Self-Injury
Loudoun County Public Schools

SUZANNE PETERSEN, MA AND KIM P. HAGER, LPC
“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 to 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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feelings Associated with Self-Injury</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Before</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tension</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worthlessness</td>
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<td>Vulnerability</td>
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<td>Loneliness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confusion</td>
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<td>Detachment</td>
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</table>
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

<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>SELF INJURY</strong></th>
<th><strong>SUICIDE</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desire to alleviate pain</td>
<td>Desire to terminate life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Temporarily relieved through self-injury (temporary escape)</td>
<td>Perceived to be relieved by death (permanent escape)</td>
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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
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