

## DEFINE:

Self-injurious behavior (SIB) or self-inflicted violence (SIV) has been defined as "the commission of deliberate harm to one's own body.

Experts who study SIB classify the anomaly according to three types:

**Major self-mutilation** is the most extreme and rare form of SIB. It consists of acts like castration or limb amputation and most often occurs where an individual is psychotic or intoxicated.

**Stereotypic self-mutilation** consists of regular and rhythmic acts such as head banging, eyeball pressing and arm biting and is most commonly seen in institutionalized mentally retarded individuals or those suffering with obsessive-compulsive disorders.

The type of SIB most common among children and teens is **superficial** or **moderate self-mutilation**. Kids caught in this cycle of behavior cut their skin, carve their skin, burn themselves, interfere with the healing process, stick themselves with needles, or utilize other methods of inflicting physical damage on themselves.

Cutting is the practice of teens who purposely injure themselves by using a sharp object to scratch or cut their skin deep enough to draw blood. It's a type of self-injury behavior typically seen more often among younger teen girls, although older teens and boys can also engage in cutting.

Self-mutilation, sometimes called self-injury, self-harm, self-abuse, or self-inflicted violence, is the deliberate harming of one's own body **without the intent to commit suicide**.

Self inflicted violence, or SIV, takes many forms, including:

- ripping or picking the skin
- hair pulling
- punching
- head banging
- bruising
- burning
- branding
- scratching
- bone breaking

Among teens, the most common, and perhaps the least noticeable, self-mutilation behaviors are skin picking and hair pulling.

But like drugs, SI is an addiction. **Those who cut generally need to increase the destructive behavior over time, cutting deeper and more often with sharper implements in order to get the desired effect.**

## PREVALENCE & FACTS

Statistics show that 1:5 teenage girls (20%) and 1:7 teenage boys (14.2%) in the US participate in self-injury.

The percentages range throughout the variety of self-injury forms:

- Cutting: 72 %
- Burning: 35 %
- Self-hitting: 30 %
- Interference w/wound healing: 22 %
- Hair pulling: 10 %
- Bone breaking: 8 %

Cutting has been popping up more in movies, music and other areas of pop culture, and as a result, it is reaching near epidemic proportions. Experts say upward of three million Americans hurt themselves on a regular basis. The majority, but not all are female teens. Statistics show that, unfortunately, the number of boys who have started down the path of self-injury is rising.

Treatment visits for teens that self-injure have doubled over the past three years. And those numbers are expected to grow as life becomes more complex for teenagers. Directors at self-injury treatment programs refer to this growth trend as an epidemic that reaches even into middle schools.

Many cutters of both sexes come from apparently stable, two-parent homes in which there are no evidences of abuse. Some of the kids have a history of suicide attempts, but many have no interest in ending their lives, no matter how self-destructive their behavior seems to be. How often they injure themselves generally depends on how acute the underlying psychological pain is. In one study, kids self-mutilated anywhere from 1 to 745 times a year.

Two of the most alarming facts about teen cutting are these:

- The number of cases is on the rise, and
- Without treatment, many who begin cutting themselves as teens will continue the behavior well into their adult years.

Teens usually will cut themselves where they can most easily reach - on arms, legs, and torso. They often take care to cut themselves only in places where their injuries and scars can be concealed by clothing to hide the practice from parents, siblings, and teachers.

Although it's sometimes done in groups, cutting is typically a secretive behavior. Teens often keep their secret even from their closest friends because they're embarrassed and ashamed.

## THE "WHY" BEHIND IT

It's understandably difficult for parents/leaders to understand why their student would hurt himself or herself on purpose. Here are some reasons various therapists offer:

- **For release of pent up emotional stress, anger, or other negative emotions**
  - The majority of teens who cut themselves do so because they lack coping skills to deal with the strong emotions, intense stress, or relationship problems in their lives.
  - Without healthy ways to deal with what they feel inside, tension builds up to an unbearable level until the teen seeks physical relief through cutting himself/herself.
- **Physical pain is used to shut out strong emotional pain (cry for help)**
  - Cutting helps them find relief from greater problems that are below the surface
    - *"I'm feeling so much pain inside because of my life that a greater pain keeps me from thinking about it"* (Person wishes to remain anonymous)
- **Distraction/Coping mechanism**
  - Don't know how to cope with the craziness of their life, so they cut to keep their mind off of it
  - While self-injury is definitely wrong and abnormal, it becomes an effective coping strategy for individuals who have not learned healthy and correct ways to deal with the problems and pressures of life.
    - *"I couldn't even feel the pain of the blade; I just knew that it focused me somewhere else."* (Person wishes to remain anonymous)
- **To gain control when their lives seem out of control.**
  - If it seems like life is out of control and they can't control anything else, they cut because they **can** control that
- **To feel something other than emptiness or "numbness," even if what they feel is pain.**
  - They are reassured by their capacity to *feel* physical sensation because it lets them know they are still alive.
  - Physical pain ends (for a period of time) feelings of numbness and it gives them a way to "feel" again
- **To punish themselves because they feel inadequate or worthless.**
  - *"Somewhere inside of me says that I've messed up and I'm no good. I'm ugly and rotten. So I cut to express what I deserve and can't put into words."* (Person wishes to remain anonymous)
- **Wanting attention, wanting to be liked by their friends**
  - One of the tragedies in schools is that students tend to repeat things around them
  - They may start just for the sheer attention that they see another cutter get or because their friends do it

- **Eliminate boredom or create excitement**
  - We live in an adrenaline-rushed society
  - Branding, overdoing tattoos, and now cutting have become the new adrenaline rushes
- **Curiosity**
  - They may see or hear about it somewhere and wonder how it feels
- **Mental Illness**
  - Cutting can be, although is not necessarily, associated with a mental disorder like depression, bipolar disorder, anorexia or other eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder and others. It may also be associated with substance abuse and with other impulse control and risk taking behaviors

### **IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND:**

Those who cut don't intend to injure themselves seriously or permanently. And while teens who cut do sometimes attempt suicide, cutting episodes are usually **not** suicide attempts. Rather, those who cut are feeling emotional pain and resort to physical self-injury in an attempt to feel better. Cutting releases endorphins, the brain's feel-good chemical, providing a respite from the pain or helping the teen "feel more alive."

But similar to a drug induced high, the endorphin rush from cutting is temporary. When it fades those who cut feel more guilty or depressed than before. To achieve that endorphin rush again, they have to cut themselves more.

This cycle often causes cutting to become a habit for teens. Kicking the cutting habit can be for some as difficult as ending a drug habit. Although cutting is not physically addictive, the behavior can have a compulsive element, causing a teen to feel that the more he/she cuts, the more he/she needs to cut.

This brings up the issue of permanence. Today's teens live in an ever-changing world where family, friends, home and, yes, even church life, are seen as undependable. For kids who are unsure who will be there for them, cutting—and the scars it leaves—offers something tangible and permanent they can hold on to.

This makes the "Silent Agony of Cutting" even scarier. Without proper and healthy coping outlets for their emotions, teenagers can find themselves lost in the very thing that they hoped would help them be found.

## GAINING FREEDOM

### LEADERS/PARENTS – HOW TO HELP YOUR STUDENT

With so many teens—including those from Christian homes—getting involved in self-injurious behavior, we need to be aware of the situation so we can respond in a sound and biblical way.

- **Do NOT** react with anger.
  - ***We need to respond in love.*** It is important for the adults in their lives not to "freak out" on them. We need to extend the unconditional grace and love of Christ to these kids, letting them know they are accepted. Kids who cut already feel unloved, unaccepted and unwanted. We need to help them KNOW they are valued.
    - Parents should remain calm, and build a trust with the kids so they know they have someone to go to in hard times. Going off of the deep end is never going to help – be calm and rational
  - ***Make yourself available without being overwhelming.*** It is important that you take the issue seriously and make yourself available to talk, but don't make this the ONLY thing that you talk about.
    - Ask how they are feeling and allow them to share at their own pace.
    - Keep open communication and accountability with them
      - Even if you think your kid will lie to you, at some point they WILL tell you the truth
- **Do NOT** go into denial about the problem.
  - Admit you and your child need help.
  - It is OK to see professional help if you don't feel like you can handle things on your own. The fact that you are going out of your way to help give your child/student freedom PROVES you are good parent/leader.
  - Assess the situation and determine *honestly* if it requires a deeper level of counseling/professional help
- **Do NOT** assume this is a "phase" your teen will outgrow.
  - The scary truth is that "cutting" is an addictive behavior, and it is rare that your teen will just stop without help
  - Take the problem very seriously. It is RARE that this is just attention-seeking behavior.
- **Do NOT** try to hide sharp objects.
  - This is an ineffective deterrent. Hiding the knives or removing sharp objects from the house is not only impractical and next to impossible, but it doesn't work. Kids will always find a way to cut, if they want to, whether it is with their fingernails, staples, straws or other common household items.
- **Do NOT** confuse the symptom with the real problem
  - Cutting is not the problem. It is merely the visible outworking of much deeper issues. Kids cut for a reason, and we need to find out what that reason is.

