

# Stress & self-harm

People deal with stress in different ways. But in some cases, stress may cause a person to harm themselves. Self-harm often shows up in the form of cutting. A person may cut themselves repeatedly with a razor blade or other sharp object. This often starts in the teenage years, but it can happen to people of all ages.

## Why does it happen?

Even though cutting may hurt, it helps a person feel less stressed for a while. Teenagers may do it when they are feeling overwhelmed about school or their social life. Adults may do it when they are under pressure at work or at home.

Whatever the reason, cutting is a sign of emotional distress.

## What to look for

It's not always easy to tell if someone is using self-harm. Signs that a person may be cutting include:

- Multiple cuts on the skin, usually in one area of the arms, legs or torso
- Wearing long sleeves or long pants when it's hot outside
- Having sharp objects like razors without an obvious reason
- Changes in behavior, such as being unpredictable or talking about feeling worthless

## What to do

If you think your loved one or friend is cutting, offer your help and support. Don't tell them to "just stop."

In the case of your child, contact their doctor to ask for help. If it's an adult, encourage them to find a therapist or to talk to their doctor.

Source: American Academy of  
Family Physicians

