

Self-Injury information for Parents

What is self-injury?

Kids Helpline defines self-injury as deliberate, non-life threatening self-effected bodily harm or disfigurement of a socially unacceptable nature. Those who engage in self-injury are deliberately doing physical harm to themselves in ways that are not intended to end their lives.

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.

Why do people self-injure?

Self-injury can be understood as a means of coping with overwhelming and inexpressible emotions. 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 possibly encouraged by peers in the group.

Signs to Look For

Because clothing can hide physical injuries, and inner turmoil can be covered up by a seemingly calm disposition, self-injury can be hard to detect. However, there are red flags you can look for:

- **Unexplained wounds or scars** from cuts, bruises, or burns, usually on the wrists, arms, thighs, or chest.
- **Blood stains** on clothing, towels, or bedding; blood-soaked tissues.
- **Sharp objects or cutting instruments**, such as razors, knives, needles, glass shards, or bottle caps, in the person's belongings.
- **Covering up.** A person who self-injures may insist on wearing long sleeves or long pants, even in hot weather.
- **Needing to be alone for long periods of time**, especially in the bedroom or bathroom.
- **Isolation and irritability.**

Should we get professional help?

If you think your child may be harming himself, take him to see a mental health professional (psychologist, doctor, or hospital like Alexian Brothers Behavioral Health Hospital). Self-harm is mostly your child's way of coping with stress. But these behaviors can continue over time if the underlying stresses are not properly handled.

Additional Information

If you have any questions or concerns please call Jenny Allen, the school social worker at Wood Dale Junior High, at: 630-766-6210

For more information parents are encouraged to listen to this FREE webinar on understanding self-injury by Wendy Lader, the co-founder of S.A.F.E. ALTERNATIVES® and co-author of *Bodily Harm: The Breakthrough Healing Program for Self-Injurers*. This Webinar is a PowerPoint presentation which runs approximately 33 minutes.

<http://store.selfinjury.com/products/Parents-Webinar%3A-by-Dr.-Wendy-Lader.html>

If your child is in need of an evaluation, you can call Alexian Brothers Behavioral Health's 24 hour access line at: 1-800-432-5005

