



SELF-INJURY AND CUTTING BEHAVIOR

*Provided through the Marketing and Development Committee
of the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas*

Self-injury is when a person hurts themselves on purpose, usually to relieve intense emotional pain. In most cases, self-injury is **not** a suicide attempt.

Self-injury is often done on impulse, so it's sometimes considered an impulse-control behavior problem. Self-injury may accompany a variety of mental illnesses, such as depression, eating disorders and borderline personality disorder. Self-injury is also known as self-harm, self-injurious behavior, self-mutilation and parasuicide.

Some people say that self-injury may bring a release of tension, it's usually followed by guilt and shame and the return of painful emotions.

MOST COMMON FORMS

- Superficial cutting on arms and legs.
- Burning.
- Scratching or picking the skin.
- Hitting, bruising, biting, pinching.
- Hair pulling.
- Interfering with wound healing.
- Head banging.



VARIOUS REASONS

A person self-injures for various reasons, often as a desperate attempt to deal with intense emotions. A person may self-injure to:

- Relieve tension, depression or anxiety.
- Cope with painful emotions, such as anger or guilt.
- Self-punish (when they feel they have done something wrong or have not met others' expectations).
- Feel in control or more "alive".

CHARACTERISTICS

People who self-injure can be of any age, but most are teens or young adults; girls and young women are especially at risk. Research indicates that people who self-injure are more likely to:

- Have low self-esteem.
- Be depressed or anxious.
- Come from middle or upper class families.
- Be "overachievers" or "perfectionists".
- Have alcohol or other drug problems.
- Have a distorted body image or an eating disorder.

**About one to two million people
in the United States
self-injure at some time.**

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Signs of self-injury can include:

- Unexplained cuts, scratches or burns, especially on arms, legs or abdomen.
- Bruises.
- Wearing long-sleeved shirts and pants, even in warm weather (to hide the injuries).
- Keeping razor blades, knives, needles or other sharp objects in bedroom.
- Having friends who self-injure.
- Withdrawing from friends and family.
- Isolating themselves from others, especially when feeling upset.

People who self-injure are usually not seeking attention. Most do not want others to know and go to great efforts to conceal their behavior.

Self-injury can lead to other problems including infections of the injuries, substance abuse, other mental health disorders, and an increased risk for attempting suicide in the future.

GETTING HELP



As a family member or friend, you may not always be able to prevent someone else from hurting themselves. When self-injury is suspected, encourage the person to get professional help to talk about their feelings and learn healthy ways to cope with problems.

Therapy can assist a person in working through emotional problems such as depression, and help families communicate better and improve parent/child relationships.

Tattoos and body piercing done by a professional for the purpose of body art are not considered self-injury.

MORE INFORMATION

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