

# Reactions to Self-Injury Disclosure Important

Written by Clover

*Self-injury disclosure can come as a complete shock if you are on the receiving end. Your reactions to self-injury disclosure, though, are important. Here's why.*

If you know someone who self injures, the first thing you need to do is be aware of self injury and what self-harm actually is. From personal experience, I know that many people find the idea of self injury incredulous, and many people tend to back away from self injurers out of fear. This fear often stems from a limited knowledge of self injury as a whole.

## About Self-Injury Disclosure

### **If someone confesses their self injurious behavior to you...**

... you must realize that on the whole, people do not injure themselves in order to get attention. I say 'on the whole' because I am not intending to categorize self-injurers here. However, self injury cutting, and other forms of self-harm, can be a cry for help due to intense and unbearable emotions (see Causes of Self-Injury). If someone confesses their self injury to you, horror is the last thing you need to express. I realize that this can be difficult, as shock is bound to be an element of your natural reaction. Most self injurers are incredibly clever at concealing their actions from people, and so a confession of this sort can be a very big surprise! However, a reaction such as "That's disgusting!" is not going to do wonders for the confidence of the person!

What you must realize is that to confess to something such as self injury is a very big step for someone. Many people are extremely worried about the reactions they will get from people if they 'come out' about their problem, and therefore if they do confess, it is likely that they confide in someone they trust.

## Self-Harm Disclosure Reactions

On a personal note, self-harm is a very difficult topic to cover as I have witnessed many different reactions to my own self injury disclosures; some of which have been extremely beneficial and have worked wonders for me, and some of which have effectively made the problems a little harder to handle. Therefore, in writing this article, I appealed to other self injurers as well as people who had friends/relatives who harmed themselves. (You can find additional information on responding to people who self-injure on the self-injury statistics and facts page.)

These were the comments they gave me when I asked the question: **"How did people react to your self-harm disclosure?"**

"They freaked, flipped, were angry, confused, and tried to control me in every way possible, and that just made me more hostile and angry myself. But not everyone reacts that way - that was mainly my doctors, and family. my real life friends were concerned. At the time the people I told on the net didn't understand either, that's why they called my family \*sigh\* but I have people that understand now and that helps A LOT."

"My friend told me that she wouldn't talk to me again unless I stopped it. She did that because she cared, but it made everything a lot worse for me."

"When I told my closest friend about the cutting she cried. That upset me in a way but it shocked me because it showed that she really did care. She was very supportive and told me that she would help me in any way that she could. That was everything that I could have wished for. I am very grateful to her and I owe her a lot."

"My family made me feel very uncomfortable. They just didn't understand when I told them. They thought I was crazy and my Mom thought it was her fault that I was doing all this to myself. She shouted and told me it would get infected. I couldn't believe that she believed that would matter to me."

"Cutting is me. If people can't take that, they can leave it. All of my friends know and some ignored me. They weren't my real friends and I have learnt to deal with that."

"My father seemed only to care about the fact the self-harm scars were there for life."

"All of my friends knew and a few of them just made fun of it. They thought it was cool. The others didn't do anything about it. They knew I had problems."

"Telling my friend I self-injure was the hardest thing I have ever done. I didn't know why I wanted to confess, but I kinda needed to. He just shook his head at me and ran out of the room. I should have expected that, but for years it stayed in my mind - from that day on I vowed I would never tell a soul about it."

"My friend encouraged me to talk to her about my self-injury, but one day it must have become too much for her. She couldn't cope. She told me that if I didn't stop hurting myself then she would tell my parents. I never talked to her after that."

"Someone found out about the self-injury cutting before I really told anyone. I confessed to a friend that day, because I needed some help in dealing with people knowing, and cause I didn't want her finding out another way. That was a long time ago now, and at first she was wonderful - concerned, worried, and supportive. She told me she was there for me. Along the road, she had problems dealing with it. There were times I thought I would die because she just didn't want to be anywhere near me - she was trying to handle my problems as well as her own. It was unfair to her. When I started to see a therapist and get cutting treatment, it helped. Now we are friends again. The cutting is a sore subject and I don't tell people about it now. It's not a big part of my personality. It is just a part of the inner me rebelling against the outer me."

