

## *Dealing with a Teen that Self Harms*

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Self-harming is when people cause themselves physical pain in the hope that it will alter their mood state. Some people harm themselves because they feel disconnected and isolated from everybody, and hurting themselves is the only way they feel real or connected. People who cut often start cutting in their young teens.

If your teen is self-harming then you may feel frustrated, guilty, confused and hopeless about the situation and how to deal with it.

Self-harm may make internal pain visible on the surface. It is showing that there is a problem that needs to be addressed.

People who harm themselves

- May have difficulty expressing their feelings verbally
- May dislike themselves and have low self-esteem
- May be feeling angry, lonely, have shame and guilt and feel they have no control over their life.

Self-harming can become an addictive behaviour, which can be just as hard to give up as an addictive drug. When people get into a cycle of self-harming behaviour it can become their main way of dealing with problems, and can start to have a very negative impact on their lives. If a young person is self-harming, they are not doing it for attention. Research suggests that about two thirds of young people who self-harm don't even tell anyone, so they can't be looking for attention.

It is important to recognise that self-harming is not well understood in society, and is not seen as an acceptable way of coping with problems. People that self-harm will also have to deal with the disapproval of other people who don't understand what they are going through.

Finding out that your teen is deliberately self-harming can be very distressing. It is hard to understand why someone would want to do this. Often parents are the last to find out their child is self-harming.

Educate yourself. Find out as much information as you can, and talk to a professional about what you can do to support your child.

- Do not ignore this behaviour as it is very serious.
- Be supportive. Let your child know that you are there if s/he wants to talk.
- Self-harming can be treated.

Even if the thought of your child self-harming causes you to feel really distressed, try to understand what the issues behind the feelings may be, and how you can support them to find more positive ways of coping with the problem.

Encourage your teen to look at the reasons why they are hurting themselves, remembering that self-harming is something a person chooses to do, but it is not an effective way of dealing with a problem. The problem will stay until it is dealt with once and for all.

You can help your child slowly move away from self-harming by working with them on the following:

- Working off stress or anxiety with exercise
- Learning to communicate effectively about how they are feeling
- Making a list of reasons why they are going to stop cutting and setting realistic goals to stop.

It is critical that you persist in letting your child know that you trust and support them to find a way through this experience, no matter how long it takes and no matter how many setbacks there are along the way. If your child believes that you trust them, they will more readily trust in themselves to find a way through.

Source; <http://www.generationnext.com.au/2015/06/dealing-with-a-teen-that-self-harms/>