

Cutting & Self-Harm

Self-Injury Help, Support, and Treatment

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Self-harm can be a way of coping with problems. It may help you express feelings you can't put into words, distract you from your life, or release emotional pain. Afterwards, you probably feel better—at least for a little while. But then the painful feelings return, and you feel the urge to hurt yourself again. If you want to stop but don't know how, remember this: you deserve to feel better, and you can get there without hurting yourself.

Understanding cutting and self-harm

Self-harm is a way of expressing and dealing with deep distress and emotional pain. As counterintuitive as it may sound to those on the outside, hurting yourself makes you feel better. In fact, you may feel like you have no choice. Injuring yourself is the only way you know how to cope with feelings like sadness, self-loathing, emptiness, guilt, and rage.

The problem is that the relief that comes from self-harming doesn't last very long. It's like slapping on a Band-Aid when what you really need are stitches. It may temporarily stop the bleeding, but it doesn't fix the underlying injury. And it also creates its own problems.

If you're like most people who self-injure, you try to keep what you're doing secret. Maybe you feel ashamed or maybe you just think that no one would understand. But hiding who you are and what you feel is a heavy burden. Ultimately, the secrecy and guilt affects your relationships with your friends and family members and the way you feel about yourself. It can make you feel even more lonely, worthless, and trapped.

Myths and facts about cutting and self-harm

Because cutting and other means of self-harm tend to be taboo subjects, the people around you—and possibly even you—may harbor serious misconceptions about your motivations and state of mind. Don't let these myths get in the way of getting help or helping someone you care about.

Myth: People who cut and self-injure are trying to get attention.

Fact: The painful truth is that people who self-harm generally do so in secret. They aren't trying to manipulate others or draw attention to themselves. In fact, shame and fear can make it very difficult to come forward and ask for help.

Myth: People who self-injure are crazy and/or dangerous.

Fact: It is true that many people who self-harm suffer from anxiety, depression, or a previous trauma—just like millions of others in the general population. Self-injury is how they cope. Slapping them with a “crazy” or “dangerous” label isn’t accurate or helpful.

Myth: People who self-injure want to die.

Fact: Self-injurers usually do not want to die. When they self-harm, they are not trying to kill themselves—they are trying to cope with their pain. In fact, self-injury may be a way of helping themselves go on living. However, in the long-term, people who self-injure have a much higher risk of suicide, which is why it’s so important to seek help.

Myth: If the wounds aren’t bad, it’s not that serious.

Fact: The severity of a person’s wounds has very little to do with how much he or she may be suffering. Don’t assume that because the wounds or injuries are minor, there’s nothing to worry about.

Signs and symptoms of cutting and self-harm

Self-harm includes anything you do to intentionally injure yourself. Some of the more common ways include:

- cutting or severely scratching your skin
- burning or scalding yourself
- hitting yourself or banging your head
- punching things or throwing your body against walls and hard objects
- sticking objects into your skin
- intentionally preventing wounds from healing
- swallowing poisonous substances or inappropriate objects

Self-harm can also include less obvious ways of hurting yourself or putting yourself in danger, such as driving recklessly, binge drinking, taking too many drugs, and having unsafe sex.

flags you can look for (but remember—you don’t have to be sure that you know what’s going on in order to reach out to someone you’re worried about):

http://helpguide.org/mental/self_injury.htm