"All I wanted was a shoulder to cry on and someone to tell me they would help me. What I got was panic about my health. Everyone seemed to take it that the cutting itself was the issue, and what it was doing to my health... the scars would always be there. No one asked me why I self-harm or what I was feeling. No one seemed to care. After that the cutting got worse. All I wanted was someone to listen to me and tell me that they understood, instead of telling me that they were worried about what I was doing to myself. No one understood."

## **Preferred Reactions to Disclosing Self-Injury**

### **How Do You Want People to React?**

"I wish my parents would have left me alone. They followed me everywhere when they found out - and it made me want to cut even more."

"I guess I want understanding... but then no one seems to understand."

"My friend told me we would get through it together. I was lucky. He helped me through it every step of the way - just by being there and letting me know that he cared."

### **How Do You Not Want People to React?**

"My friend left. I hated myself."

"I was scared of telling people because I thought they'd be afraid of me. I was right."

"All they care about is infections and scars. So I give them more to care about."

*About the author: Clover, is a self-injurer and started the self-injury website, "A Healing Touch."*

<http://www.healthyplace.com/abuse/self-injury/reactions-to-self-injury-disclosure-important/>

# What is Self-Injury, Self-Harm, Self-Mutilation?

Written by [Natasha Tracy](#)

## Definition of Self-injury

Self-injury, also known as self-harm or self-mutilation, is defined as an act wherein someone deliberately hurts or injures themselves. Self-injury is most often used as a coping mechanism and is not an attempt at suicide. The practice is not limited to teens. Self-harm in adults also takes place and is not unusual.

*It's a perplexing phenomenon with many names: self-injury, self-harm, self-mutilation, self-inflicted violence, self-cutting, and self-abuse to name some. Those who come across it - family members, friends, supporters - even many professionals - struggle to understand why people self-harm, and find the behavior disturbing and puzzling. Recent reports imply that it is reaching 'epidemic proportions,' particularly among young people. Furthermore, research suggests that it is a frequent companion to eating disorders, alcohol abuse and drug abuse, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, borderline personality disorder, and dissociative disorders. Those caught in its clutches claim that self-injury is difficult to stop due to its highly addictive nature, or say they are reluctant to try because it helps them 'feel better,' 'more in control,' 'more real,' or simply 'it keeps them alive.'*

- Jan Sutton, author "[Healing the Hurt Within: Understand Self-Injury and Self-Harm, and Heal the Emotional Wounds](#)"

## What is Self-injury?

Self-injury is a way of dealing with very strong emotions. For some people, self-harm gives the relief that crying may provide for the rest of us. Some people who engage in self-mutilation feel they can't control highly angry and aggressive emotions. They become afraid that they may hurt someone, so they turn their aggression inwards to get relief.

People who self-harm may be defined as attention seekers. However, a person who engages in self-injury may believe this is the only way to communicate their distress. Attention-seeking may actually be their last motivation, as self-mutilation can be a hidden problem that goes on for years. Self-harming purely for attention is one of the big myths about self-injury.

Self-injury may start as a spur-of-the-moment outlet for anger and frustration (such as punching a wall) and then develop into a major way of coping with stress that, because it remains hidden, generates more stress. (read [Cutting: Self-Mutilating to Release Emotional Stress](#))

The severity of self-harm doesn't necessarily relate to the severity of a person's underlying problems. Usually, as time passes, one of the effects of self-harm is that the person who is self-injuring becomes more accustomed to the pain they inflict on themselves and so they harm themselves more severely to get the same level of relief.

This spiral can lead to permanent injury and serious infections.

## Self-Harm is Not Defined as Attempting Suicide

It's important to make a distinction between self-harm and attempted suicide, though people who self-mutilate often go on to attempt suicide.

In the case of attempted suicide, the harm caused is uncertain and possibly even invisible, such as in the case of ingesting pills. By contrast, in self-harm, the degree of harm is clear, predictable and often highly visible; such as in the case of cutting or burning.

