

# The Relationship Between Non-Suicidal Self-Injury and Suicide

## How Self-Injury and Suicide Differ

### Expressed Intent

- **Suicide:** to end feeling (and life) altogether
- **NSSI:** to feel better

### Methods Used

- **Suicide:** much more lethal
- **NSSI:** cause damage to the surface of the body only

### Frequency

- **Suicide:** much more frequent
- **NSSI:** often used regularly or off and on to manage stress and other emotions

### Aftermath

- **NSSI:** unintentional death is not common; shorter improvement in sense of well-being and functioning

### Damage Level & Lethality

- **Suicide:** much more lethal
- **NSSI:** often carried out using methods designed to damage the body badly enough to require treatment or to end life

### Psychological Pain Level

- **Suicide:** caused by higher psychological distress
- **NSSI:** lower psychological distress; reduce arousal

### Cognitive Constriction

- **Suicide:** high cognitive constriction
- **NSSI:** less severe intense cognitive constriction

## Common Risk Factors of NSSI and Suicide Thoughts and Behaviors

History of trauma, abuse, or chronic stress

High emotional perception and sensitivity

History of alcohol or substance abuse

Feelings of worthlessness

Few effective mechanisms for dealing with emotional stress

Feelings of isolation

Presence of depression or anxiety

## People Who Engage in Both Suicidal Behaviors and NSSI are More Likely to Report:

In the general population of NSSI users  
**35% - 40%** will also report some suicidality

- Over 20 lifetime NSSI incidents
- Psychological distress in the last 30 days
- A history of emotional or sexual trauma
- Greater feelings of hopelessness
- Greater family conflict and poor relationship with parents
- More impulsivity and risky behaviors
- Greater substance use
- A diagnosis of Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Over 1/2 of those who report NSSI in average youth and young adult populations report no suicidal thoughts and behaviors

## The National Institute of Mental Health's Key Signs and Signals in Assessing Whether A Person is Actively Suicidal



Talking about wanting to die



Looking for a way to kill, or making a plan to kill oneself



Feeling trapped and as if there is no end to pain



Too much or too little sleep



Increased use of substances (drugs or alcohol)



Mood swings



Extreme anger or rage



Anxious or agitated behavior



Feeling hopeless or talking about having no way out

### For More Resources

Cornell Research Program on Self-Injury and Recovery  
<http://www.selfinjury.bctr.cornell.edu>

Youth Risk and Opportunity Lab  
<https://www.yro.cornell.com>

Whitlock, J., Minton, R., Babington, P., & Ernhout, C. The relationship between non-suicidal self-injury and suicide. Cornell University, Ithaca, NY

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