

PARENT INFORMATION ON SELF-INJURY/CUTTING BEHAVIOR

What is Self-Injury/Mutilation?

- Self-injury refers to the intentional self-infliction of wounds by cutting, burning, or otherwise wounding of the skin, without the intent to die.
- Several terms have been developed to describe when individuals intentionally harm themselves including: self-mutilation, self-injurious behavior, deliberate self-harm, parasuicidal behavior, and self-wounding.
- Oftentimes known as “cutters,” students who self-mutilate will frequently engage in the behavior repeatedly and in a secretive manner.
- Self-injury can include behaviors such as cutting, burning, hitting, picking, hair pulling, and head banging. The most common form of self-injurious behavior is cutting.
- Those who self-injure are typically NOT suicidal. Self-mutilation is usually a coping strategy to make the student feel better or release emotions. However, suicide is always a concern with these individuals and accidents can occur with self-mutilation behaviors.
- It is estimated that 60% or more of those who self-injure are girls.

Why Individuals Cut or Self-Injure

- Cutting is often associated with individuals who have difficulty regulating their emotions and coping with problems.
- Individuals who cut may be seeking a method of gaining control over a situation.
- Students may be experiencing low self-esteem, symptoms of depression, or other psychological disorders.
- Self-injury may be a way to avoid overwhelming emotions by focusing on physical pain.
- A secondary gain of self-injurious behavior may be peer acceptance.
- Self-injury appears to have a contagious effect among peer groups. Once this behavior is observed in a peer group, it can become “acceptable” and is often encouraged by peers in the group.

Signs to Look For

- Frequent or unexplained scars, cuts, bruises, and burns
- General signs of depression
- Social and emotional isolation and disconnectedness
- Use of clothing designed to cover injuries (i.e., long sleeves in warm weather)
- Discussions or posts about self-injury on social media

Parental Dos/Don'ts

DO	DON'T
Be aware of what your child is posting or reading on social media, including their phone (i.e. text messages and posts)	Agree that your child can keep their communications on social media/texts "confidential"
Limit peer influence while your child is being treated	Allow your child to socialize with friends unsupervised (including social media and texting) until treatment is well established
Encourage substitute behaviors that focus on stress reduction and coping strategies (i.e. journaling, exercise, listening to music)	Reward your child in response to self-injury behavior in an attempt to make it go away (i.e. out to lunch or going shopping)
Understand that this is your child's way of coping	Overreact, say or do anything to cause shame or guilt
Encourage participation in extracurricular activities and clubs	Make deals in an effort to stop self-injury
LISTEN to your child	Agree to keep self-injury behavior confidential
Let your child know how much you love him/her	Use punishment or negative consequences when your child self-injures

The School's Role

- While self-injury is often noticed in school, school is not the place for it to be treated.
- Students should seek out their guidance counselor, school psychologist, student assistance counselor, teacher, or other trusted staff members if they or someone they know are struggling with self-injury.
- School personnel can direct the student and their parents to the appropriate resources for treatment outside of school.
- Collaboration between parents and school personnel to reinforce treatment options and encourage alternative coping strategies for self-injury

Resources

Websites:

*Resources recommended by the National Association of School Psychology
(<http://www.nasponline.org/>)*

- Self-Mutilation: Information and Guidance for School Personnel
http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/nasp_mutil.pdf
- American Self Harm Information Clearinghouse
<http://selfinjury.org>
- Focus Adolescent Services
www.focusas.com/SelfInjury.html
- National Mental Health Association (fact sheet)
www.nmha.org/infoctr/factsheets/selfinjury.cfm
- Secret Shame/Self-Injury Information and Support
www.palace.net/~llama/psych/injury.html
- Screening for Mental Health
<http://www.mentalhealthscreening.org/programs/youth-prevention-programs/>
- Intervening with Self-Injurious Youth
http://www.nasponline.org/conventions/2010SummerConfHandoutsNashville/BS1_Rich_Lieberman_5.pdf

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

Self-Injury in Adolescents

http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/selfinjury_in_adolescents

National Institute of Mental Health

Child and Adolescent Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/child-and-adolescent-mental-health/index.shtml>

Cornell Research Program on Self-Injurious Behavior in Adolescents and Young Adults

What do we know about self-injury?

<http://www.crpsib.com/whatissi.asp>

Books

[Helping Teens Who Cut: Understanding and Ending Self Injury](#) by Michael Hollander, Ph.D.