- **Do NOT** say or think: "What did I do wrong as a mother (father) for you to do this to yourself."
  - *"Don't take it personally. You didn't fail as a parent just because your student is struggling... I had great parents who loved me. I just couldn't deal with the world around me."* (person wishes to remain anonymous)
  - Be there and help them through this but know that it wasn't created by you

**\*\*ADDITIONAL NOTE to PARENTS\*\*:** It is vitally important to understand that you are NOT responsible for your student's decision to self-injure. If you are overwhelmed with guilt, it will be impossible for you to take the actions necessary to help your student gain freedom.

That being said, it would be wise to assess the relationship that exists between you and your student. Ask yourself: What expectations do I place on his/her life? How are the lines of communication between us? Am I really listening and trying to understand my student?

This does NOT mean you are the problem. But assessing the relationship may determine if something needs to change so you can be part of the solution.

**HUMILITY IS KEY!!**

Here are some practical things TO **DO**:

- ***DO help your student find alternatives to cutting.***
  - While some stop cold turkey, others need to be weaned off a behavior they feel works for them. Some suggest working down to lesser injurious behaviors like snapping the wrist with a rubber band.
  - The most effective way to help is to find some sort of creative outlet such as writing, music or art.
  - Remember, the ultimate goal is not just to stop the cutting, but to get to the deeper issues that cause the cutting.
- ***DO pray with your student regularly***
  - Let your student know that both you and God accept them unconditionally. They have value by virtue of being created in God's image. He doesn't reject them for their behavior.
- ***DO keep the lines of communication open with your teens, even if you are not dealing directly with this struggle at the present time.***
  - This goes a long way in preventing many of the issues that manifest themselves in cutting. And we need to pray *for* our kids regularly that they would seek God in all that they do.

**\*\*ADDITIONAL NOTE to YOUTH PASTORS/WORKERS\*\*:** Those who find out that some of their teens are hurting themselves need to take action, but at the same time need to be very careful. Conventional wisdom is that youth workers should somehow alert the parents to the problem so as to avoid potential legal problems. But this needs to be done very carefully. It would be wise to inform the student first and work to convince them to tell their parents themselves. Offer to go with them and help them. If, over a period of time, the teen refuses, the youth worker may need to inform the

parents of the behavior. Each situation needs to be assessed on its own merits, taking into consideration the temperament of the parents and how they are likely to react. There is the very real possibility that informing the parents could create more severe problems, as some cutters are suicidal, and many come from abusive homes.

**ALWAYS PRAY FOR, SEEK OUT, & USE WISDOM!!!**

**\*\*ADDITIONAL NOTE to EVERYONE\*\*:** Keep in mind the words Jesus spoke (John 10:10) – “The Enemy comes to steal, kill and destroy. But I have come to give life and life more abundantly.” The BEST way we can fight the enemy’s plot to destroy a generation is to **LOVE** and **PRAY** for them.

