

# Offering Help and Hope to Women who Self-Injure

INTRO: *Why should we invest our time discussing the topic of self-injury???*

The goal for this workshop is to introduce us to the world of the self-injurer. This is a growing problem in the church and family. "Self-injury *is* one of our nation's fastest-growing and most disturbing epidemics." <sup>i</sup>

Epidemic - A rapid and extensive development or growth, usually of something unpleasant. <sup>ii</sup>  
(Please Note: I am including this quote to describe the rapid increase of cutting, not to label this chosen life pattern as a disease.)

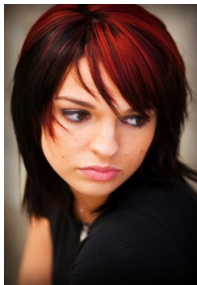
You may not be aware of the secret shame experienced by many self-injurers (or cutters). Those who practice the acts of self-injury usually do not announce their secret struggles. They cover their tale-tale scars and battle wounds with long sleeves, long pants, and wrist bands. They may whisper their secret shame to their peers behind closed doors and anonymously post their photos on self-injury web sites, but seldom will they share this life consuming struggle with their parents, spouse or church leaders.



**Meet Susan:** a 40 yr. old Christian wife and mother who is silently struggling with depression



**Meet Amy:** a lovely 14 yr. old girl who is a member of a dedicated Christian family



**Meet Becky:** a bubbly 24 yr. old single woman who is active in her community and in her church



**Meet Anna:** a 33 year old Christian woman who is desperately trying to save her marriage

What do these women have in common? Outwardly, they are happy and active Christian women that you would enjoy meeting. Secretly, they are practicing the coping method of self-injury. We will get to know these dear women a little better as we continue.

Cutters are very real people with a genuine need for our love, compassion, and words of truth. They are unique individuals but many of their temptations will be similar to your temptations and the Word of God will ALWAYS provide answers for their sorrow.

(1 Cor. 10:13, 2 Tim. 3:16-17)



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## I. Before we Begin – The Identity Problem



“Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” Eph. 4:21-24

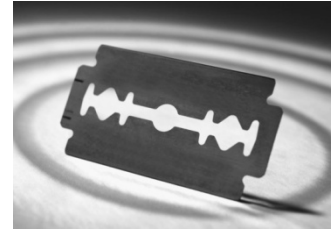


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## II. What is self-injury?

**A. Self-injury, also known as cutting or self-mutilation occurs when someone intentionally and repeatedly harms herself/himself.**

Cutting is a complex, dangerous, and addictive-like behavior. It is usually a symptom of a much deeper difficulty. Often, the choice to self-injure is the cutter's attempt to escape his or her larger problems. In fact, the practice of self-injury may be the coping method used to help turn the cutter away from suicidal thoughts.



**B. Broadly speaking, self-injury is an attempt to alter one's mood state by inflicting physical harm serious enough to cause tissue damage to your body.** These actions can include cutting (with knives, razors, glass, pins, any sharp object), burning their fingers or other body parts, hitting their body with an object or their own fists, hitting a heavy object (like a wall) until they bruise or break a bone, picking at their skin until it bleeds, deeply scratching their arms, biting their skin, pulling their hair or eyelashes out, putting sharp objects under their fingernails, etc. The most commonly seen forms are cutting, burning, and head banging.

1. **Tissue damage usually refers to damage that will tear, bruise, or burn the skin -- something that causes bleeding or marks that don't go away in a few minutes.** The desired altered mood state can be positive or negative, or even neither. Some people self-injure to end a dissociated or unreal-feeling state, to ground their self and come back to reality. The sort of self-injury addressed here is repetitive self-harm. People learn that hurting themselves brings relief from personal distress and then turn to self-injury as a primary coping mechanism.

While self-injury may bring a momentary sense of calm and a release of tension, it is usually followed by guilt, shame, and the return of painful emotions. The self-injury cycle continues and with it comes the possibility of more serious and even fatal self-aggressive actions.<sup>iii</sup>

### *The Life Stories Continue:*

### **The Self Injury Practices of Susan, Amy, Becky and Anna**

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## C. There are three types of self-injury.

1. **Major self-mutilation**, the rarest and most extreme form of self-injury, usually results in permanent disfigurement, i.e. castration or limb amputation.
2. **Stereotypic self-mutilation** usually consists of head banging, eyeball pressing and biting.
3. **Superficial self-mutilation**, the most common form of self-injury, usually involves cutting, burning, hair-pulling, bone breaking, hitting, interference with wound healing and basically any method used to harm oneself.<sup>iv</sup>
4. **Harmful eating practices such as anorexia and bulimia may be connected to the practices of self-injury.** “Some definitions of self-injury are broader and take into account eating disorders, alcohol and drug abuse, and other harmful activities.”<sup>v</sup> The practices of self-starvation and the binge/purge cycles bear a particular similarity to the self-injury practices. In each of these practices, the goal is finding a method to cope with, block out, and release unwanted feelings and emotions.

