

Protocol for Immediate Response to Self-Injury

For Teachers, School Staff, Nurses, and School-Based Mental Health Professionals

If you become aware of a student who is self-injuring, or even suspect that a student may be engaging in self-injury, follow the steps below. Early recognition and compassionate response are essential for student safety and recovery.

For Teachers & All Non-Mental Health Staff

- **Stay calm and supportive.** Approach the student with a nonjudgmental and empathetic attitude. Avoid showing shock, disapproval, or frustration.
 - **Ask simple, clarifying questions.** For example: “I noticed this mark—are you hurt?” or “Can you tell me what happened?” Do not press for details.
 - **If there is a visible or fresh wound:**
 - Escort or refer the student directly to the school nurse.
 - Notify the school counselor or psychologist right away.
 - **If the student confirms self-injury:**
 - Refer the student to the school counselor or psychologist.
 - **In case of severe injury or uncertainty:** Call **911 immediately**. When in doubt, err on the side of emergency response.
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For the School Nurse

- **Provide direct wound care** and assess whether emergency medical services are needed.
 - **Ensure immediate communication** with the school counselor or psychologist so that a mental health follow-up can occur the same day.
 - **Document the incident** according to school/district protocols.
 - **If in doubt, call 911.**
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For the School Psychologist or Counselor

- **Clarify confidentiality.** Remind the student of the limits (i.e., safety concerns must be shared).
- **Screen for suicide risk.** Use your district’s suicide assessment protocol. If suicidal ideation or intent is identified, follow your school’s suicide crisis response procedures immediately.

- **Determine intent.** Use an informal interview to confirm whether the behavior is intentional self-injury versus an accident.
 - **Engage parents/guardians.**
 - Unless contraindicated for safety, contact parents and request they come to school.
 - Provide parents with the **Parent Fact Sheet** and referral information for outpatient therapy, crisis services, and/or medical follow-up.
 - Have parents sign a notification form confirming they were informed and received resources.
 - **Use professional judgment.** If notifying parents is unsafe, consider mandated reporting (e.g., Child Protective Services) or other protective actions consistent with state law and district policy.
 - **Follow-up care:**
 - Check in with the student within **5–7 days**.
 - Schedule **regular well-being check-ins every 2–4 weeks**
 - Document all interventions and contacts carefully.
 - [Guidance for providing ongoing support.](#)
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Key Reminders

- **Never promise secrecy.** Always prioritize student safety.
- **Model calm concern.** Students may feel embarrassed or fearful; your response sets the tone for support.
- **Encourage professional help.** Self-injury is often a sign of underlying distress; therapy and support services are essential.
- **When in doubt, act.** If you are uncertain about the severity, contact emergency services and notify your school mental health team.