

# #10441 SELF-INJURY: FROM SUFFERING TO SOLUTIONS

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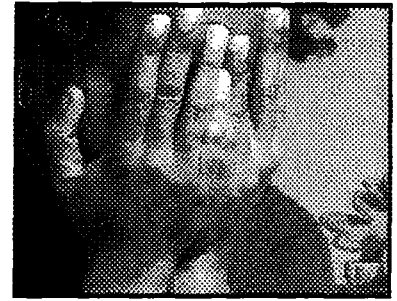
## CAPTIONED MEDIA PROGRAM RELATED RESOURCES

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[#9911 THE MIRROR IN MY MIND: BODY IMAGE &  
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# Self-Injury: From Suffering to Solutions



## Introduction

Anger and sadness can be caused by many different experiences and emotions. How people handle the stress that accompanies these feelings is often the key to healthy and happy lifestyles. For some, negative emotions can lead to negative activities—even to self-harm. Self-injury, though rarely discussed, affects nearly one in a hundred Americans, many of them teenagers. There are warning signs, and there are ways to help yourself and those around you.

## What is self-injury?

Self-injury is sometimes called cutting, self-harm, self-inflicted violence or SIV, self-injurious behavior, and self-mutilation. Although it can be called different names, self-injury has a common definition: to cause intentional harm to one's own body without the intent of suicide, without the assistance of another person, and with enough severity for tissue damage to result.

There are different forms of self-injury—cutting, burning, scratching, biting, self-hitting, banging one's head, carving words into skin, and interference with wound healing. Most self-injurers harm themselves in hidden places, so the wounds aren't visible to others.

## What are the causes?

People who self-injure are usually trying to deal with complex emotions; their actions, then, are symptoms of underlying feelings. The program discusses four examples of self-injurers. First, there is the loner-type of personality, someone who keeps to themselves, has a hard time fitting in, and has a difficult time expressing him or herself to others. Perfectionists are also at risk because often they are afraid to admit to others that something is wrong. Then, there are those who have a hard time dealing with rejection. Finally, the program discusses people who may have been abused in the past. Oftentimes, this abusive behavior carries over to personal behavior.

Self-injury is not limited to these four examples or these situations, but there is a pattern in the background and overall experiences of self-injurers. Most ex-self-injurers explain that their self-abuse allowed them to feel something amidst the numbness they felt during certain times.

## How can we help others?

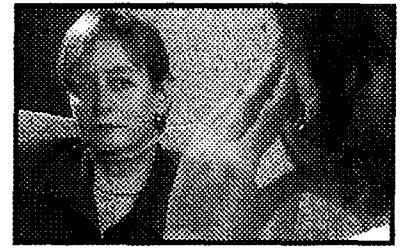
If you suspect someone you know is self-injuring, the first thing you should do is talk with them. It's usually easier to talk openly and informally. Let them know that it is okay and that they're not alone, and tell them that you'll go with them if they're willing to seek professional assistance.



If you're unable to talk with that person, it's still important that they talk to someone. Find a friend, a teacher, or a counselor and explain to them the situation. They can help you decide how best to approach the individual.

## How can we cope?

Because self-injury is a result of underlying feelings, it's important to confront these feelings and to deal with them in healthy ways. For many people, talking through problems and emotions with someone they trust is the best way—they do not have to deal with their problems alone.



It's also important to stay active, both in body and in mind. Exercise helps the body cleanse itself of stress. And, joining a sports or athletic group may offer opportunities to meet other people. When you actively use your brain, you can invest in an activity that helps take your mind off other things. Keeping the mind active and in search of knowledge is the best thing to do in the short term, and certainly in the long term.



### Here are some healthy activities:

- Join a school sports team or club;
- Look into scholastic clubs;
- Take a bike ride;
- Learn to play a musical instrument;
- Call friends and go to a movie;
- Start an art project, such as painting or sculpture; or
- Use the Internet to network with others.

## Web & print resources

The following resources may provide additional information about self-injury. Since the Web is constantly evolving, some of the Web sites may have changed locations or may no longer be available. Due to the nature of the topic, educators may wish to view the sites before allowing students access.

<http://www.focusas.com/SelfInjury.html> —Offers background information about SI, explaining the causes, methods, and counseling options.

<http://www.selfinjury.com> —Provides facts about SI and the S.A.F.E. Alternatives treatment program.

Conterio, Karen, et al. 1999. *Bodily Harm: The Breakthrough Healing Program for Self-Injurers*. Hyperion.—Examines causes and actions, addressing much of the mysteries and myths surrounding SI.

Levenkron, Steven. 1999. *Cutting: Understanding & Overcoming Self-Mutilation*. W. W. Norton & Company.—Provides psychological insight into SI and includes case studies and stories of personal experience.

Wegscheider Hyman, Jane. 1999. *Women Living with Self-Injury*. Temple UP.—Discusses the complexities of SI through the experiences of 15 women.



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