## D. It is not self-injury if your primary purpose is:

1. sexual pleasure
2. body decoration
3. spiritual enlightenment via ritual
4. fitting in or just being cool

## E. Self-injury is described by many terms.

**Medical Terms and Definitions:** Intentional, direct injuring of body tissue without suicidal intent - scarring may be intended.

- self-inflicted violence (If someone else does it to you, it is not self-injury.)
- self-injury (**Physical** injury - This is not emotional abuse.)
- self-harm (Intentional - This is not accidental injury or clumsiness.)
- parasuicide (This is **not** a suicide attempt but it may involve releasing suicidal desires.)
- cutting (This is the common name for self-bloodletting.)
- delicate cutting (This refers to an artistic form of self- bloodletting.)
- self-abuse (This may include self-flogging.)
- self-poisoning (This is a much rarer form of self-injury.)
- self-starving (May be referred to as Anorexia.)
- self-mutilation (This name seems to annoy people who self-injure.)



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## III. Who would want to harm their own body?

Approximately .7 to 2.8% of the United States population, (or 2 to 8 million Americans), use physical self-injury as a way of dealing with overwhelming feelings or situations.<sup>vi</sup> **Note: This may be a very inaccurate estimate since the majority of self-injury goes unnoticed and unreported.**

### A. We are unsure of the impact of self-injury upon our nation's children.

- In 2006 it was reported that 15% of the teenage population were self-injurors.<sup>vii</sup>
- “Studies show that between 14-39% of adolescents have had at least one incident of deliberate self-injury.”<sup>viii</sup>
- The real number may be even higher for this is most often a secretive practice.
- Statistics now show that 1 in 5 teenagers have engaged in some form of self-injury.
- This practice often starts in the early teen years and may continue through their 20's, 30's and beyond.
- Children as young as 4 years of age have been reported to intentionally practice self-injury.
- This practice is more common in school age children. "We can go to any school and ask, 'Do you know anyone who cuts?' Yeah, everybody knows someone," says Karen Conterio, author of the book, *Bodily Harm*.
- Self-injurors *may* have experienced physical, sexual or verbal abuse. Although a history of abuse is common for self-injurors, not everyone who self-injures has been abused.
- Self-harm is apparent in even high-functioning individuals who have no other underlying clinical diagnosis.
- Even Senior Citizens have joined the growing ranks of self-injurors!
- Self-harming individuals of any age are at increased risk for suicide.

**Note:** Although suicide is not the intention of self-harm, the relationship between self-harm and suicide is complex, as self-harming behavior may be potentially life-threatening. There is also an increased risk of suicide in individuals who self-harm to the extent that self-harm is found in 40–60% of suicides. However, generalizing self-harmers to be suicidal is, in the majority of cases, inaccurate.<sup>ix</sup>

### B. This practice is frequently seen as a feminine coping practice but male self-injury is increasing at an alarming rate.

“Studies show that 20-50% of self-injurors are male. Males are more likely to burn or hit themselves in self-harm than females, which may be less likely to be noticed than the tell-tale cuts more often exhibited by girls”<sup>x</sup>

- Males who self-injure tend to do more violent damage to their body.



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- Male self-injurers are more difficult to identify because teenage boys are expected to play rough and end up with bruises, cuts, and broken bones.
- Women show up more for medical treatment and counseling, so it *appears* to be more prevalent in women. On the other hand, in institutional settings such as prisons, it is found more often in men.

### **C. Warning signs that a family member or friend may be cutting self-injuring.**

This practice has long existed in secrecy. Cuts can be easily hidden under long sleeves. But in recent years, movies and TV shows have drawn attention to it -- prompting greater numbers of teens and tweens (ages 9 to 14) to try it.

