

Definition of Self Harm:

- ◆ The deliberate *and immediate physical* violence of injuring one's own body.
- ◆ The act of attempting to alter a mood state by inflicting physical harm serious enough to cause tissue damage to one's body.
- ◆ A maladaptive coping mechanism.
(People who self injure are using a coping mechanism that is not as understood or accepted by society as alcoholism, drug abuse, overeating, anorexia, bulimia, workaholism, smoking cigarettes, and other forms of problem avoidance are)

Many Different Names:

- ◆ Self Harming Behaviors
- ◆ Self Injurious Behavior
- ◆ Self Mutilation
- ◆ Deliberate Self Harm Syndrome
- ◆ Self Inflicted Violence
- ◆ Self Abuse
- ◆ Parasuicide
- ◆ Delicate Cutting



Counseling Services
A Resource for Students

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Self Harming
Behaviors

*The orange ribbon
is a symbol for self-
harm awareness.*

Common Forms :

- ♦ Cutting/ carving/ stabbing (~80%)
- ♦ Burning
- ♦ Scratching
- ♦ Self hitting
- ♦ Head banging
- ♦ Interference with wound healing
- ♦ Bone breaking
- ♦ Biting

Why Do People Do It?

The reason why someone self-injures are numerous and each time it is done, it does not necessarily have to be for the same reason.

- ♦ Self Harming Behaviors are **distinct from suicide**. Suicide seeks to end all feelings, whereas a person who self harms seeks to feel better.
- ♦ Relief from psychological pain
- ♦ Release of mounting tension
- ♦ Inability to feel or feeling too much
- ♦ Wanting to feel something ('alive' or 'real')
- ♦ Expressing anger
- ♦ Silent way of communicating
- ♦ Control/punishment: feelings of guilt, low self worth
- ♦ Nurturing: self care; cleaning of the wounds
- ♦ Event marker: way of remembering something important or traumatic
- ♦ Follow the crowd: experimenting; superficial

Common Psychological Characteristics:

- ♦ Strongly dislike/invalidate themselves
- ♦ Hypersensitive to rejection
- ♦ Chronically angry; usually at self
- ♦ Tend to suppress anger; high levels of aggressive feelings are suppressed
- ♦ More impulsive - tend to act with the feelings of the moment
- ♦ Tend not to plan for the future
- ♦ Depression
- ♦ Suffer chronic anxiety
- ♦ Don't see self as skilled at coping
- ♦ Low self-esteem
- ♦ Low optimism about life
- ♦ Tend to be avoidant
- ♦ Don't see self as empowered

Various Facts:

- ♦ **Self-injury Awareness Day** is March 1st
- ♦ Approximately 2 million Americans, or 1% of the U.S. population, self harm
- ♦ The majority of the people who self harm are women between the ages of 13-30
- ♦ A higher percentage of females self harm, however males who self harm use more severe forms
- ♦ Onset age is often between 10-16; generally peaks age 18-24
- ♦ **Occurs in people of any age, ethnicity, or economic background**

Recovery

Therapy - Understanding *why* one self-harms is the first step toward recovery

- ♦ The key is learning to tolerate thoughts and feelings
- ♦ Need to develop positive coping skills - Need to learn how to regulate emotions
- ♦ Hospitalization as a last resort! Only use if risk of suicide or severe self injury.

Alternatives to Self-Harm Behaviors

- Listen to music
- ASK FOR HELP
- Journal
- Meditate
- Take a break from mental processing
- Clean your room
- Do something FUN
- Take a shower
- Put your feet firmly on the floor
- Count down from 10
- Notice black and white thinking and look for gray
- Get to know others

How to Help Someone You Care About:

- ♦ Don't avoid the subject; make it clear that self-injury is okay to talk about
- ♦ Understand your own feelings. Examine what *your own* motive is for wanting them to stop?
- ♦ Show concerns for the injuries themselves
- ♦ Separate who they are, from what they do
- ♦ Set reasonable limits; don't see stopping self-injury as the most important goal
- ♦ Role model good coping skills
- ♦ Don't take it personally
- ♦ Accept your limitations; you can't force them to stop & demanding immediate cessation of self-harming may be counter-productive (they may hide it)