

# IF YOUR CHILD IS SELF-INJURING...

Guidelines developed by the International Consortium on Self-injury in Educational Settings (ICSES)

## Helpful Strategies

- Find support for yourself (ideally through informal networks and professional support)
- **Be clear about your expectations for your child about participating in family life and other activities**
- Be collaborative and include your child in choices wherever possible (e.g. therapist, house rules, technology use, etc.)
- **Acknowledge/Validate your son/daughter's pain/upset but remain calm throughout**
- Choose times and places for hard conversations to maximize comfort and minimize distraction
- **Keep lines of communication as open as possible**
- Know that as much as you feel your son/daughter's upset/pain it is more helpful to your child to separate yourself from his/her feelings in order to stay calm in the face of their intensity
- **Learn about self-injury and emotion/ emotion regulation**
- Ask your child open, honest questions -- questions without an agenda asked in a sincere and respectful way
- **Model healthy coping strategies**
- Understand and respect your child's readiness to change
- **Help your child identify and reinforce successes**
- Respect your child's wishes concerning sharing his or her self-injury with extended family, friends or school
- **Seek therapeutic support for you and for your family. Self-injury can cause family division; it helps for everyone to feel heard and understood**
- Recognize that self-injury serves a purpose; knowing about how it helps and what to expect in recovery can be helpful

## Unhelpful Strategies

- Blaming them for their self-injury
- **Blaming yourself for your child's self-injury**
- Getting caught up in their intense emotions and moods
- **Taking sides with different family members about what is "right to do"**
- Engaging in unnecessary power struggles (limit unilateral decisions and work for shared agreements wherever possible)
- **Imposing a set of new "lock down" controls (e.g. monitoring whereabouts, requiring constant connection, limiting mobility)**
- Unnecessary punishments and ultimatums
- **Forcing conversation or requiring constant check ins about self-injury or emotions**
- Tiptoeing around the situation or setting reasonable expectations out of fear that you'll cause self-injury to happen.
- **Taking doors off hinges and removing all possible self-injury implements from your home**
- Insisting that your child cover old scars
- **Removing reasonable family expectations (e.g., washing the dishes) as a way to 'smoothing out' your child's emotional life**
- Regularly jumping in to "fix" situations you think may trigger your child

