

March is Self-Injury / Self-Harm Awareness Month

What to Know

Non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) is often a coping strategy rather than a suicide attempt. Many young people and adults use self-harm to manage overwhelming emotions, numbness, or distress when they don't yet have safer tools.



What to Watch For

- Unexplained cuts, burns, or frequent bandages
- Wearing long sleeves even in warm weather
- Strong emotional reactions to stress or perceived rejection
- Withdrawal, shame, or secrecy



How We Can Help

- Stay calm and curious; avoid panic, punishment, or ultimatums
- Use supportive language such as: "I'm glad you told me. You don't have to handle this alone."
- Focus on building safer coping strategies rather than only stopping the behavior
- Connect early with trusted adults, school supports, or behavioral health providers



If Someone Is in Crisis or Needs Immediate Support

- Call or text 988 to reach the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
- Available 24/7, free, and confidential
- You can call for yourself or someone else, even if you're unsure it's an emergency

Grounding Reminder

Self-harm is a signal, not a failure. Responding with empathy and consistency lowers risk and builds trust.

What to Know

Individuals with developmental disabilities experience mental health challenges at equal or higher rates than the general population. Their emotional needs are often overlooked or misinterpreted as “behavior,” which can delay meaningful support.



What This Looks Like

- Anxiety may appear as avoidance, shutdown, or increased need for reassurance
- Depression may show up as irritability, loss of interest, or regression in skills
- Trauma responses may be mistaken for defiance, noncompliance, or “acting out”



How We Can Support

- Assume the goal is communication, not compliance
- Adjust expectations, not empathy
- Use clear language, visual supports, and predictable routines
- Validate feelings even when limits or boundaries are needed



Equity Check

Inclusion means ensuring access to mental health support that fits the person—rather than expecting the person to fit the system.