

## How Can You Tell?

### Warning Signs

- Unexplained injuries including cuts, bruises or burns on the wrists, arms or thighs
- Blood stains on clothing, towels or bedding
- Sharp objects such as razors, knives or glass shards lying around
- Numerous "accidents." Individuals who self-injure themselves use "accidents" as a way to explain their injuries.
- Frequently wearing long sleeves and pants even during warm weather
- Needing to be alone for long periods of time
- Low self-esteem • Acting out at school, work or home

## THE DANGERS OF SELF-INJURY

- Worsening feelings of shame, guilt and self-esteem
- Infection from wounds or sharing tools
- Severe blood loss from major blood vessels or arteries that were cut
- Worsening of underlying issues or disorders
- Scars • Addiction • Death

## BETTER WAYS TO COPE

### Find New Techniques

There are several different reasons why someone would hurt themselves, but there are other things they could do to deal with their issues.

If you hurt yourself to calm yourself down, try:

- Taking a hot bath or shower.
- Listening to calming music while massaging your neck, hands or feet.

If you hurt yourself to express pain or emotions, try:

- Writing your negative feelings in a diary or journal.
- Drawing or painting how you feel on a piece of paper.

If you hurt yourself because you don't feel connected to the world, try:

- Talking to a friend or someone you trust.
- Taking a cold shower.

If you hurt yourself to release tension, stress or if you're very angry, try:

- Hitting a bag or pillow to vent your anger.
- Exercising vigorously.
- Making loud noises (e.g. with an instrument, banging pots and pans).



## TEST YOURSELF!

### What Do You Know?

1. Cutting is the only form of Self-Injury.  
a. True                      b. False
2. Injuring yourself can lead to death.  
a. True                      b. False
3. Self-Injury is an "emo" thing.  
a. True                      b. False
4. Those who injure themselves are only doing it for attention.  
a. True                      b. False
5. Exercising can help relieve stress and tension.  
a. True                      b. False

# SELF-INJURY



Answers: 1. b; 2. a; 3. b; 4. b; 5. a

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## PAINFUL REMINDERS

## WHAT IS SELF-INJURY?

Everyone deals with overwhelming emotions and everyone copes with them differently. Some people choose to vent to others about their feelings while others distract themselves by exercising or reading a book. These are all healthy ways to cope with your emotions.

However, some people deal with their emotions by harming themselves. Self-injury is the act of intentionally injuring one's own body to cope with overwhelming emotions such as anger, anxiety or sadness. Self-injury, also referred to as self-mutilation, self-harming or self-inflicted violence gives a person something physical to show for all their emotional pain. For them, wounds are external and treatable, whereas emotional pain is unseen and confusing.

## PICK YOUR PAIN

### Different Forms of Self-Injuring

One of the most common forms of self-injury is cutting, which involves making cuts or scratches on the body with a sharp object. Others forms include:

- Burning
- Breaking bones
- Hitting or punching
- Pinching
- Piercing the skin
- Head banging
- Biting
- Pulling out hair or eyelashes
- Preventing wounds from healing

## THIS STUFF HURTS!

### So Why Do It?

It can be hard to understand why people harm themselves on purpose. The reasons people do this to themselves are very complicated. Most self-injury is in response to intense feelings of pain, distress, sadness, negative thoughts or memories. The driving force behind self-injury often has to do with expressing bad feelings. When these bad feelings become unbearable, self-injury is used as a way to cope. However, this coping mechanism rarely makes the individual feel better. In most cases the guilt and shame of the act makes them feel worse.

Some common triggers for self-injury include:

- Difficult relationships with parents, family members or peers
- Difficulties at school or work, such as not performing well
- Depression
- Bullying
- Low self-esteem
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Distress from a traumatic experience

## FACTS & MYTHS ABOUT SELF-INJURY

**Myth #1:** Self-injury is a suicide attempt.

**Fact:** For self-injurers, it's not their intention to commit suicide. For the majority of people, self-injury is used as a coping mechanism. They use it as a way to get through the day. For those people, it's actually a way to stay alive and function. However, people with a history of self-injury have higher risk of suicide, which is why it's important to get help.

**Myth #2:** Self-injury is just a way to get attention.

**Fact:** Self-injury can be attention seeking. This attention is necessary and deserved for anyone who is broken by life and needs support. Individuals who self-injure generally do it in secret. Those who reveal what they are going through and seek help may have hidden their issues for months or years. For self-injurers, the goal isn't to draw attention to themselves. In fact, shame and guilt make it very difficult for them to come forward and reveal what they've been doing.

**Myth #3:** Individuals who self-injure like pain.

**Fact:** Physical pain is not what self-injury is about. It's about emotional pain and releasing it through physical actions. Individuals don't enjoy the pain. For them, these actions can feel like the only way to let go of overwhelming thoughts and feelings.

**Myth #4:** Self-injury isn't serious if the wounds aren't bad.

**Fact:** The severity of the individual's wounds has very little to do with the severity of emotional pain present. Just because some wounds may be minor it doesn't mean it's not a problem. Different people have different methods of how they self-injure. Also, they have different pain tolerances.

**Myth #5:** Self-injury is a trend or an "emo" thing.

**Fact:** Self-injury isn't a new thing. Mental health professionals have been studying these behaviors for decades. Also, self-injury isn't a lifestyle. The term "emo" was originally used to describe a genre of music. Today it has been associated with depression, self-harm and suicide. There is no one certain type of person who self-harms; it affects a variety of people.



## LONELY AND HURTING

### Erica's Story

In Erica's hometown, she was involved in her school's soccer team and was class president. Things were going great for her. That all changed when her dad's job relocated her family to a different town. Erica was extremely upset about the move and her negative attitude made it difficult for her to make friends at her new school. Erica refused to try out for the soccer team and would argue with her parents constantly. She began isolating herself and rarely came out of her bedroom. Her parents thought something was wrong because even when summer came along she would only wear jeans and a sweat shirt.

Erica's mom first noticed the cuts when Erica was doing the dishes one night. Erica pretended like she didn't know what her mom was talking about and told her that their cat must have scratched her. Her mom seemed surprised that the cat had been so rough, but she didn't think much more about it.

At that point Erica knew she needed help but she couldn't seem to find the words to tell her parents that the marks on her arms were from something that she had done. She was cutting herself with a razor when she felt upset. Then one day, one of her cuts became infected. She started running a high fever and her mother found her passed out on her bed. She rushed Erica to the hospital. It's a good thing she did. The doctor said the infection was so bad that she could have lost her arm if he hadn't gotten the infection under control in time.

Erica's mom was able to get her the help she needed and Erica eventually accepted her new home, made friends and even made her school's soccer team.