

Let's talk about Non- Suicidal Self-Injury ?

2nd Edition.



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Have you heard about Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI)?

Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI) is when someone intentionally hurts themselves without wanting to end their life. It's been showing up more and more in the everyday life of schools and families, often bringing fear or confusion to those who don't fully understand what it's about.



Why would someone hurt themselves on purpose?

That's an important question! To answer it, we need eyes that don't judge, and ears willing to listen to those who live it in their own skin



This booklet is an invitation: to talk, to listen, to understand

We invite the entire school community to join in:



Families



Students



Teachers




School staff and leadership


Because this is not just about the person who self-injures — it concerns all of us






Let's take a look at some questions:

 Have you heard about NSSI? What comes to your mind when you think about it?

 Have you ever seen how people react when they realize someone is hurting themselves? How did that feel to you?

 Do you know anyone who has hurt themselves on purpose? What was it like to be close to them while they were going through that?





NSSI: What it is and what it isn't

Hurting your own body on purpose is more common than people realize, but it's still misunderstood.

💡 To talk about NSSI, we first need to understand what this behavior means

The words we choose matter. NSSI isn't just any way of hurting the body, there are some key points we need to keep in mind.



What is NSSI? ⁽⁵⁾

NSSI Is the deliberate, self-inflicted destruction of body tissue resulting in immediate damage, without suicidal intent.

⚠️ As the name suggests, there's no suicidal intent, and that's why it's important not to confuse it with suicidal behavior.



What isn't NSSI? ⁽⁵⁾

- Indirect risk behaviors (e.g., speeding or abusing psychoactive substances, including alcohol or mood-altering drugs).
- Eating disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia.
- Tattoos and piercings (they're done for socially accepted reasons)

✳️ Note: Even if they involve pain or risk, these practices don't carry the same meaning as NSSI and shouldn't be confused with it

Common forms of NSSI ⁽²⁾⁽⁵⁾:

- Cutting your own skin
- Punching, slapping, pinching, or banging the head
- Scratching wounds until they get worse
- Pulling out hair repeatedly
- Harming yourself as a form of punishment or guilt
- Biting nails or picking at skin until it bleeds (when done intentionally to cause harm)
- Scratching yourself until it causes injury
- Ingesting substances that are harmful to the body





So... what name should we use?

When we talk about this topic, it's common to come across the term "self-mutilation." But many people who hurt themselves say they don't identify with that name.

💭 They say that "self-mutilation" feels like a loaded term, and using it can increase prejudice and judgment toward those who are going through this kind of suffering⁽⁶⁾.

That's why, in this booklet, we use the term NSSI – Non-Suicidal Self-Injury. It's a more thoughtful way to talk about this topic, without labeling those who are going through it 🙏



We know that names carry weight. Some can reinforce prejudice or make it seem like people who self-injure have some kind of illness⁽⁷⁾.

⚠️ The way we name things is deeply tied to what we're going through. For some people, hurting themselves feels like the only way to cope with what's hurting inside. But the relief doesn't last, because the source of the pain is still there.

To you who self-injure : What name feels right to you when we talk about this behavior? (It doesn't have to be official - just whatever makes sense to you).

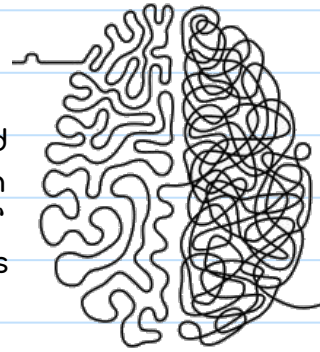
To families and teachers : Have you heard about NSSI before? What term was used?

Let's look at some data...



Who self-injures? Where?

NSSI is common among children and adolescents — around 22% have gone through it⁽¹⁾. It's more prevalent in so-called “developing” countries (33.7%) than in “developed” countries (19.7%)⁽¹⁾.



*Note: These terms refer only to the economic condition of countries — not to the value of their people or cultures.



When does it usually start?

NSSI can happen at any age, but it usually starts between ages 12 and 14⁽²⁾⁽⁴⁾.

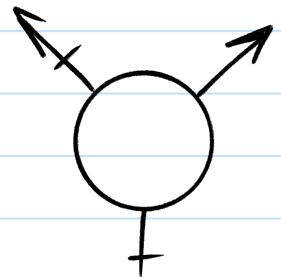
*Note: Although it's less common, it can also appear in children under the age of 12



Does it relate to gender?