Because clothing can hide physical injuries, and inner turmoil can be covered up by a seemingly calm disposition, self-injury can be hard to detect. However, there are red flags you can look for (but remember—you don't have to be sure that you know what's going on in order to reach out to someone you're worried about):

- **Unexplained wounds or scars** from cuts, bruises, or burns, usually on the wrists, arms, thighs, or chest.
- **Blood stains** on clothing, towels, or bedding; blood-soaked tissues.
- **Sharp objects or cutting instruments**, such as razors, knives, needles, glass shards, or bottle caps, in the person's belongings.
- **Frequent "accidents."** Someone who self-harms may claim to be clumsy or have many mishaps, in order to explain away injuries.
- **Covering up.** A person who self-injures may insist on wearing long sleeves or long pants, even in hot weather.
- **Self-injurers may try to avoid any common shower or dressing areas.** (School P.E. classes, sleep-overs, swimming opportunities, summer camp, family trips, etc.)
- **Needing to be alone for long periods of time**, especially in the bedroom or bathroom.
- **Isolation and irritability may be a red flag.** <sup>xi</sup>

## **IV. Why do some people choose to self-injure?**

### **A. The following seven reasons are some of the most common reasons given:**

- 1. To release emotions**
- 2. To show hatred for oneself**
- 3. To discipline or punish oneself**



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4. To feel pain or see blood
5. To calm racing thoughts
6. To stop flashbacks or intrusive, vivid memories
7. To avoid suicide<sup>xii</sup>

Note: My young friend Amy has suggested an additional reason why a person might be tempted to self-injure. She stated it this way, **“Because everyone wants to feel loved!”** Sometimes when you don’t feel loved or accepted, hurting yourself is a substitute for love.

## B. The *REAL* reasons that people are tempted to self-injure:

1. It may work (at least on a very temporary basis).

“Cutters often say that the emotional pain is transferred to the physical pain and makes sense to the cutter who then physiologically experiences pain relief caused by the mechanisms in his/her own body. Cutters also say that the physical pain feels good - much better than the emotional pain experienced prior to cutting.”<sup>xiii</sup>

2. The Physiology of “Cutting”

### HOPE & HELP for SELF-INJURERS AND CUTTERS by Mark Shaw, FOCUS PUBLISHING

- a) God made the human body with marvelous processes to recover from injuries.
- b) The body’s physiological healing processes include endorphin, dopamine, and other neurotransmitters which are released to provide natural pain relief. This natural pain relief is one of the reasons that people turn to repetitive self-harm.

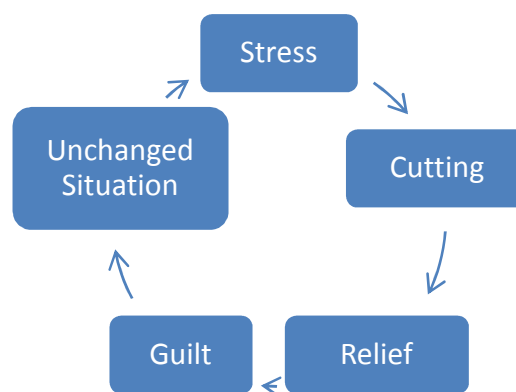
## The Vicious Cycle of Cutting

### SELF-INJURY

(When Pain Feels Good)

Edward T. Welch

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## V. What hope can we offer the self-injurer?

**A. Self-injurers need the truth.** Self-injurers are guilty of many forms of deceit. They need to trust Jesus, who is the Truth. Jn. 14:6 Remember to speak the truth in love, not lectures.

Lie	Lies of the self-injurer <sup>xiv</sup>	Truth
Hopelessness & Depression		God is a God of Hope. Isa. 49:23
“I must have control.”		The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it. Ps 24:1
“I must avoid confrontation.”		My Savior was hated & rejected. Jn. 15:18-20, Eph. 5:1-2
“I need relief.”		Getting relief from self-destructive behavior is selfish. Mt. 22:34-40; Rom. 8:28-29; 1 Cor. 10:31
Self-loathing, being angry at myself, believing that I must punish myself		Christ was pierced for my sin. I have a new identity. Isa. 53:5; Mt. 5:20; 2 Cor. 5:21
“This is more than I can handle.”		It may <i>feel</i> like more than I can handle but God says that He won’t give me more than I can handle. 1 Cor. 10:13
“I am ashamed. I must hide who I am.”		Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. Ps 34:5

## B. Self-injurers need to learn how to live in the truth.

**Here are some questions that you might want to use to facilitate your discussions.**

- How long have you been hurting yourself?
- Why do you hurt yourself?
- How do you hurt yourself?
- When and where do you usually injure yourself?
- How often do you injure yourself?
- How did you learn to hurt yourself?
- What is it like for you to talk with me about hurting yourself?
- Does it hurt when you injure yourself?
- How open are you about your self-injurious behaviors?
- Do you want to change your self-injury behaviors?
- How can I help you to turn from your self-injury?<sup>xv</sup>

**Sad Note:** For some self-injury is no longer shameful. I have witnessed web sites which promote it almost as an art form.