Self-mutilation is also different than activities that happen to harm. Many people indulge in behavior that's harmful to themselves, such as smoking or drinking to excess, but people don't smoke to damage themselves – harm is an unfortunate side-effect. The reason they smoke is for pleasure, whereas people who self-injure intend to hurt themselves. <http://www.healthyplace.com/abuse/self-injury/what-is-self-injury-self-harm-self-mutilation/>



# Causes of Self-Injury, Self-Harm, Self-Mutilation

Written by [Natasha Tracy](#)

The causes of self-injury can be confusing. The average person has difficulty understanding the causes and reasons for self harm. After all, they wonder, who would purposefully want to hurt themselves?

The reasons for self-injury, also known as self-harm or self-mutilation, are complex though and not everyone self-harms for the same reason. The causes of self-mutilation likely vary with age. Self-injury behaviors can start before the age of seven or, more commonly, between the ages of 12 and 15. Self-harm behaviors normally end within five years of starting. For many, however, self-injury can last well into adulthood.<sup>1</sup>

The causes of self-harm are both psychological and environmental in nature. Overall, self-harm can be seen as a way of dealing with stress.

## Suicide as a Cause of Self-Injury

It's important to realize that suicidal ideation is rarely a cause of self-injury. The goal of self-harm is to physically injure the self and not to die. In fact, many people use self-injury as a way to avoid suicide. Suicide attempts and self-mutilation behaviors do correlate, however, with those who have self-harmed being much more likely to attempt suicide or have a plan for suicide. The cause of self-injury can really be seen as emotional distress and if this distress is not alleviated, it can result in suicidal behavior.

## Environmental Causes of Self-Harm

As the main reasons for self-injury relate to stress, one of the main environmental components of self-harm is the presence of trauma or stress. This may be a past trauma, such as sexual assault, or current stress such as the pressure to succeed.

One of the stressors known to create a risk for self-harm is sexual orientation. Those in a sexual minority group are more likely to self-injure. Specifically, females who identify as bisexual are at a higher risk for self-mutilation.

## Psychological Reasons for Self-Mutilation

There are various psychological reasons for self-mutilation but the overwhelming factor is the presence of unmanageable anxiety. This anxiety, be it from trauma, stress or pressure, is so great that the person finds they can't deal with it. The self-injury, then, is a way of releasing or dealing with this chronic anxiety. Self-harm becomes a coping mechanism, albeit a negative one. Self-injury is also commonly used to deal with overwhelming sadness or emotional numbness.

The presence of other psychological disorders can also be an indirect cause for self-injury. While a disorder does not specifically cause the behavior, those with certain mental health disorders are at a higher risk. Disorders associated with self-mutilation include:

- Addiction disorders
- Eating disorders
- Posttraumatic stress disorder
- Borderline personality disorder
- Depression
- Anxiety disorders

People cite other reasons they self-harm, however. These self-harm quotes may provide insight into that. Some other causes of self-injury include desires to:

- Experience a feeling in the face of numbness

- Control the body and mind
- Express feelings or needs
- Distract from other problems
- Create visible and noticeable wounds
- Purify oneself
- Reenact a trauma in order to resolve it
- Protect others from emotional pain

A small number of people also report good feelings and a rush of energy as the reasons for self-harm.

<sup>1</sup>Cornell Research Program on Self-Injurious Behavior in Adolescents and Young Adults, What do we know about self-injury?  
<http://www.crpsib.com/whatissi.asp>

<http://www.healthypalce.com/abuse/self-injury/causes-of-self-injury-self-harm-self-mutilation/>

# Self Injury, Facts and Stats

Written by [Samantha Gluck](#)

*The best way to help is to stay informed about self injury statistics and facts. The more you know about the causes of self injury, motivations, and appropriate responses, the more effective you'll be when dealing with someone who engages in this activity.*

## FACTS:

### Responding to Self Injurious People

There are so many myths about self-injury, that's why it's important to know about self mutilation facts when responding to people who engage in this type of behavior. People self injure to cope with internal emotions, stop bad feelings, relieve emotional numbness, punish themselves, obtain a sense of belonging, get attention, and many other reasons. Read through these guidelines about approaching someone who engages in self injury:

- Remain calm and caring
- Accept him or her even if you disagree with the behavior
- Know that this represents a way of dealing with emotional pain
- Listen with compassion
- Avoid panic and overreaction
- Do not show shock or revulsion at what they've done
- Do not use threats in an attempt to stop the behavior
- Do not allow him or her to recount the self injury experience in detail as it may trigger another session
- Do get appropriate help for him or her from a qualified mental health professional

### What You Should Know

Knowing the self injury facts can help you better understand the underlying origins of this behavior and the techniques of self harm. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition (DSM IV-TR) lists self injurious behavior as a symptom of borderline personality disorder, but recent research indicates that it also occurs with other mental health disorders, including:

- Eating disorders
- Depression
- Anxiety disorders
- Substance abuse
- Conduct and oppositional disorders

The phenomenon has become more visible in society in recent years. Recent data and self injury statistics show the following behaviors are common among people who engage in self harm:

- Cutting
- Burning
- Interfering with wound healing (picking or reopening wounds)
- Punching or hitting oneself or other objects
- Inserting objects into the skin
- Purposely bruising or breaking one's bones
- Certain forms of hair pulling

Experts term these behaviors as non-suicidal self injury, but suicide also qualifies as a form of self harm – one that is, of course, devastating to those left behind.

# STATS:

Self injury statistics show that this disturbing phenomenon is a real and present danger to vulnerable people worldwide, especially in developed countries, such as the U.S. and those in western Europe. Frequently, untreated depression and other mental health challenges create an environment of despair that leads people to cope with these challenges in unhealthy ways. Check out these self mutilation statistics:

- Each year, 1 in 5 females and 1 in 7 males engage in self injury
- 90 percent of people who engage in self harm begin during their teen or pre-adolescent years
- Nearly 50 percent of those who engage in self injury activities have been sexually abused
- Females comprise 60 percent of those who engage in self injurious behavior
- About 50 percent of those who engage in self mutilation begin around age 14 and carry on into their 20s
- Many of those who self injure report learning how to do so from friends or pro self injury websites
- Approximately two million cases are reported annually in the U.S.

While these self harm statistics are from reliable sources, truly accurate information about rates and trends of self mutilation are difficult to come by because the majority of participants conceal their activities. Their behavior may never come to the attention of medical professionals or other social services.

<http://www.healthyplace.com/abuse/self-injury/self-injury-self-harm-statistics-and-facts/>



# Why I Self-Harm: Why People Self-Injure

Written by [Natasha Tracy](#)

When people make the statement, "I self-harm," the most common question after that is "why?" But delving into why people self-harm, also known as self-injury or self-mutilation, is complicated. Each individual has their own reasons for self-injury and understanding their self-injury behaviors often means understanding an individual's circumstance.

And to make matters more confusing, many people aren't even sure why they self-injure. In the words of Amy, age 16:<sup>1</sup>

*I was hurting myself for 2 years before I ever told anyone. I think, to begin with, I didn't even know that it was self-harm because I was scratching and biting myself, but then I moved on to cutting myself as well. I was so upset all of the time and the frustrating thing was I didn't even know why.*

## Why Do I Self-Harm: Environmental Factors

Many factors come together when looking at why a person self-mutilates and one of the big ones is stress. People typically begin to self-harm because they are under more stress than they can handle. This stress leads to anxiety and this anxiety becomes overwhelming. This stress might be due to school or work pressure, problems at home or other stresses.

