



no "kid"ding did you know?

topic: self-harm

website resources

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[AAMFT Consumer Update: Adolescent Self Harm](#)

[Cutting](#)

[Cutting & Self-Harm: Warning Signs and Treatment](#)

[Self-Injury: A Struggle](#)

[S.A.F.E. Alternatives: Self Abuse Finally Ends](#)

[To Write Love on Her Arms \(TWLOHA\)](#)

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The following "No 'Kid'ding" article appeared in the March 2009 issue of *Alternative for Youth's (AFY) Youth Matters newsletter*.

In the 2008-2009 school year, we noticed an increased number of youth who inflict self-injuries in some of AFY's programs. Also referred to as self-harm or "cutting," self-injury is a scary and upsetting behavior for parents, friends and others who care for self-injurers. As with other risky behaviors, helping someone who cuts or getting help for cutting begins with information. Did you know:

- Self-harm can be defined as the deliberate, direct injury of one's own body that causes tissue damage or leaves marks for more than a few minutes and that is done in order to deal with an overwhelming or distressing situation.

- Approximately 1% of the population has, at one time or another, used self-inflicted physical injury. Self-harm cuts across all cultural and socio-economic levels, but more adolescent females engage in this behavior than males and it usually starts in young teens.

- Cutting is used as quick relief from emotional stress, strong emotions, intense pressure, or upsetting relationship problems. For kids with emotional problems, self-injury has an effect similar to cocaine and other drugs that release endorphins to create a feel-good feeling.

- Teens who cut may not know better ways to get relief from emotional pain or pressure and may cut to express strong feelings of rage, sorrow, rejection, desperation, longing, or emptiness.

- Symptoms of cutting include:

- Unexplained cuts, scratches, or burn marks on arms, legs, and abdomens, particularly when they appear regularly. Be suspicious of comments like "the cat did it."
- A teen regularly removing bodily hairs.
- Mood changes like depression or anxiety, out-of-control behavior, changes in relationships, communication, and school performance.
- Finding knives, razor blades, box cutters, and other sharp objects hidden in the teen's bedroom.
- Regularly locking herself or himself up in the bedroom or bathroom following a bad day at school, negative encounters with peers, and family conflicts for lengthy periods of time.
- The teen's peers cut or burn themselves.
- Reports from a sibling indicating that he or she found blood encrusted razors or caught the teen in the act of self-injuring.

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- Most people who cut aren't attempting suicide. Cutting is usually a person's attempt at feeling better, not ending it all. Although some people who cut do attempt suicide, it's usually because of the emotional problems and pain that lie behind their desire to self-harm, not the cutting itself.

- People don't usually intend to hurt themselves permanently when they cut, and they don't usually mean to keep cutting once they start. But both can happen. It's possible to misjudge the depth of a cut, making it so deep that it requires stitches or, in extreme cases, hospitalization. Cuts can become infected if a person uses non-sterile or dirty cutting instruments - razors, scissors, pins, or even the sharp edge of the tab on a can of soda.

- Cutting can become a compulsive behavior such that the more a person does it, the more he or she feels the need to do it. The brain starts to connect the false sense of relief from bad feelings to the act of cutting, and it craves this relief the next time tension builds. When cutting becomes a compulsive behavior, it can seem impossible to stop and seem almost like an addiction.

- Self-harm is not a problem that teens simply outgrow, and parents need to intervene. Steps for parents include:

- Opening the door to communication in a loving, non-punishing way. Let the child know that you are aware of the self-harming and if they don't come to you, to go to someone else.
- Being direct with your child, and don't act out of anger or let yourself become hysterical. You can say, for instance, "We're going to get help for you."
- Knowing that the girl or boy must be ready for treatment.
- Seeking therapeutic treatment for the teen (see [How to Find a Therapist](#) for more informational tips).
- Parents can help by providing emotional support, helping identify early warning signs, helping kids distract themselves, lowering the child's stress level, and providing supervision at critical times.
- When kids just can't break the cycle through therapy, an inpatient program can help.

- The bottom line: "When kids decide they don't want to cut any more - and they get stressed again -- they have to be able to manage stress as it arises," David Rosen, MD, MPH, professor of pediatrics at the University of Michigan says. "They can't succumb to cutting. People who can figure out some alternative way to manage stress will eventually quit it."

Note: The above information also relates to adults who cut and is provided for informational purposes only, not as treatment nor recommendation for treatment.