

# What is Self-Harm?

Self-harm is intentionally injuring one's own body. The most common form is cutting. Other methods include burning, scratching, ingesting, piercing, banging or interfering with wound healing.

**Who is most at risk?** Up to 60% of those engaging in self-harm are female. Self-harming behavior typically begins between the ages of 14-24 and can progress well into adulthood.

**Why do people do it?** For some, self-harm allows for a physical expression of overwhelming internal emotions. For others, it serves to temporarily relieve stress and anxiety caused by these emotions. The biological effects of self-harm and its ability to create a short term mood boost make it a very difficult behavior to stop.

**Is it linked to mental illness?** Self-harm is sometimes associated with depression, bipolar disorder, eating disorders, obsessive thinking or compulsive behavior. Some individuals who self-harm have trouble controlling their impulses or take unnecessary risks which can also be a sign of mental health problems.


## Warning Signs

- Scars from burns or cuts
- Fresh cuts, scratches, bruises or other wounds
- Broken bones
- Keeping sharp objects on hand
- Wearing long sleeves or long pants, even in hot weather
- Claiming to have frequent accidents or mishaps
- Spending a great deal of time alone
- Pervasive difficulties in interpersonal relationships
- Persistent questions about personal identity, such as "Who am I?" and "What am I doing here?"
- Behavioral and emotional instability, impulsivity and unpredictability
- Statements of helplessness, hopelessness or worthlessness

## Reaching Out

It's important to seek assistance from a qualified mental health professional specializing in self-harming behaviors. Because a one-size-fits-all strategy doesn't work with self-harming behaviors, treatment recommendations will be customized to each situation.


- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT).** Helps the person identify unhealthy, negative beliefs and behaviors and replace them with healthy, positive ones.
- **Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT).** A type of cognitive behavioral therapy that teaches behavioral skills to help the person tolerate distress, manage or regulate their emotions and improve their relationships with others.
- **Medications.** No medications specifically treat self-injuring behavior. However, a physician may recommend treatment with antidepressants or other psychiatric medications to help treat depression, anxiety or other mental disorders commonly associated with self-injury.
- **Hospitalization.** In cases of severe or chronic self-harming behavior, psychiatric hospitalization can provide a safe environment for more intensive treatment to get the person through the crisis. Treatment should include assessment, medication management, group therapy and individual therapy. Before discharge, an aftercare plan will be created that could include treatment at a hospital day program or outpatient treatment.



A common misconception about self-harm is that people do it for attention.

Some may wonder, why else would someone deliberately harm themselves? For many, self-harm is a way of coping with painful feelings such as worthlessness, panic, guilt or rejection.

Self-harm can become a vicious cycle which is why it's important to be aware of the symptoms and how it can be treated.



# How we can help

If you or someone you know is struggling with self-harming behavior, Pine Rest's highly trained clinicians can provide assessment and treatment at every level of care from outpatient to hospitalization.

We know it can be difficult speaking to anyone, even your loved ones, about emotional issues and how they are leading to self-harm. Through the understanding and compassionate environment at Pine Rest, you can learn how to deal with negative emotions in healthy and positive ways and ultimately improve your quality of life.

## Contact Information

### Outpatient & Telehealth

We offer assessment, psychiatry, psychosocial help and individual, group and family therapy through our outpatient clinics and telehealth services throughout Michigan.

**866.852.4001**

[pinerest.org/locations](http://pinerest.org/locations)

[pinerest.org/telehealth](http://pinerest.org/telehealth)

### Psychiatric Urgent Care

For urgent needs, our Psychiatric Urgent Care Center is open daily for adults. Same day assessments are available on site and through telehealth.

**616.455.9200**

[pinerest.org/urgent](http://pinerest.org/urgent)

### Crisis Services

If you or a loved one are in crisis, please call our hospital Contact Center which is staffed 24/7 by licensed clinicians.

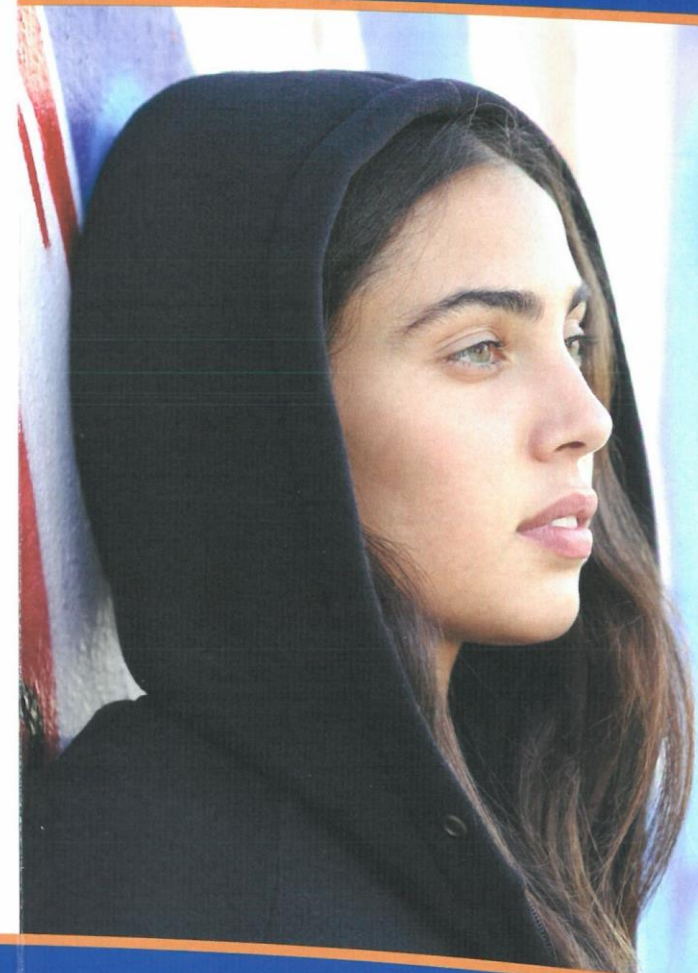
**800.678.5500**

**616.281.6446 (TTY line)**

[pinerest.org/inpatient](http://pinerest.org/inpatient)

## UNDERSTANDING

# Self-Harm



For more information about mental health topics, please visit: [pinerest.org/insights](http://pinerest.org/insights)



**Why would someone choose to hurt themselves?**