

SELF-MUTILATION

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- 1.9 million Americans do these things and do them repeatedly some for years at a time
- other sources estimate that 750 out of every 100,000 people in the U.S. self-injure
- these people are not crazy, not suicidal, although 1/3 of them expect to be dead within 5 years
- The majority of cutters are women between the ages of 13 and 30
- The majority of cutters have been sexually abused or molested during childhood
- How do you know if you are really prone to self-injury – answer these questions:
 1. Do you deliberately cause physical harm to yourself to the extent of causing tissue damage (breaking the skin, bruising, leaving marks that last for more than one hour)?
 2. Do you cause this harm to yourself as a way of dealing with unpleasant or overwhelming emotions, obsessive thoughts, or dissociations?
 3. If your harm is not compulsive; do you often think about self-injury even though you are relatively calm and not doing it at the moment?
 - If you answered #1 or #2 YES you are a self-injurer.
 - If you answered YES to #3 you are most likely a repetitive self-injurer
- The way these persons chose to hurt themselves could be by cutting, hitting, burning, scratching, skin-picking, banging their heads, breaking bones, not letting wounds heal, etc.
- How they do it is not as important as recognizing that they do it
- For many cutters, self-mutilation seems the only appropriate response to the state of their world and to how they are feeling about it and about themselves
- Self-injury is a self-preservation technique for many cutters; the self-mutilation relieves anxiety and/or depersonalization symptoms which could lead to psychosis or suicide if not alleviated
- Self-harm can be focusing and calming for them, it seems to give a person a feeling of control over their lives and their bodies which they can experience in no other way
- People trying to help cutters should try not to take this coping mechanism away from them without helping them first come to terms with the things that trigger these incidents

Psychological Picture of Cutter:

1. Strong dislike/invalidate themselves
2. Are hypersensitive to rejection
3. Are chronically angry, usually to themselves
4. Tend to suppress their anger
5. Have a high level of aggressive feelings, which they disapprove of strongly and often suppress or direct inwards
6. Are impulsive and more lacking in impulse controls

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7. Tend to act in accordance with their mood at the moment
8. Tend not to plan for the future
9. Are depressed and suicidal/self-destructive
10. Suffer chronic anxiety
11. Tend towards irritability
12. Do not see themselves as skilled at coping
13. Do not have a flexible repertoire of coping skills
14. Do not think they have much control over how/whether they cope with life
15. Tend to be avoidant
16. Do not see themselves as empowered

Types of Self-Injurious Behaviors:

1. Cutting: 72%
2. Burning: 35%
3. Self-hitting: 30%
4. Interference with wound healing: 22%
5. Hair pulling: 10%
6. Bone breaking: 8%
7. Multiple methods: 78%

Things To Do If You Are a Cutter To Be Safe:

- *Keep dangerous things out of your house/apartment/dorm room*
- *Make a tape of music for those bad times*
- *Make a list of friends you can call*
- *Focus on what is real and around you right then*
- *Make a contact with someone you care about and who cares about you*
- *Call a crisis line*
- *Create an internal safe place where you can go*
- *Get a warm drink and curl up in a warm place with something smooth and soft*
- *Substitute hurting yourself with something else*
- *Do NOT go out driving your car alone*
- *Try not to be hard on yourself for feeling this way*
- *Try and focus on getting through this crisis time*
- *Use a toothbrush instead of a razor*
- *Use a red marker instead of a razor*
- *Hold ice*