



Children's Mental Health Matters!

Facts for Educators *Self-Injurious Behavior in Children and Adolescents*

Definition

Students who exhibit self-injurious behavior perform deliberate and repetitive acts of injuring their own body as a way to cope with overwhelming feelings and thoughts. Some forms of self-injurious behavior include cutting, carving, scratching, burning, branding, biting, bruising, hitting, and picking and pulling skin and hair. Self-injury is a serious illness that is often accompanied by other mental health problems like depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder or anorexia nervosa.

Why do we care?

- ✎ Students who exhibit self-injurious behavior have difficulty verbally communicating their feelings with others.
- ✎ Students who exhibit self-injurious behavior are more likely to engage in other types of risky behavior, such as substance or alcohol abuse.
- ✎ Students who exhibit self-injurious behavior are more likely to isolate themselves from classmates.

What can we do about it?

- ✎ **Discuss the situation with the child's parents or caregiver.** It is important to let the child's family know of your suspicions. Ask the family to help the student seek available resources.
- ✎ **Offer support and reassurance to the student.** It is important not to alienate a self-injuring student but rather to build trust.
- ✎ **Students should be under supervision at all times,** until they have been assessed as safe or given over to the care of their parents.
- ✎ **Be aware that the student's behavior is usually a symptom of a more serious underlying problem.** Talk to the student about what's going on in his/her life that could be triggering this behavior.
- ✎ **Notify the school clinicians about the student's behavior,** and ask them to provide additional information and resources to the students and caregivers.

Resources/Links

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Facts for Families No. 73: Self-Injury in Adolescents. <http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/73.htm>

National Association of School Psychologists <http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/Self-Mutilation%20March%2004.pdf>

Mental Health America

The country's leading nonprofit dedicated to helping ALL people live mentally healthier lives.

www.mentalhealthamerica.net

Fact Sheet on Self-Injury

<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/information/get-info/self-injury>

S.A.F.E Alternatives (Self-Abuse Finally Ends): <http://www.selfinjury.com>

Adapted from Resources found on:
www.schoolmentalhealth.org March 2009