



## Self-Injury: Cutting & Beyond



Self-injury is often a way to cope with overwhelming feelings

### What is Self-Injury?

Self-injury, also known as self-inflicted violence, self-harm, self-abuse, or self-mutilation is defined as any intentional injury to one's own body. It usually leaves marks or causes tissue damage. It is hard for most people to understand why someone would want to cut or burn him/herself. The mere idea of intentionally inflicting wounds to oneself makes

pain makes people cringe. Yet there are growing numbers of people, young and old, who intentionally hurt themselves. Understanding the phenomenon is the first step in changing it.

### Who Engages in Self-Injury?

There is no simple portrait of a person that intentionally injures him/herself. This behavior is not limited by gender, race, education, age, sexual orientation, socio-economics or religion. However, some commonly seen factors include:

- A history of physical, emotional or sexual abuse.
- Co-existing prob-

lems of substance abuse, obsessive-compulsive disorder, or eating disorders.

- Raised in families that discouraged expression of anger.
- Lack of skills to express emotions.
- Lack of a good social support network.

### What it is NOT:

A behavior is not considered self-injury if the person's primary purpose is:

- sexual pleasure
- body decoration
- spiritual enlightenment via ritual, or
- fitting in or being cool.

## The Addictiveness of Self-Injurious Behavior

A person who becomes a habitual self-injurer usually follows a progression. The first incident may occur by accident, or after seeing or hearing of others who engage in self-injury. The person has strong feelings such as anger, fear, anxiety or dread before an injuring event. These feelings build,

and the person has no way to express or address them directly. Cutting or other self-injury provides a sense of relief, a release of the mounting tension. A feeling of guilt or shame usually follows the event. The person hides the tools used to injure, and covers up the evidence, often by wearing long sleeves. The next time a similar strong feeling

arises, the person has been "conditioned" to seek relief in the same way. The person feels compelled to repeat self-harm, which is likely to increase in frequency and degree.

(continued on page 2)

### Types of Self-Injury:

The most common ways that people self-injure include:

- \* cutting
- \* burning
- \* picking at wounds
- \* hair pulling
- \* hitting
- \* bone-breaking
- \* head-banging

Most self-injuring persons act alone, not in groups, and hide their behavior.



### IN THIS ISSUE:

Self-Injury	p. 1
What it is Not	p. 1
Types of Self-Injury	p. 1
Addictiveness	p. 1
How to Help	p. 2
Readiness Checklist	p. 2
Resources	p. 2

## Caring Hearts/Helping Hands

News You Can Use to Change Your Community  
A Community Care Team Newsletter



CONLEY OUTREACH COMMUNITY SERVICES / COMMUNITY CARE TEAM

PO Box 931  
Elburn IL 60119  
630/365-2880  
conleyor@conleyoutreach.org  
[www.conleyoutreach.org](http://www.conleyoutreach.org)



### Addictive Self-Injurious Behavior (continued from page 1)

Self injury is not suicidal behavior. In fact, it may be a way to reduce the tension that, left unattended, could result in an actual suicide attempt. Self-injury is the best way an individual knows to self-soothe. It may represent the best attempt the person has at creating the least damage. However, self-injury is highly linked to a poor sense of self-worth, and over time, that depressed feeling can evolve into suicidal attempts.

#### AREA RESOURCES for SELF INJURY

##### Inpatient/Outpatient Programs

Linden Oaks 630/305-5500  
Alexian Brothers 800/432-5005

##### General Counseling

Family Counseling Service 630/844-2662  
TriCity Family Services 630/232-1070  
Heartland Counseling 630/365-0899  
Gateway Foundation 630/966-7400

Find back issues of our CCT Newsletters at:  
[www.conleyoutreach.org](http://www.conleyoutreach.org)

## How Can I Help?



It's very hard to discover that someone you care about is physically harming him/herself. Your concern may come out in frustration and even comments that can drive the person farther away.

Some ideas that might be helpful:

- Understand that self-harming behavior is an attempt to maintain a certain amount of control, and that it is a way of self-soothing.
- Let him/her know that you care and that you will listen.
- Encourage expression of emotions, including anger.
- Ask questions about the emotional pain (e.g. why, when, how often do you hurt yourself).
- Offer to find a therapist or support group.
- Do not tell the person to stop the behavior or make judgmental comments—people who feel worthless and powerless are even more likely to self-injure.
- Help brainstorm high-sensory alternatives to self-injurious behavior (ex. Squeezing ice, taking a cold shower, eating spicy food, dancing fast, running).

### *Are You Ready to Stop? A Checklist*

While not all of these conditions need to be in place to stop self-injurious behavior, this checklist is useful in determining readiness:

- I have a solid emotional support system of friends, family, and/or professionals that I can use if I feel like hurting myself.
- There are at least two people in my life that I can call if I want to hurt myself.
- I feel at least somewhat comfortable talking about SIV with three different people.
- I have a list of at least ten things I can do instead of hurting myself.
- I have a place to go if I need to leave my house so as not to hurt myself.
- I feel confident that I could get rid of all the things that I might be likely to use to hurt myself.
- I have told at least two other people that I am going to stop hurting myself.
- I am willing to feel uncomfortable, scared, and frustrated.
- I feel confident that I can endure thinking about hurting myself without having to actually do so.
- I want to stop hurting myself.