Studies have shown that NSSI is slightly more common among girls⁽³⁾⁽⁴⁾, but the difference between genders is small

*Note: More than comparing girls and boys, it's essential to respect each person's way of existing — in their gender identity, expression, or the way they love





After all... is it a disease?

No. Diseases usually have a biological cause, linked to something in the body that isn't working properly⁽⁸⁾.

When it comes to NSSI, there's no scientific evidence linking this behavior to a direct biological cause.

*Note: NSSI is a sign of suffering, not a disease.



But are people who hurt themselves suffering?

Yes. People who self-injure are going through some kind of suffering. But that alone doesn't mean there's something wrong with their body or brain.

Many times, NSSI is a way of coping with the pain of everyday life, trying to forget something that hurts, or punishing oneself for something they feel.

*Note: Each person has their own reasons and listening with care is the first step toward understanding.



To you who self-injure: Have you ever noticed in which moments or situations you feel the urge to hurt yourself? Is there any pain, thought, or difficult feeling that usually comes before it?

To families and teachers: Have you noticed any link between NSSI and how the person experiences suffering in their everyday life?



Risk and Protective Factors

Some situations can increase the chances of someone hurting themselves. Others can help a person choose a different path.

These factors don't explain everything on their own, but they can serve as warning signs or paths toward care. They help us think about ways to prevent NSSI and support someone who's going through a difficult time.

▼ Risk Factors

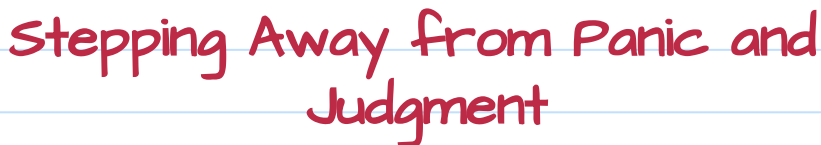
- Social isolation
- Lack of support from family, friends, or school
- Lack of safe spaces to talk and be heard
- Experiencing or witnessing violence
- Difficult or highly conflictual family relationships
- Impacts of the pandemic (such as losses, sudden changes, or loneliness)
- Negative online environments (exposure, comparison, judgment)
- Strong negative reactions to self-injury, such as guilt or shame
- Discrimination based on gender identity, sexuality, or ways of existing (LGBTQIAPN+)

🛡️ Protective Factors

- Participating in supportive groups or collectives
- Having safe spaces to talk and be heard (at home, at school, or with friends)
- The presence of a school psychologist
- Guidance around internet use and adult support in digital spaces
- Spaces to talk about feelings and everyday life experiences
- Support networks with trusted people (friends, family, school)

To you who self-injure: Do you identify with any of these factors? Can you remember a situation when you felt more at risk, and another when you felt more protected?

To families and teachers: Have you ever noticed any risk or protective factors in the life of someone who self-injures?

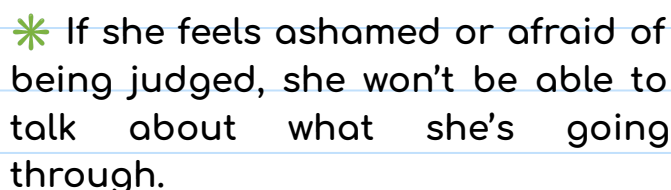


It's common to feel scared when someone we love and care is hurting themselves. After all, it's painful to witness. But we don't always realize that behind NSSI, there might be a response to other kinds of pain they're going through.

Often, those who hurt themselves are carrying wounds left by the world around them💔

☁️ Judgments like “it’s just drama,” jokes, or scolding only make the suffering worse. Instead, we need to listen:

What is this person feeling? What brought them to this point?



And the pain? It stays, hidden...





Let's take a moment to talk

To you who self-injure: Have you ever felt judged or ashamed when someone found out you were hurting yourself? Tell us what happened.

How would you like someone to listen to you in those moments?



To families and teachers: Even if it feels scary at first, what actions do you think could help support and understand someone who is hurting themselves?

When development is at risk

♦ Physical Development

When we hurt ourselves on purpose, the body creates wounds and scars that can get infected and cause even more pain. Sometimes, this physical pain gets in the way of doing things that matter or things we enjoy.

