

Self-Injury

Loudoun County Public Schools

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Terminology



“Cutting” is used generically and is often referred to in other more general terms

- Self-harm
- Deliberate Self-harm
- Self-injury
- Self-inflicted Violence
- Self Mutilation
- Self-Injurious Behaviors

What is Self-Injury?



Self-injury can take several forms (including, but not limited to)

- Cutting, carving or puncturing of skin
- Hitting or bruising self
- Head banging
- Skin picking (including re-opening wounds)
- Pulling out hair
- Taking pills or other dangerous substances or ingesting sharp objects
- Burning
- Breaking bones

Self-Injury Statistics



- Because of the secrecy around self-injury, it is difficult to get accurate statistics; numbers are likely an underestimation
- Each year, 1 in 5 females and 1 in 7 males engage in self injury
- 90 percent of people who engage in self harm begin during their teen or pre-adolescent years
- Nearly 50 percent of those who engage in self injury activities have been sexually abused
- Females comprise 60 percent of those who engage in self injurious behavior

More Statistics



- •About 50 percent of those who engage in self-injury begin around age 14 and carry on into their 20s
- •Many of those who self-injure report learning how to do so from friends or pro self-injury websites
- •Approximately two million cases are reported annually in the U.S.

Self-Injury Can Be...



- A stress reliever
- A distraction from emotional pain
- A way to connect to peers
- A “cry for help”



Self-injury is rarely a “suicide attempt”, but of course, for safety reasons, it is imperative to discuss this with your child thoroughly and frequently discuss safety.

Self-Injury



- Some individuals who self-injure have a history of suicidal thoughts and attempts
- Some individuals who self-injure have a history of eating disorders
- Some individuals who self-injure have a history of abuse
- Some individuals who self-injure have other mental health concerns.

However.....

- *The majority of individuals who self-injure are regular, average, people who don't know how to deal with stress or cope with problems*

Categories of self-injury



- **Impulsive Self-Injurious Behaviors**
 - Preoccupation of harming oneself, hard to resist impulse, feeling of tension prior to act and relief at execution, no suicidal intent
- **Compulsive Self-Injurious Behaviors**
 - Behaviors that are repetitive and ritualistic, multiple times per day (hair pulling, nail biting)

Categories of Self-Injury



- **Stereotypic Self-Injurious Behaviors**
 - Biologically driven force that is highly repetitive, fixed, rhythmic, and usually contentless acts, anywhere from mild to severe injury
- **Major Self-Injurious Behaviors**
 - Most dramatic kind (castration, amputation) that involves suffering and severe psychotic pathology

What is NOT considered Self - Injury?



Behaviors that inflict harm to the body that are used for other purposes such as :

- Body decoration (body piercing, tattooing)
- Spiritual enlightenment via ritual
- Fitting in or being cool
- Sexual Gratification

SIB Contagion factor



- SIB has been common to follow epidemic – like patterns in institutional settings such as hospitals and detention facilities.
- Anecdotal reports from adults working with youth in school settings report a fad quality to SIB similar to that which happens with eating disorders.
- SIB may be used by youth as a way to be a member of a group.
- Increase in SIB shown in social and popular media may influence SIB.

Why Do People Self-Injure?



Self Injury is used to:

- Provide a way to manage/cope with intolerable feelings such as anxiety, depression, past trauma
- Distract oneself from other problems
- Relieve stress or pressure
- Feel in control of one's body/mind
- Express feelings/Communicate needs
- Purify oneself
- Protect others from their emotional pain
- Create visible and noticeable wounds

Detecting Self Injury



- Marks, cuts, burns on arms, wrists, forearms, legs opposite the dominant hand are most common areas noted for evidence of SIB
- Regular use of wrist bands/coverings
- Inappropriate dress for season
- Unwillingness to participate in events or activities which require less body coverage
- Frequent bandages, odd or unexplainable paraphernalia in the person's possession (e.g. razor blades or other objects that can be used to cut, pound, burn)
- Heightened signs of depression or anxiety.

