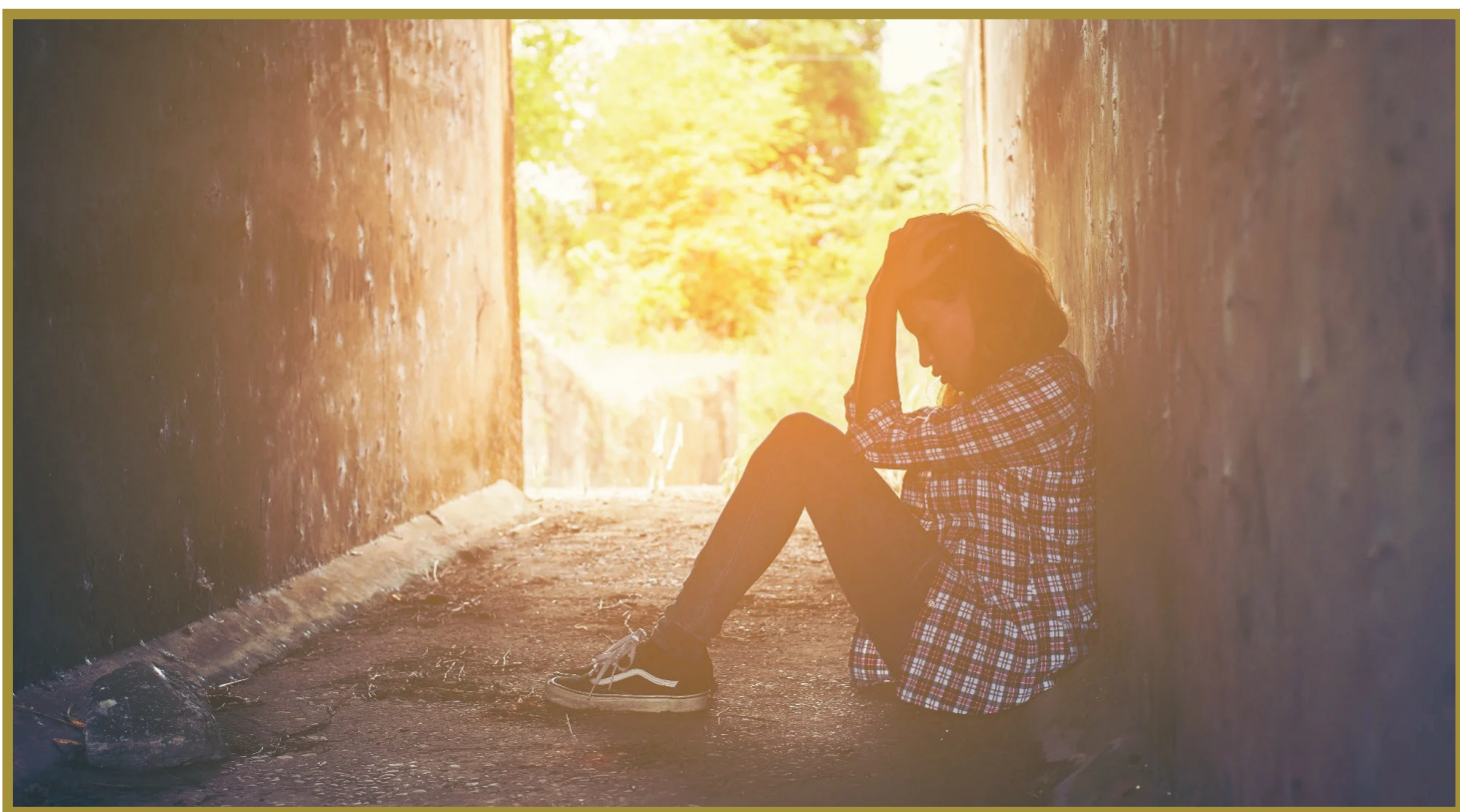




# Understanding Teen Self-Harm



Discovering that someone you love engages in self-harm can feel frightening, confusing, and even frustrating. You may not comprehend why someone would willingly choose to hurt themselves; likewise, you also might not understand how you can help them recover.

## What is Self-Harm?

Self-harm (also known as self-injury or self-mutilation) refers to someone intentionally hurting their own body. Sometimes the injuries are shallow, but they can also be severe and even life-threatening.

People self-harm in many different ways, including:

- Cutting themselves with a sharp object like a knife, razor, or scissors (the most common method)
- Burning themselves with cigarettes, matches, or lighters
- Pulling out their hair
- Poking or inserting objects through various body openings
- Punching themselves or punching things
- Picking at existing wounds or scratches
- Carving words or symbols into their skin

While self-harm itself isn't a specific mental illness, it can be a compulsive behavior that can disrupt someone's overall functioning. People may self-harm once or very sporadically. In other cases, however, the self-harm is more compulsive, meaning that over time, the person feels more intense urges to engage in the behavior.

## Types of Self-Harm

Not everyone who self-harms does the same thing. Cutting might be the best-known version of self-harm, but it's far from the only method. Here is a look at some of the different forms of self-harm children and teens might engage in.

### Cutting

Cutting refers to using a sharp object like a knife, scissors, or razor blade to puncture the skin. People often cut on their arms, legs, or stomach.

### Burning

Burning refers to burning oneself with fire or other chemicals. People may use candlesticks, matches, candles, or lit cigarettes to burn themselves.

### Head or Body Banging

Headbanging refers to hitting one's head repeatedly against a hard surface, such as a wall or table. Body banging can mean punching inanimate objects like a wall to hurt oneself or slamming one's entire body against something.



## **Hair Pulling**

Some people may engage in hair pulling to hurt themselves. It should be noted that this method is not the same as trichotillomania (a compulsive disorder associated with recurrent urges to pull hair). When hair pulling is done with the primary intention of hurting oneself, it is considered self-harm.

## **Intentional Restriction**

Any form of deliberate deprivation—such as restricting food, voluntarily wearing light clothing in freezing temperatures, or avoiding drinking water when thirsty—can be a form of self-harm.