

What is Self-Injury?

Self-injury is any form 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. Some young people may also burn themselves, punch themselves or hit their bodies against something. Some young 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 young people self-injure and often there is little outward sign that there is anything wrong. A lot of young people that self-injure find it very difficult to talk about it. They may feel that no-one understands or that people will be angry.

It seems that more girls self-injure than boys. This may be because boys are able to express strong emotions like anger more easily.

Many young people that self-injure believe they are the only person that does this. Fear and shame may force them to keep it secret for many years. This means that no one knows how big the problem really is.

Why do Young People Self-injure?

There are always powerful reasons why someone self-injures. For most it is a way of coping with 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').

Young people may have a number of different things going on in their lives. Growing up may already be a very difficult time, but a lot of young people have additional problems with other issues such as bullying, sexuality, problems with friends, bereavement, pressures at school, abuse, pressures to fit in, race, culture, religion or money.

Some young people may also care for relatives that are unwell and may not have had a chance to be 'young'. Some young people may live in households where there are abusive or violent relationships. They may come from families where expectations to do well at school or college are very high and feel under pressure to succeed.

Some young people may also come from families where talking about how they feel is very difficult and a lot of emotions are left unexpressed.

Any of these factors may be very distressing for young people and could be reasons for their self-injury.

Some of the Myths about Young People and Self-Injury

It's only a teenage thing, she'll grow out of it.

If a young person is hurting themselves it is a sign that something is bothering them, that they need help. If not, over time the self-injury can become more severe and more of a problem.

He's only doing it to be cool

Whilst one-off cutting may be part of being accepted by the group, if someone repeatedly feels the need to hurt themselves, there are very likely to be underlying problems that need sorting out.

She's just copying her mates at school

Young people who self-injure find that it helps them to cope. The only reason why somebody would continue to hurt themselves, is because they find it helps them to cope with emotional pain they feel or with the problems they have in their life.

Quotes from Young People

"I began to self-harm as I was hurting on the inside, so I thought I'd show it on the outside."

"When I self-harm I feel relief and better for about 5 minutes but then I start to feel angry at myself. I feel guilty because I should feel like that and because of the scars on my arms."

"I began to self-harm because it gave me a sense of power over my body and control that I didn't feel I had in other ways, especially over emotions which feel overwhelming and scary."

What can help?

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

Who can Young People talk to?

If young people feel unable to speak to their family or friends, there are other people or organisations they can contact.

At school/ college

Young people can talk to the school nurse or a teacher they like and trust. The school may have a policy that says they may have to tell the parents of the young person. Find out if this is the case. At college there will probably be a counsellor.

Helplines and Information

Bristol Crisis Service for Women

www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk

Helpline 0117 925 1119

Fri & Sat 9pm-12.30am, Sun 6pm-9pm

'The Rainbow Journal' is a self-help book for young people who self-injure. It is free to those under 18. Also provide a range of publications about self-injury.

National Self Harm Network

www.nshn.co.uk

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

The Basement Project

www.basementproject.co.uk

Provides information and publications about self-injury.

Young Minds

www.youngminds.org.uk

Young Minds have produced a booklet about young people and self-injury.

Young People and Self-Harm

www.selfharmUK.org.uk

Information and resources from the National Inquiry looking at young people and self-harm.



Young People and Self-Injury

Bristol Crisis Service for Women

Helpline: 0117 925 1119

Friday and Saturday evenings

9.00 pm – 12.30 am

Sundays 6.00 pm – 9.00 pm

BCSW 2008

Bristol Crisis Service for Women

PO Box 654 Bristol BS99 1XH

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