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Cutting and Self-Injuring Behavior

Self-injuring behavior, commonly seen in adolescents and teenagers as cutting, can be a very troubling and scary thing for parents to find out their children are doing. Parents must understand that their children or teens are often doing these behaviors because of underlying emotional issues they are trying to deal with.

*“The most common form of self-injury is cutting or scratching the skin with anything that can draw blood, such as razors or even paperclips and pen caps, but people also self-injure by burning themselves, picking at skin and wounds, or hitting themselves. They often start around puberty.”* – The Child Mind Institute

It is important for parents to be able to understand the reasons why their children may be harming themselves. Most often, cutting or other self-injuring behavior is to help try to distract from emotional or mental pain a child or teenager may be going through that they don’t understand. The Child Mind Institute also explains some children may feel numb to experiences or “dead inside” and use cutting as a way to feel something. The Child Mind Institute also explains some children or teens may use these behaviors as a way to communicate with parents when they don’t know how to verbalize what’s going on in their minds.

**Signs of Self Harm**

It's important for parents to be able to recognize signs their child or teen may be harming themselves, and also what to do if their child is harming themselves. The Child Mind Institute offers a list of signs or behaviors for parents to look out for that may indicate their child is harming themselves:

* Talking about self-injury
* Suspicious-looking scars
* Wounds that don’t heal or get worse
* Cuts on the same place
* Increased isolation
* Collecting sharp tools such as shards of glass, safety pins, nail scissors, etc.
* Wearing long-sleeved shirts in warm weather



* Avoiding social activities
* Wearing a lot of band aids
* Refusing to go into the locker room or change clothes in school

**Triggers**

Triggers are also something parents should be aware of if they know or suspect their child or teenager is harming themselves. Troubling or emotional events, such as a breakup, a death, being bullied, or a fight with a friend are all examples of triggers which can make a child feel emotional and feel the need or want to cut.

**Getting Help**

It is important if you find out your child is harming themselves to get help for them. Self-harm and cutting are serious behaviors, and can escalate to more extreme measures if the emotional and mental help your child needs is not addressed. The Child Mind Institute gives this advice for parents:

“If you discover that a child has been hurting herself, even if she says it was a one-time thing, it’s important to get help. It’s true that kids might experiment with self-injury, especially if they have friends who are doing it, but it’s a serious and dangerous behavior, and you don’t want to ignore what might be a real mental health issue.” – The Child Mind Institute

**Resources for Adolescents:**

National Helpline: 1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)

Maryland Youth Crisis Line: 1-800-422-0009; TDD Line-Hearing Impaired: (410) 531-5086

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

LGBT Youth Suicide Hotline: 1-866-4-U-TREVOR

Relay Service for the Deaf: 1-800-735-2258

Self-Injury Hotline:  1-800-DONTCUT (1-800-366-8288)