



Mental Health Association of Tarrant County
3136 West 4th Street
Fort Worth, TX 76107
817-335-5405/www.mhatc.org

Back to School

Self-Injury

What is it?

Self-injury, also known as cutting or self-mutilation, occurs when someone intentionally and repeatedly harms herself/himself. The method most often used is cutting but other common behaviors include burning, punching, and drinking something harmful, like bleach or detergent.

Who does it?

It's estimated that about two million people in the U.S. injure themselves in some way. The majority are teenagers or young adults with young women outnumbering young men. They are of all races and backgrounds.

Why?

- Often, people who self-injure say they hurt themselves to express emotional pain or feelings they can't put into words.
- It can be a way to have control over your body when you can't control anything else in your life. A lot of people who cut themselves also have an eating disorder.
- Although these individuals usually aren't trying to kill themselves, sometimes they are unable to control the injury and die accidentally.

How can I help a friend with this?

- **Ask about it.** If your friend is hurting herself, she may be glad to have you bring it up so she can talk about it. If she's not injuring herself, she's not going to start just because you said something about it.
- **Offer options but don't tell him what he has to do or should do.** If he is using self-injury as a way to have some control, it won't help if you try to take control of the situation. Helping your friend see ways to get help (like talking to a parent, advisor, college counselor or mental health professional) may be the best thing you can do for him.
- **Seek support.** Knowing a friend is hurting herself this way can be frightening and stressful. Consider telling a resident advisor or other trusted adult. This person could help your friend get the help she needs. You may feel that you don't have the right to tell anyone else. But remember, you can still talk to a mental health professional about how the situation is affecting you, or you can get more information and advice from any number of organizations.
- **Remember you're not responsible for ending the self-abuse.** You can't make your friend stop hurting himself or get help from a professional. The only sure thing you can do is keep being a good friend.

How can I help myself if I hurt myself?

- **Know that help is available.** Treatment is available for people who injure themselves. To learn about it, try talking to a professional person around you, someone like a college counselor. If you're not comfortable with that, think about contacting your local mental health association or checking out the S.A.F.E Alternatives website.
- **Know you are not alone.** Because so many people are self-injurers, it's likely that there are people around who can understand and can help.
- **Know you can get better.** This is a difficult time in your life. However, with help, you can get to the point where you don't hurt yourself anymore.
- **Get help.** Now is the best time to get help with this problem. If you wait, the problem will only get bigger. But if you find a way to meet it head on today, you'll be free of it and free to get on with your life. Free! A good way to be.

Where can I learn more?

- National Mental Health Association:
www.nmha.org
1-800-969-NMHA (6642)
- S.A.F.E. Alternatives (Self-Abuse Finally Ends)
www.selfinjury.com
Information Line: 1-800-DONT CUT

References

S.A.F.E. Alternatives website. Accessed June 2003. Internet Explorer:
<http://www.selfinjury.com>
Sullivan, Dana. "Self-Injury poorly understood problem." www.cnn.com. 5 September 2000