

Helping someone who self-injures

You may feel upset, shocked or angry when someone you care about hurts themselves. Try to look behind the injuries and see the person in pain. The most precious things you can offer are acceptance and support. Let your friend know you understand that self-injury is helping them to cope at the moment. They are not 'bad' or 'mad' for doing it. You could invite them to talk to you about their feelings, or to call you if they are having a difficult time. But only offer as much as you can cope with, and don't try to take responsibility for stopping them from hurting themselves.

Helplines and Information

TESS text and email support for young women up to age 25

Open Mon, Tues, Weds, Thurs and Fri 7-9pm

Text us on 0780 047 2908

E-mail link available through website to ensure confidentiality of your e-mail at www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk/tess-text-and-email-support-service

National Children's Bureau

www.ncb.org.uk/projects/selfharm

Provides information on a wide range of activities and initiatives that relate to young people and self-harm.

National Self Harm Network

www.nshn.co.uk

A survivor led organisation with a range of information about self-harm.

The Basement Project

Useful Book Resource:

**Healing the Hurt Within:
Understand Self-Injury and Self-Harm,
and Heal the Emotional Wounds
By Jan Sutton
ISBN: 1845280369**



Self Injury

0808
80 10 800

info@rasacymru.org.uk

Canolfan
Gefnogaeth
Trais a
Cham-drin
Rhywiol (Gogledd
Cymru)

Blwch Post
P.O Box 87
Caernarfon
Gwynedd
LL55 9AA

Rape &
Sexual Abuse Sup-
port Centre (North
Wales)

What is self-injury?

'Self-injury' is any sort of self-harm which involves causing injuries or pain to your own body. It can take many forms.

The most common form of self-injury is probably cutting. Usually these cuts are not deep, but sometimes they are.

Someone may also burn themselves, punch themselves or hit their bodies against something. Some people pick their skin, or pull out hair.

How common is self-injury?

Self-injury is far more common than most people think. All sorts of people self-injure. Often they carry on successful careers or look after families, and there is little outward sign that there is anything wrong. Self-injury seems to be more common among women. This is partly because men are more likely to express strong feelings, such as anger - outwardly.

Many people who self-injure believe they are the only person who does this. Fear and shame may force someone to keep self-injury secret for many years. This means that no-one knows how big the problem really is. Our experience shows that where it is acceptable to talk about it, many people will say that they have self-injured at some time.

Why do people self-injure?

There are always powerful reasons why a person hurts themselves. For most people it is a way of getting through great emotional pain. Many people cope with their problems in ways that are risky and harmful to themselves. Some drink or eat too much, smoke, drive too fast, gamble, or make themselves ill through overwork or worry. They might do this to numb or distract themselves from problems or feelings they cannot bear to face (like 'drowning your sorrows').

Self-injury, although it is more shocking, is very like these 'ordinary' forms of self-harm. Like drink or drugs, hurting themselves may help a person block out painful feelings. Like taking risks or gambling, it may provide danger and distraction. Often people say that self-injury helps them to release unbearable tension, which may be caused by anxiety, grief or anger. It puts their pain 'outside', where it feels easier to cope with. For others it relieves feelings of guilt or shame. Sometimes a person's self-injury is a 'cry for help'; a way of showing (even to themselves) that they have suffered and are in pain.

Perhaps hurting themselves is a way of feeling 'real' and alive, or having control over something in their life.

What lies behind a person's distress may be painful experiences in childhood or adulthood. A person may have suffered neglect or abuse, may have always been criticised and silenced, rather than supported and allowed to express their needs and feelings. Some people who self-injure come from chaotic or violent families.

For others, adult experiences of emotional or physical cruelty have led to their desperation.

Myths about self-injury

Self-injury is a failed suicide attempt

Self-injury is a way of carrying on with life, not of dying. Injuries are seldom life-threatening. It is important to know the difference between self-injury and a suicide attempt, so that the true meanings of self-injury can be understood.

Self-injury is 'just attention seeking'

Self-injury is mainly about trying to cope with great pain. For some it is a desperate attempt to show that something is really wrong, and that someone should take notice of their distress.

Self-injury is a sign of madness

Self-injury is a sign of distress, not madness; a sign of someone trying to cope with their life as best they can.

A person who self-injures is a danger to others

Someone who self-injures is directing their hurt and anger at themselves, not at others. Most would be appalled at the idea of hurting anyone else.

What can help?

Self-injury causes great distress, and can seem a difficult problem to overcome. But it is possible for someone to stop hurting themselves, if they can understand and sort out the problems behind what they do.

If you are someone who self-injures

Think about what your self-injury is 'saying' about your feelings and your life. This will give you clues about problems you need to work on. You might find it helpful to talk about your self-injury and what lies behind it with friends or a counsellor. To find out about counselling you could ask your GP, Women's Centre, Rape & Sexual Abuse Support service, MIND group, li-