

HOW CAN I STOP CUTTING?

Some people who cut themselves say that cutting makes them feel better. Cutting yourself is not a healthy way to deal with your feelings of anger, sadness, depression or frustration. You're hurting yourself.



What You Can Do To Stop Cutting Yourself

Kelly could not explain to her mother the unusual scar on her thigh that her mother spotted as Kelly changed clothes. Her mother suddenly realized why her daughter wore sweat pants and long sleeves in the 102 degree summer heat. Kelly cut herself every day before school and cut herself before going to bed.

Adam's dad first noticed the deep cuts on his son's arms and legs one night when he was taking out the trash. Adam told his dad that their dog scratched and bit him when they were playing around. His dad thought the scratches seemed deep and was surprised that their gentle dog had been so rough, but he didn't think much more about it.

Injuring or cutting yourself on purpose is a type of self-injury. People who cut themselves don't often talk about it or let others know they're doing it. Friends are usually the first people to recognize that there is a problem when they see cuts or other signs of self-injury. Find a friend that you trust to help you feel better and give you the support or courage you need to find or ask for help.

Cutting is often a result of problems you cannot understand or handle on your own. Cutting can become an addiction and it can be very hard to stop. That is why it's important to seek help. You cannot solve this problem alone. And there's no shame in that.

Find an adult that you can trust, tell them about your cutting problem, and tell them you need help to stop. **If you're not comfortable with that, contact a local mental health group or a HOTLINE for help such as the ones listed in this brochure. Mental health professionals that have ways to help you better deal with the problems in your life--without cutting.**

What You Can Do If A Friend Is Cutting

Tessa was wearing long sleeves under her soccer jersey again. She told me she was worried about getting too much sun. When Tessa raised her arm, I noticed fresh cuts on her forearm. When she saw me looking at them, she said something about getting tangled in her mother's rose bushes while trying to get her soccer ball.

It can be upsetting and hard to understand why a friend might cut himself or herself on purpose. You might feel confused, scared, sad or sorry that your friend is hurting himself or herself in this way. It is often difficult to help a friend who cuts and you may not see changes overnight, if at all.

Some people who cut themselves are not ready to face what they are going through - and you can't blame yourself for that. Don't take on the burden as your own or feel responsible for your friend's behavior.

As a friend, here are some things you can do to help:

Ask about it. Friends with cutting problems are often glad to be able talk about it, especially with a friend. Don't be afraid to ask--cutting won't start just because you said something about it.

Be informed. Learning about cutting can help you understand why some people do it, and how they can stop. Sharing this information with your friend can be a caring act, and it might help her or him take the first step toward healing.

Offer options for help. Helping someone see ways to get help - like talking to a parent, teacher, school counselor or mental health professional- may be the best thing you can do.

Seek support. Knowing a friend is going through this can be frightening and stressful. Consider telling a teacher or someone else you trust. And remember, even if you don't want to share your friend's secret, you can still talk to a counselor, a therapist or another adult you trust about how it is affecting you.

You're not responsible for stopping your friend's cutting. You cannot blame yourself for your friend's choices. You can't force someone to stop cutting or to get help. Be sure to care for yourself, and don't allow yourself to be drained or pulled down by your friend's situation. Sometimes even a best friend may need to take a break from this situation.

What Is Cutting?

Cutting and self-injury is not a new trend, but it appears to be happening more often. It is the most common method of self-injury and is often done repetitively. It's estimated that about two million people in the U.S. cut or injure themselves on purpose in some way. Cutting is more common among teenagers and young adults, with girls and young women outnumbering boys and young men. People who cut or injure themselves on purpose can be of any gender, age, class, ethnicity or social circle.

Reasons for Behaviors

Many young people who cut report that they feel empty inside, are unable to express their feelings, feel lonely, not understood by others, or fearful of close relationships and adult responsibilities. Cutting is their way to cope with or relieve painful or hard-to-express feelings. Cutting is often not a suicide attempt. However, relief is temporary, and a self-destructive cycle often develops without proper treatment.