Greg, age 15 talks about how stresses at home helped explain why he self-injured:

*My mum and dad split up when I was little so my mum had to bring us up on her own quite a lot . . . She had a boyfriend for a while who I really didn't like, he used to beat her, but he never hurt me in that way . . .*

*That was probably why I started getting so down and angry all the time. My mates thought I'd started to go boring and so I stopped going out with them as much. Then this one boy started on me after school one day and I ran away. I was so annoyed at myself for being scared again that I went home and punched the wall outside our house.*

*After that, rumors went around school, and more boys started to wait for me at the end of the day. I hated going to school and I hated myself for not being able to deal with it. So I started to do things to myself to avoid going to school – like swallowing things that would make me sick. And every time that I got really angry, I had to hit something really hard. I started to realize that I was doing lots of things to my body that weren't good for it, but I didn't really know what else to do.*

## Understanding Self-Injury: Psychological Issues

Personal, psychological issues may also help people understand why people self-harm. In the case of Madison, age 13, she felt that no one loved her:<sup>2</sup>

*The pressures of friends and boyfriends and family can be too much and the threat of razors and knives can seem to be enough to keep you sane . . . Sometimes it can be hard to believe someone actually loves you until they have a good reason to say something about it. I had this thought stuck in my mind that I wasn't loved. That nobody cared. I became addicted to cutting and burning myself because of these thoughts.*

Self-mutilation is often correlated with other mental health problems such as substance use disorders, depression, bipolar disorder and eating disorders. Chronic illness and sexual assault can also be underlying causes of self-harm behaviors.

<sup>1</sup>Selfharm.co.uk, Disclosure: Sharing Stories of Self-Harm: <http://www.selfharm.co.uk/get/facts/disclosure-sharing-stories-of-self-harm/>

<sup>2</sup>Reachout.com, Just keep going: <http://us.reachout.com/real-stories/story/just-keep-going>



# Self-Injurers and Their Common Personality Traits

Written by [Samantha Gluck](#)

*Self-injurers, people who self-injure, do share some common personality traits. Who are these people who self-harm? Read on to find out.*

Self-injurers are spread across races, genders and come from different social classes. There are not many unifying factors among people that self injure. Most of them are women, but not all, and most of them begin to self-injure in their early teenage years, but not all. (Yes, there are adults who self-harm) Chances are that more men self injure than we know about, but are less likely to seek medical and emotional support for self-injury. It is not easy to spot the signs of self-injury, as many who engage in the practice are very adept at hiding them.

## Personality Traits of the Self-Injurer

**People who self-injure generally share these characteristics:**

- strongly dislike/invalidate themselves
- are hypersensitive to rejection
- are chronically angry, usually at themselves
- tend to suppress their anger
- have high levels of aggressive feelings, which they disapprove of strongly and often suppress or direct inward
- are more impulsive and more lacking in impulse control
- tend to act in accordance with their mood of the moment
- tend not to plan for the future
- are depressed and suicidal / self-destructive
- suffer chronic anxiety
- tend toward irritability
- do not see themselves as skilled at coping
- do not have a flexible repertoire of coping skills
- do not think they have much control over how/whether they cope with life
- tend to be avoidant
- do not see themselves as empowered

Unfortunately, many people don't understand self-injury. Many think self-harm is simply about getting attention. However, this is rarely ever the case and, generally, not one of the causes of self-injury. People self-injure to relieve tension and unwanted emotions. If someone is committing self-injury for attention, they are probably asking for help and need the attention.

<http://www.healthyplace.com/abuse/self-injury/self-injurers-and-their-common-personality-traits/>



# Myths About Self Injury

Written by [Samantha Gluck](#)

The biggest myths about self-injury stem from misinformation. It is very easy to misunderstand self-injury if you do not suffer with the problem yourself. Even many self injurers do not understand exactly why they cut themselves or engage in other types of self-harm. Because of the nature of self injury, people tend to jump to very quick conclusions.

## The Biggest Self-Injury Myth

**Self Injury is NOT a series of failed suicide attempts.** This is one of the biggest self-injury myths. Those who self injure do so more to "cope" than as a way out, a way of dying. It is true that many self injurers contemplate suicide as an extreme option. Many do suffer with the same kinds of illnesses (ie, bipolar, depression, borderline personality disorder) that those who commit suicide do. However self injury is not done with the intention of killing oneself.

**Self Injury is NOT pure attention seeking** - while it may be right that those who do self injure may *need* attention, calling attention to oneself is not usually one of the reasons why people self-injure. Those who do self injure often do so in such secretive ways that those very close to them have no idea of their problem; which is why their reaction to self-injury disclosure or discovery is one of shock and dismay. Interpreting self injury as attention seeking can only make things worse for the self injurer.