Self-injury isn't harmless: it can make the problems we're already dealing with even harder to face.

⚠ Risk to life

Studies have shown that NSSI, if not taken seriously, can increase the risk of suicide in some cases.⁽¹⁰⁾ Among young people who have attempted to take their own lives, many were already engaging in self-injury.

* Even if it doesn't seem like a big deal, talking and asking for support is always important.

👐 Interpersonal development

NSSI often happens in silence, many times alone, or among others who are also going through it. Shame and fear of judgment can lead the person to isolate themselves even more.

* Relationships are part of what shapes us. When we stay silent or pull away, we miss the chance to build connections that help us understand our pain.

What if we talked about it?

The challenges we face don't have to be faced alone.

Talking about what's hurting can open space for support, care, and new ways of dealing with suffering.



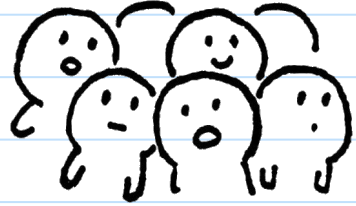
What can we do?



Group formation

Talking in groups helps build real connections.

Often, people who self-injure are trying to cope with different kinds of suffering. In a safe space, it's possible to talk about it without fear.



These spaces help us think together about new ways to face pain, without turning it against ourselves.



Talking openly about NSSI

A lot of people have heard of NSSI, but very few know how to explain what it really is.

Only those who go through it, often on their own skin (literally), can truly say what they feel and think.



Truly listening is the first step toward understanding — and also a way to show that the person is not alone..



Teacher training

As NSSI becomes more present in schools, educators also need space to talk, ask questions, and prepare themselves.

It's not easy to deal with such a sensitive topic, and no one should have to face it alone.

Having a school psychologist makes a big difference, but we can all learn to listen with more care.



What can we do

♥ How can families help? Seeing someone we love hurting themselves is painful. It's normal to feel scared, sad, or confused.

And it's because we love them that families also need listening and guidance, so fear doesn't turn into judgment.

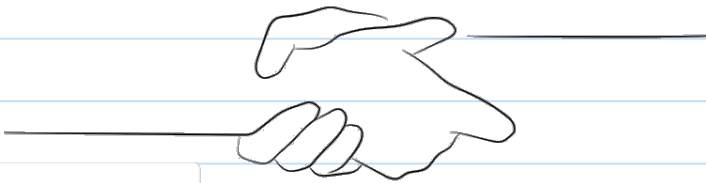
⚠ When the reaction is anger, punishment, or phrases like "you're just being dramatic" or "you just want attention," it can make the pain even worse. The person might end up hurting themselves even more.

Often, people who self-injure already feel ashamed and are trying to hide what they're going through.

That's why the way forward isn't asking "why?", trying to control, or making threats.

What matters most is that the person feels they can count on a safe space, where they won't be judged; just truly heard.

🧸 Even if it's a hard topic to talk about, we need to talk about it, because it's real, it's happening, and it deserves care.



Scan the QR code for more information on how to respond when you find out someone is hurting themselves.

*If you can't access the QR CODE, access the link:
<http://bit.ly/helpingnssi>*

Scan me



Let's take a moment to talk

To you who self-injure: What helps you feel safer when someone finds out you're hurting yourself?

How would you like your family to talk to you about it?



To families and teachers : What can you do to help this person feel safer and more supported?

Our Space!



Let's make the most of this space!

We suggest using this page to write down any questions you have about the topic, what you'd like to learn more about, and a bit about how you felt after reading the booklet.



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Team

ECOAR Project - From Risk to Protection

Authors:

Laura Lorenzetti

Raquel Souza Lobo Guzzo

English translation:

Laura Lorenzetti

Graphic Design:

Isabella Viana Ruiz

Produced by:

GEP-InPsi: Critical Psychology and
Development Processes in School and
Community Contexts

Address: Av. John Boyd Dunlop, s/n, Jardim
Ipaussurama - Campinas/SP, PUC-Campinas,
Campus II

Instagram: @GEPInPsi | @ECOARPsiNaEscola

E-mail: gepinpsi@gmail.com

Website: <http://gep-inpsi.org/>

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