## GAINING FREEDOM

### STRUGGLING STUDENT – HOW TO HELP YOURSELF

- Tell someone. You do NOT need to walk through this alone!
  - Almost all people who struggled in the past with self-injury agree that one of the BEST things that you can do is come forward--talk about your problems with parents, teachers and friends. It's equally critical for you to talk honestly with yourself. The addiction you're in thrives on secrecy and fear, **but as with all wounds, a little fresh air can help speed the healing.**
- Find someone who has worked with cutters...and ask for their help.
- Know your triggers. (In other words, figure out what makes you want to hurt yourself and pre-plan, or decide before you're really hurting, what you are going to do INSTEAD of cut)
- CREATE A SUBSTITUTE EMOTIONAL OUTLET.
  - Write your uncensored/honest feelings (hurt, anger, frustration) out in a journal
  - Draw a picture of what you feel inside – if it helps, use red pen or paint and make the paint drip
  - Jog, Lift weights, Bike Ride, Dance like crazy, Exercise...
  - Play with a pet
  - Watch TV (change the channel if it features cutting or the show makes you want to cut more)
  - Hang out with friends – if you know you've really got the urge to cut, STAY WITH PEOPLE
  - Put a rubber band around your wrist and when you get the urge to cut, SNAP that rubber band over and over again on your arm
    - Make welts if you have to... Welts from a rubber band will be better than cuts!
  - Compose songs or poetry to express what you're feeling
  - Listen to music that makes you feel BETTER – not something that makes you feel angry or sad
  - DO ANYTHING that helps you get your feelings out in an HEALTHY way
- READ OVER "HIDDEN SCARS, SILENT WOUNDS." (It's the next page that tells you the TRUTH about who you are and what GOD really thinks about you. Even if you don't believe in the whole "God thing" right now, this sheet will help dispel some of the lies you might believe about yourself and your situation.)
  - Read...and re-read the parts that most help you.
- Check out the resource list at the end of this packet for other places to get help
- Refuse to allow this form of "slavery" to rule you.
  - Galatians 5:1 "Stand firm and do not let yourselves be trapped again in any form of slavery." (Cutting can be a devastating, lonely kind of torture you inflict on yourself.)
    - "Take a step back. Look at the long term. Who's in control of your life, the cutting or you?" (Person wishes to remain anonymous)
- **STICK WITH STOPPING.** It is going to take TIME for things to get better, but don't give up hope.



## Hidden Scars, Silent Wounds - Hand Out

The Lie	The Problem	The Truth
I am worthless, fat, ugly, stupid (you fill in the blank).	Putting yourself down	The Creator of the universe places great value on my life. I am His workmanship ( <i>Eph. 2:10</i> ), created in His image ( <i>Gen. 1:27</i> ) and made complete in His Son, Jesus Christ ( <i>Col. 2:10</i> ). He has bought me with a great price ( <i>1 Cor. 6:20, John 3:16</i> ). He calls me His friend ( <i>John 15:15</i> ) and desires a relationship with me ( <i>1 John 1:3</i> ).
I am the only one to blame for everything that goes wrong in my life.	Desire for self-control	You do need to accept responsibility for your actions, but we're all subject to being hurt by others in a sinful world. More important, God deeply desire to be Lord of your life – to love, comfort, guide and grow you. But He won't demand it; He wants you to give Him control willingly. When you do, He promises to work all things together for your good ( <i>Rom. 8:28, Prov. 3:5-6</i> ).
I need to go through these hard times alone. This is my secret.	Isolating yourself	"God helps those who help themselves" is nowhere to be found in the Bible. Instead, we're invited to cast all our anxieties on Jesus, because "He cares for you" ( <i>1 Pet. 5:7</i> ). We are also told that "the Lord Himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you" ( <i>Deut. 31:8</i> ). So even though tough times come, God is with you, and you can rely on Him to stay with you throughout any painful circumstances you face ( <i>Isaiah 41:10</i> )
Everyone expects me to be strong.	Unrealistic expectations; trying to be perfect	No one is strong all the time. In fact, God values our weakness, because it allows Him to be strong for us. "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness" ( <i>2 Cor. 12:9</i> ).
People wouldn't want to be with me if they knew how I felt.	Desire to please others	Placing trust in the opinions of others rather than in the promises of God will always lead to disappointment. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" the Bible asks ( <i>Rom. 8:31</i> ). Not only is He our advocate, He also understands us; Jesus has been there. ( <i>Isaiah 53:2-3</i> ).
Better to hurt myself physically than to allow my rage to hurt someone else emotionally.	Self-abuse	As Christians, we're taught not to hurt others, to "turn the other cheek" ( <i>Matt. 5:39</i> ). But we're also taught to protect ourselves physically. "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?... For God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple" ( <i>1 Cor. 3:16, 17b</i> ).
I deserve this kind of pain. I don't deserve God's love or forgiveness.	Self-condemnation	God's word tells us that "there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" ( <i>Rom. 8:1</i> ), and that includes self-condemnation. We are all born sinners ( <i>Rom. 3:23</i> ) and thus deserve the pain of separation from God that sin creates. But God wants to fellowship with us, so He sent His son. Jesus said: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears My words and believes in Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" ( <i>John 5:24</i> ). Not only that, but He also promises that nothing can separate us from His love ( <i>Rom. 8:38-39</i> ).

