



The Advanced Times

Advanced Counseling Services
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Cutting & Teens – Coping with loved ones who self-injure

By Patricia Beach, LMSW, ACSW, BCD

Self-injury, or self-inflicted violence in adolescents and adults is not a new phenomenon. Usually started in the teen years, it is best defined as the intentional harm of one's own body without conscious suicidal intent. In most cases of self-injury, it is the skin that is cut, scraped or burned with a knife, scissors, razor, matches or other common household object. The cuts are generally surface cuts and are not life threatening. This behavior has become a behavior of "trendiness" among teenagers and many experiment with it. Cutting or self-mutilation is not necessarily a sign of serious psychopathology when experimented with a few times, but it can easily become entrenched and difficult to treat when used on an ongoing basis to deal with feelings.

People who injure themselves often aren't able to regulate, express, or

control their feelings well. Adolescents are struggling to learn how to cope with and express their feelings and will latch onto this behavior as an attempt to do so. One way of understanding this behavior is, as many cutters will tell you, "If I can make it hurt on the outside, it helps to take away all the hurt I have on the inside."

Some suggestions for coping with a loved one who self-injures:

DON'T:

- Ignore or deny the extent of pain or misery that the person is experiencing or pass it off as a "teenage phase."
- Try to discourage the behavior with punishment, threats or isolation from friends.
- Attempt to "fix" the problem or expect yourself to be able to change the behavior or the amount of pain the person is in.

DO:

- Talk about it and bring it out of secrecy
- Be supportive; ask how you can help
- Be available, within limits. Don't shadow them, but the more time you spend, the less opportunity they have to hurt themselves
- Acknowledge the severity of the distress
- Get help from a professional, because this impacts the one injuring themselves as much as family and friends.

Pat Beach is the Site Administrator and a therapist in our Southfield office. You can reach Pat at (248) 213-0501 ext. 3108

(This is a condensed article. Original can be found in Birmingham-Bloomfield Families in Action Quarterly Newsletter, Spring, 2008)

FYI CORNER:

■ Jacey Yunker, Clinical Social Worker, is starting a 7-week Group Therapy for **Women in the Military**: it's FREE! Call her at (734) 285-8282 ext. 2123. Starts in June, 2009.

■ ACS is constantly looking at ways to meet the needs of the community with the ever-growing economic, housing & employment crisis. Call us to find out what we are doing!

Anger Management for Adolescents!

We are happy to add another very vital program to our Southfield office. Sam Gross, MA, LLP, LPC, is presenting **Anger Management Group Therapy**, designed for adolescents.

Make an appointment for an evaluation & enrollment in the group by calling Sam at (734) 285-8282 ext.. 2210

Enroll your teen today! We can help . . .

Did you know . . . ?

Studies have shown that people who suffer with mental illness and do not get treatment potentially reduce their lifespan by as many as 20-25 years!



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