# SYMPTOMATIC MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR NON-HEALTH STAFF NON-SUICIDAL SELF-INJURY (NSSI) BEHAVIOR

**DO NOT LEAVE STUDENT ALONE AT ANY TIME IF CONCERNED ABOUT SUICIDALITY!**

NSSI is the deliberate, self-inflicted destruction of body tissue resulting in immediate damage without suicidal intent and not for culturally or socially sanctioned reasons (such as tattoos and body piercings). Examples include cutting or carving into the skin, scratching, burning, and hitting oneself or objects.

Non-health staff may be the first to know about NSSI behavior. In this event, non-health staff should proceed as follows:

## WHAT TO DO FIRST

1. Stay calm and say in a caring way something like ***“I’m here to help you.”***
2. If possible, provide a private, supportive space where the student feels safe, and you can assess any possible self-harm and assess the severity of any injuries.
3. Immediately assess whether any self-injury has occurred. Ask the student: ***Have you injured yourself or tried to injure yourself in any way on any part of your body?***
4. If the self-injury is life-threatening, is serious enough to require immediate medical attention, or the student is not cooperative with the assessment, call 911 or immediately transport the student to the nearest emergency room per your center operating procedure (COP) for Mental Health Emergencies. **Do not leave the student alone until they are safely transferred to medical care. Alert the health and wellness director (HWD).**
5. If the self-injury is not life-threatening but requires first aid but not significant medical attention (such superficial scratches on the arms) and the student is alert and reasonably calm, notify the health and wellness center staff according to center operating procedures (COP) and wait for further instructions on how to proceed. If it is after hours or on the weekend, contact the on-call health and wellness staff. **Do not leave the student alone.**

## WHAT TO DO NEXT

1. While waiting for health and wellness staff, give the student as much personal space and sense of control as possible.
2. Calmly talk to the student with a reassuring tone of voice. Provide reassurance to the student that help, and support are available.
3. Speak clearly and use short sentences. Do not overwhelm the student with words as this will likely cause the student to become more stressed and anxious.
4. Express genuine concern by saying something like, ***“I’m worried about you. I’ve seen these scars on your arm and I think you might be hurting yourself.”***
5. Listen to the student without judgment and with empathy. Self-injury is usually carried out in secret and can be associated with a lot of shame and guilt, so a student may not initially be willing to talk about their self-injury behavior. In this case, gently encourage the student to talk more generally about current problems and stressors.
6. Allow the student to express their current feelings and concerns. Acknowledge the student’s feelings by saying something like ***“I can see you’re having a hard time right now.”***
7. Do not give specific advice, lecturing, or trying to “fix” the situation. Just listen. Listening is the best way to comfort and support a student.
8. Remember that most students who engage in self-injury are not likely to be suicidal. However, there are times when self-injury can be a warning sign for suicidal thoughts or attempts either now or some point in the future. **If there is any concern for suicidal thoughts, intentions, or plans, follow the** [**Suicidal Self-Directed Violence Symptomatic Management Guidelines**](https://supportservices.jobcorps.gov/health/Documents/SMGs/SMG_suicidal.docx) **(“Assess Symptom and Risk Factors”). Do not leave the student alone.**
9. Inform the health and wellness staff member about the information the student has shared with you including the student’s answers to the suicide risk questions, if asked.

## WHAT TO DO NEXT

1. After the student has been taken care of, talk to other students who may have witnessed or been involved and provide reassurance that the student who is going to the emergency room or to the health and wellness center is safe and getting help. Privacy rights must be protected. Do not share specific health information.
2. After the episode has resolved (within 1-2 days), consult with health and wellness staff for information on how to best support the student going forward.
3. If you are feeling stressed or upset about the situation, consider contacting the center your center’s Human Resources representative for information about your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Diagram

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