

What You Need to Know...



Cutting

What is cutting?

- Cutting is when someone takes something sharp, like a razor, knife, scissors or piece of glass, and runs it along a part of their body, usually to the point of bleeding or bruising.
- Most cuts are made on arms, wrists and legs. Sometimes, people cut their chest, stomach, face or neck. Cutting on the arms and wrist is the most common because it is often easier to make up excuses for marks on these parts of the body, something like, "My cat scratched me," or "I had an accident in the kitchen."
- Cutting is a form of self-injury, self-harm or self-mutilation. Some people also call it slashing or slicing.
- Besides cutting, people may hurt themselves in other ways, including scratching, burning or punching.

Basically, people who cut deal with difficult problems or feelings, but there are better, healthier ways to cope.

Who cuts?

About 2 million people in the U.S. hurt themselves in some way. Most are teenagers or young adults, and they are from all races and backgrounds. To hide their cutting, they often wear clothing to cover their injuries like long pants or shirts, even in warm weather.

Why do people cut?

For most people, it's hard to understand why anyone would intentionally hurt themselves. However, for those who cut, there are a few reasons.

- Some people say they do it because of emotional pain they can't put into words.
- Some say it gives them a sense of control when other things in their life are out-of-control, like a break-up, a friend who is sick or a parent's divorce.
- Some people cut to punish themselves for troubling thoughts or acts.
- Some find the act soothing, and it makes them feel alive.
- Some cut to get a reaction from other people.

No matter what the reason, cutting is a serious and dangerous behavior, and may be a sign of another problem. Many people who cut themselves also have an eating disorder. Some may be experiencing depression. Others may have experienced sexual, emotional or physical abuse.

Is cutting a suicide attempt?

Usually people who cut aren't trying to kill themselves. At the same time, cutting can be life-threatening. In fact, sometimes, people can't control the injury and die accidentally.

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How can I help a friend who is a cutter?

Ask about it. Friends with cutting problems are often glad to be able to talk about it. If you bring it up and this person isn't self-injuring, they won't start just because you said something about it.

Offer options but don't tell him/her what she/he has to do or should do. If he/she is using self-injury as a way to have some control, it won't help if you try to take control of the situation. Helping your friend see ways to get help, like talking to a trusted adult (parent, teacher, school counselor or mental health professional), may be the best thing you can do for him/her.

Seek support. Knowing a friend is hurting themselves this way can be frightening and stressful. Consider talking with a trusted adult. This person could help your friend get the help they need. You may feel that you don't have the right to tell anyone else, but remember, you can still talk with a mental health professional about how the situation makes you feel.

Remember you are not responsible for ending the self-injury. You can't make your friend stop hurting themselves or get help from a professional. The only thing you can do is keep being a good friend.

How can I help myself?

Talk to a trusted adult. Maybe it's a parent, a teacher or a school counselor. Tell them you are cutting yourself, and want to stop. Ask them to help you find help. Know that you may get some tough reactions like denial, sadness or anger, but that will pass.

Get help. Cutting isn't something to deal with on your own. There are therapists and support groups who can help you work through what makes you cut. Even if you are nervous about getting help, take this step because now is the best time to do it. If you wait, the problem will only get bigger and harder to hide. Remember, you can stop cutting.

To see what resources are available in your community, visit Mental Health America of Wisconsin's web site at www.mhawisconsin.org.

Mental Health America of Wisconsin is a United Way of Greater Milwaukee Agency.



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