Cutting vs. Suicidal Behavior

Cutting is a form of planned injury where the intent is to feel better without having a goal of suicide. With suicide the goal is to end life in order to not feel anything. Sometimes a person who cuts themselves may have thoughts of suicide, but usually they are not trying to kill themselves. Sometimes they are unable to control the injury and die accidentally. However, if a person says he/she is suicidal or if you believe a person is suicidal, get help immediately. Call 911 or go to a hospital emergency room. **Always take thoughts of or plans for suicide seriously.**

Never keep a plan for suicide a secret. Don't worry about endangering a friendship if you truly feel a life is in danger. Risking your feelings to help save a life is a risk worth taking.

If you feel the person isn't in immediate danger offer to work together to get help. Help them to find a trusted adult or a mental health professional so they can get better.

Don't try to minimize problems or shame a person into changing his/her mind. Reassure him/her that help is available, and that suicidal feelings are temporary.

Warning Signs of Cutting

Many young people who self-harm use different methods. Cutting arms or legs is the most common. They may try to cover scars with clothing, and if discovered, often make excuses as to how an injury happened. A significant number are struggling with eating disorders and alcohol or substance abuse problems. An estimated one-half to two-thirds of self-injurers have an eating disorder.

Other behaviors or common warning signs of cutting include:

- Burn marks (including scars) on arms, legs, abdomen, feet, etc.
- Cutting instruments, e.g., razors, knives, pins/needles found among your child's belongings
- Friends or peers are cutting themselves
- Wearing long pants and long-sleeve shirts consistently (even in warmer weather)
- Blood stains on clothing
- Regularly seeking isolation and privacy when emotionally distraught or depressed

There are also other methods used to self-injure such as deep scratching (which draws blood), pinching, skin burning, punching or biting oneself, scalding hot showers, hair pulling, and doing things like picking at scabs to keep them from healing.

Treatment of Cutting

A person who is cutting needs the help of a mental health professional such as a psychiatrist or a psychologist to help them learn positive, healthy coping skills to help them get better.

Treatment may include one or a combination of:

- Individual therapy
- Group therapy
- Family therapy
- Medication
- In-patient hospitalization
- Stress reduction and management skills

What You Can Do If Your Child Is Cutting

Although parents may not be able to prevent cutting, maintaining open communication should always be a goal. Parents should make sure they're not the ones doing all the talking and be careful not to try to solve all the child's problems. Sometimes parents just need to listen so that children know it's okay to speak about things that weigh on their hearts.

Like with other addictions, parents can't force someone who cuts or self-injures to stop. **Cutting is a serious matter and not just a fad.** It doesn't help to get mad at or reject your child, lecture or beg your child to stop. Children need to be ready to accept help and do the work it takes to change the behavior.

Do not issue ultimatums or punish the self-destructive behavior. Threatening to hospitalize a child who is cutting can make them feel a lack of control and overwhelm them. Instead, let children know that you care, and that they deserve to be healthy and happy, and that no one needs to bear their troubles alone.

Here are some other things a parent can do to help:

- If a cutting episode causes the need for immediate medical help (excessive bleeding, need for stitches), get the child to a hospital emergency room.
- Find professional services from a mental health professional immediately.
- Participate in the child's recovery (e.g., family therapy).
- Be there for the child with an open mind and understanding heart.

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Helpful Resources

Mental Health America of Texas
www.mhatexas.org
www.TexasSuicidePrevention.org

Texas Department of State Health Services
www.dshs.state.tx.us

Suicide Prevention Lifeline
1 800 273-TALK (8255)

Mental Health America
www.mentalhealthamerica.net

Cornell Research Program on Self-Injurious Behavior in Adolescents and Young Adults
www.crpsib.com/resources.asp

S.A.F.E. Alternatives® (Self-Abuse Finally Ends)
www.selfinjury.com

KidsHealth
www.kidshealth.org

Christianity Today
www.christianitytoday.com/cl/2004/005/29.18.html

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
www.aacap.org