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C. Self-injurers need to learn how to turn from self-pity and hopelessness to love for God and love for others.

1. The self-injury sin follows a pattern of triggers and reactions. This brings us hope. Self-injury can be anticipated and alternate plans of faith can be implemented.
2. Self-injurers need accountability and encouragement. This is also a time for them to start praying for their accountability and encouragement partners.
3. Self-injurers need to focus on the Scriptures and their prayer life.
4. Self-injurers **MUST** learn to value the blood of Jesus Christ.

**Note: Spilling your own blood will never bring peace, forgiveness, and FREEDOM.**

- The self-injurer probably will not recognize their sinful practice as a form of false worship. Their actions replace the value of Christ's blood in their heart and in their life.
- They may falsely believe that self-injury is a form of freedom. In fact, it is slavery. This choice will demand more and more of their heart, mind, and body.
- Eventually, their sinful actions become their very identity. When someone accepts the label of "Cutter", they are saying that "Cutter" is their identity.

VI. **Key Verses to Study and Use:** These verses will provide some of the necessary resources to help the Cutter take their thoughts captive!

- "So **God created man in his own image**, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Gen. 1:27 (*Cutters may be filled with self-hatred.*)
- "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; **he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear**. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." 1 Cor. 10:13 (*Cutters may feel isolated by their sinful temptations.*)
- "Guard my life and rescue me; **let me not be put to shame**, for I take refuge in you." Ps. 25:20 (*Cutters may live in shame and fear.*)
- "Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink; **deliver me from those who hate me**, from the deep waters." Ps. 69:4 (*Cutters may have experienced abuse as a child.*)
- "**He** will rescue them from oppression and violence, for **precious is their blood in his sight**." Ps. 72:14 (*Cutters need to see that God values their life blood.*)
- "How much more, then, will **the blood of Christ**, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, **cleans our consciences** from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" Heb. 9:14 (*Cutters must find cleansing in Christ's blood alone.*)



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- “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but **with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.**” 1 Peter 1:18-19  
(*Cutters must recognize the superiority of Christ’s blood.*)
- “Blessed be the Lord, **who daily beareth our burden,** Even the God who is our salvation.” (Ps. 68:19)  
(*Cutters can learn to trust the Lord with their daily burdens.*)
- “Then **they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress.**” (Ps. 107:19) “Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. **Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer.**” (Ps. 4:1)  
(*Cutters can cry out to the Lord in their troubles.*)
- “Live as free men, but **do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil;** live as servants of God.”(1 Pe. 2:16) “I will **walk about in freedom,** for I have sought out your precepts.” (Ps. 119:45)  
(*A Cutter will only find true freedom by seeking God’s will for their life.*)  
(Also See Rom. 8:28-29; 2 Cor. 5:17; Heb. 12:1-3; and James 1:5-6)

### **THE BOTTOM LINE!**

**Self-Injurers *NEED* the God of Psalm 147:3.**

**“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”**

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<sup>i</sup> Bodily Harm by Karen Conterio and Dr. Wendy Lader, Hyperion Press, 77 West 66<sup>th</sup> St. New York, New York 10023

<sup>ii</sup> Encarta Dictionary

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/self-injury/basics/definition/con-20025897>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.mirror-mirror.org/selfinj.htm>

<sup>v</sup> [lysamena@self-injury.org](mailto:lysamena@self-injury.org).

<sup>vi</sup> <http://www.focusas.com/SelfInjury.htm>; [lysamena@self-injury.org](mailto:lysamena@self-injury.org).

<sup>vii</sup> <http://www.focusas.com/SelfInjury.htm>

<sup>viii</sup> Fuller Youth Institute

<sup>ix</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-harm>

<sup>x</sup> Beyond Skin Deep Responding to Kids Who Cut, June 1, 2009, Fuller Youth Institute, Fuller Theological Seminary

<sup>xi</sup> [http://www.helpguide.org/mental/self\\_injury.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/self_injury.htm)

<sup>xii</sup> Jane Wegscheider Hyman, *Women Living With Self-Injury* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press)

<sup>xiii</sup> Hope & Help for SELF-INJURERS AND CUTTERS by Mark Shaw, FOCUS PUBLISHING

<sup>xiv</sup> Cutting - Bleeding the Pain Away and Relief without Cutting by Amy Baker, Faith Resources, New Growth Press

<sup>xv</sup> Helping Those Who Hurt Themselves The Prevention Researcher By Tracy Alderman, Ph.D.

