Self-Injurious Behaviour (SIB)

WHAT IT IS, AND HOW TO HELP

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What is SIB? Self-Injurious Behaviours are self-directed, non-suicidal behaviours that cause injury to oneself. SIBs are among the complex behaviours common in autistic people and those intellectual disabilities. The intent may be to communicate or express pain, frustration, or distress.

Who is likely to Self-Harm (Suicide)?

- Late teen or adult
- No cognitive impairment
- Mental health condition

Some people self-injure, and also self-harm

Who is likely to Self-Injure (Non-Suicidal)?

- Autism or genetic condition
- Child or early teen
- Cognitive impairment

Triggers for SIB:

Sensory: may use SIB to 'compete' with upsetting sensory input. Consider possible lighting, noise, and scents that may be contributing to discomfort.

Communication: Frustration due to inability to communicate needs and preferences.

Medical: A person may use SIB as a way to compete with, distract from, or communicate the following: physical discomfort, hunger, or exhaustion.

Escape: May engage in SIBs if trying to avoid or escape a specific setting or situation. May be seeking a preferred object or activity.

Examples of SIB:

- Slapping face repeatedly
- Hitting or banging head
- Biting hands and/or fingers
- Pulling hair and/or teeth out
- Scratching skin deeply
- Purposefully runs into objects
- Picking scabs, not allowing healing
- Eye gouging

What Can Help:

- **Take it Slow –** Remember that SIBs are complex and severe challenges that take time to overcome.
- **Seek to Understand –** Dig deeper and consider the many reasons a specific SIB may be taking place in a specific context.
- **Advocate for Change and Increased Supports –** Families need support in multiple forms. Individuals need a comprehensive support approach. You may have to advocate to leaders.
- **Recognize and support family -** Consider that the family members may require more support patience, time, etc. because of effort associated with helping their loved one with SIB.
- **Offer Other Forms of Support –** Specific tasks of daily life like shopping, cleaning, and cooking can be challenging on hard days. Consider offering support with tasks, or respite care.
- **Be Mindful of Child and/or Parent-blaming Language –** Reframe your thinking. They are not being difficult, they have been traumatized. Adopt trauma-informed approaches.

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