Feelings Associated with Self-Injury



| Before | During | After |
|---------------|--------------|----------------|
| Tension | Pleasure | Guilt |
| Worthlessness | Exhilaration | Shame |
| Vulnerability | Satisfaction | Crushed |
| Loneliness | Numbness | Pathetic |
| Confusion | Relief | Disturbed |
| Detachment | Control | Out of Control |

Feelings Associated with Self-Injury



- Hurting myself makes me feel different from others
- I feel out of control before I hurt myself
- Hurting myself makes me forget about things that stress me out
- I feel like I am doing something that I shouldn't be doing and feel ashamed
- I feel like I am doing something that I shouldn't be doing and feel invigorated
- I hurt myself when I am feeling vulnerable
- I hurt myself to feel in control
- I hurt myself to punish myself
- I hurt myself to punish others
- I hurt myself because it is a way of "cleansing"

SIB vs. Suicide



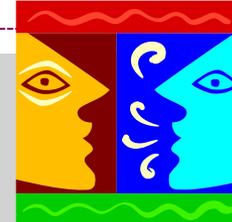
SELF INJURY

- Desire to alleviate pain
- Temporarily relieved through self-injury (temporary escape)

SUICIDE

- Desire to terminate life
- Perceived to be relieved by death (permanent escape)

Parent Tips: The Dos and Don'ts of Self-Injury



Do...

- Talk openly to your child. The more comfortable you are talking about it, the more likely your child will open up.
- Take this very seriously and explore the issue of suicidal ideation.
- Ask about other forms of self-injury.
- Be supportive but stress the importance of getting mental health support.
- Ask your child about their feelings.
- Help your child identify healthy alternatives to dealing with their feelings.

Parent Tips: The Dos and Don'ts of Self-Injury



Don't...

- React with anger, fear, or revulsion
- Assume this is a phase that they will outgrow
- Assume that they are not thinking about suicide
- Tell them to stop – getting into a power struggle does not stop the behavior and can actually make your child more resistant to change.
- Assume self-injury is manipulation
- Expect a quick fix.



How do I talk to my child about self-injury?



- Talk to your child as soon as you are aware that they may be self-injuring.
- Tell them that you are concerned about them and that they can talk to you about anything.
- Speak to your child calmly and non judgmentally while expressing your love and concern .
- Encourage your child to express how they are feeling.
- Listen, don't try to offer your opinion or “fix” the problem.
- Parents should not react with intensity such as fear and anger.

Healthy home environment



- Open communication and trust around expressing feelings.
- Talk and model healthy coping strategies.
- Spend time together.
- Provide healthy boundaries.
- Establish and follow through on rules and expectations.
- Avoid putting too much pressure and emphasis on outcomes and more recognition on the effort.
- Appreciate the strengths and individuality of your child.

School Resources



School Mental Health Professionals

- School Counselors
- School Social Workers
- School Prevention Specialist
- School Psychologist

- **Types of Groups**
- Young Womens Groups
- Young Mens Groups
- COA
- Substance Abuse Prevention
- Recovery

- **Student Assistance** – 3 sessions with therapist from LCMH

Song- composed and sung by 12 year female recovering from self-harm and eating disorder



- Put my problems down on the table
- Try to believe that I am able
- To fight this pain
- Like an opponent in a chess game

- Cause we're all kings and queens of our own broken worlds
- Well, I've been playing horse since I was
- Just a little girl
- And tell me when these mirrors won't cut me down
- And give me back the crown

- Take this pill
- And believe that it will kill my pain
- This broken house and broken heart both think
- That I've gone insane

- Convince myself
- It'll be one more day
- But something inside me
- Still wants to reign

- Cause we're all kings and queens of our own broken worlds
- Well, I've been pilling boxes since I was
- Just a little girl
- And tell me when these mirrors won't cut me down
- And give back the crown

- Well, Alice in the underworld is gonna find her way out
- When she finds the guiding light
- And there's so much more that I'm hungry for
- When I've lost my appetite

- We're all kings and queens of our own broken worlds
- Well, I've been pilling boxes since I was
- Just a little girl
- And tell me when these mirrors won't cut me down
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