## **RESOURCES**

\*\* These are the list of resources we've compiled to help you or your student in the fight against this struggle. Many of these resources were used to create the information in this packet

### **COUNSELORS**

(Please note that counselors' availability is dependent on their schedules, your insurance, and the level of urgency with the student)

**Christine D. Erickson, MA, NCC, LPC**

512 Northampton St  
Edwardsville, PA 18704  
570-406-7059

**Family Services of Wyoming Valley**

570-823-5144

**Back Mountain Harvest Assembly – The Hope Center**

340 Carverton Road  
Trucksville, PA  
570-696-5233

**Petra Plucenik**

570-331-4766

**Marguerite Mosack**

239 Schuyler Avenue SUITE 350  
Kingston, PA 18704  
570-283-5580

*children service center*

### **24-HR HELPLINES**

**Family Services of Wyoming Valley (host of helpline)**

570-829-1341

## BOOKS & ARTICLES

*Bodily Harm* by Karen Conterio and Wendy Lader

*A Bright Red Scream* by Marilee Strong

*Community Mental Health Journal*. "The plight of chronic self-mutilators," Vol. 24, 1988, 22-30

*Cutting: Understanding and Overcoming Self-Mutilation* by Steven Levenkron

*Bodies under Siege* by Armando R. Favazza

*Crying through their cuts: the stark reality of physical self-abuse*. Article by Walt Mueller

## ONLINE RESOURCES

- SAFE: Self Abuse Finally Ends [ <http://www.selfinjury.com/> ]
- The Help Line [ <http://www.helplinecenter.org/> ]
- Focus on the Family [ <http://www.focusonthefamily.com> ]
- Parenting Today's Teens [ [www.Parentingtodaysteens.org](http://www.Parentingtodaysteens.org) ]
- Online Radio Production with Mark Gregston –  
[ <http://www.heartlightministries.org/blogs/pttradio/> ]
- Center for Parent/Youth Understanding [ <http://cpyu.org/default.aspx> ] - search "cutting"
- Teen Help [ <http://www.teenhelp.com/index.html> ]
- Self Mutilators Anonymous [ <http://selfmutilatorsanonymous.webs.com/> ]
- Kids Health/Teen Health [ [http://kidshealth.org/teen/your\\_mind/problems/resisting\\_cutting.html](http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/problems/resisting_cutting.html) ]
- To Write Love on Her Arms (anti-self-injury, anti-suicide movement) [ <http://www.twloha.com/index.php> ]
- Crimson Ashes [ [www.crimsonashes.com](http://www.crimsonashes.com) ]
- Teen Hopeline [ [www.teenhopeline.com](http://www.teenhopeline.com) ]
- Lysameña Project on Self-Injury [ [www.self-injury.org](http://www.self-injury.org) ]
- Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation [ [www.ccef.org](http://www.ccef.org) ]
- American Association of Christian Counselors [ [www.aacc.net](http://www.aacc.net) ]

## PASTORS

<b>Carrie Maurio</b>	<i>youth pastor, 1<sup>st</sup> A/G Wilkes-Barre</i>	570-829-0989
<b>Wayne Morgan</b>	<i>Wilkes-Barre Youth for Christ</i>	<a href="http://www.nepayfc.com">http://www.nepayfc.com</a>
<b>Ed Booth</b>	<i>youth pastor</i>	570-606-9010
<b>Rob Coscia</b>	<i>pastor, Diamond Valley Church</i>	570.899.1114