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

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<th>DO</th>
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<td>Be aware of what your child is posting or reading on social media, including their phone (i.e. text messages and posts)</td>
<td>Agree that your child can keep their communications on social media/texts “confidential”</td>
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<td>Limit peer influence while your child is being treated</td>
<td>Allow your child to socialize with friends unsupervised (including social media and texting) until treatment is well established</td>
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<td>Encourage substitute behaviors that focus on stress reduction and coping strategies (i.e. journaling, exercise, listening to music)</td>
<td>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)</td>
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<td>Understand that this is your child’s way of coping</td>
<td>Overreact, say or do anything to cause shame or guilt</td>
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<td>Encourage participation in extracurricular activities and clubs</td>
<td>Make deals in an effort to stop self-injury</td>
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<td>LISTEN to your child</td>
<td>Agree to keep self-injury behavior confidential</td>
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<td>Let your child know how much you love him/her</td>
<td>Use punishment or negative consequences when your child self-injures</td>
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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

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

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.