

# 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