**Some Self Injury is minor** - goes this myth about self-injury, so it's not that big a deal. Physically minor self-injury does NOT mean that it is not serious. The severity of the person's feelings and reasons behind self-harm cannot be determined by the severity of a cut, burn, etc.

## Last of Our Self-Injury Myths

Our final self-injury myth focuses on the mental stability of the self-injurer. After all, the reasoning goes, who in their right mind would want to harm themselves?

**Self Injurers are NOT crazy** - while many self injurers have psychological problems, such as depression, self injury does not always accompany another psychiatric disorder. Self injury is a problem in its own right and may be regarded by those who have very limited or no experience with self-mutilation to be a sign of craziness. To other people, it may be 'crazy' - to a self injurer, it is the way they live.

<http://www.healthyplace.com/abuse/self-injury/myths-about-self-injury/>



# Self-Injury Cutting: Cutting Yourself to Relieve Emotional Pain

Written by [Natasha Tracy](#)

Cutting yourself is something many people would never think of doing, and yet for others, self-injury in the form of cutting may be something they do on a regular basis. Cutting is also known as one type of self-harm, self-injury or self-mutilation. People may cut themselves to use the physical pain to relieve emotional pain they are feeling but can't handle.

One study found that of college students who self-injure, over 33% self-harmed by cutting.<sup>1</sup> It is more common for females to cut themselves than for males.

## What is Cutting?

The self-injury cutting is done any time you purposefully break the skin and make it bleed. Cutting might be done with a knife, razor blade or broken glass. The cuts do not have to be deep to be considered self-mutilation. Cutting is often done on the hands, wrists, arms, thighs and stomach.

People will typically lie about the signs of cutting or cover them up. For example, a person might blame scratches or cuts on a cat. Self-harm cuts are also often hidden by clothing. This can be seen when someone insists on wearing long-sleeves or pants even in very hot weather. (If you're cutting yourself, find out how to explain self-harm scars to others.)

## Cutting Yourself. Why?

The reasons people self-mutilate by cutting vary, but it is often to relieve emotional pain and, paradoxically, numbness.

When a person is overwhelmed with a painful emotion, sometimes they don't know how to handle it; this is when a person may self-injure, cut. These strong emotions may be linked to intense pressure, school or relationship problems, anxiety or situations the person feels they can't change. The physical pain of self-mutilating, cutting, is like a release valve to relieve the emotional pain. Someone may see the releasing of blood similar to releasing the strong feelings they have inside.

Others self-harm by cutting because they feel numb and the pain of self-harm allows them to feel something. Some even report that cutting provides an energy rush, although this is uncommon.

Cutting also allows a person to express pain when they don't know any other way to express it. The visible self-mutilation from the cutting becomes a sign of the pain and a form of communication.

People may also self-injure by cutting because:<sup>2</sup>

- They wish to control their body and mind
- They wish to distract themselves from other problems
- They wish to purify themselves
- They feel the need to reenact a trauma in an attempt to resolve it
- They wish to protect others from emotional pain

## Self-Harm By Cutting as a Sign of Psychiatric Disorder

Cutting may also be a sign of an underlying psychiatric disorder. While many people engage in self-injury cutting due to life-stressors, others do it because they have an undiagnosed mental health disorder. A person who self-harms by cutting may have:

- Depression

- Bipolar disorder
- Borderline personality disorder
- A psychotic disorder
- A substance use disorder

No matter the reasons behind cutting yourself, effective cutting help and treatment for cutting is available. While self-injury self-help methods can be used, self-injury cutters should seek professional help in tackling this problem.

<sup>1</sup>Janis Whitlock, John Eckenrode, Daniel Silverman, Self-injurious Behaviors in a College Population: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/117/6/1939.long>

<sup>2</sup>Cornell Research Program on Self-Injurious Behavior in Adolescents and Young Adults, What do we know about self-injury? <http://www.crpsib.com/whatisi.asp>

<http://www.healthyplace.com/abuse/self-injury/self-injury-cutting-cutting-yourself-to-relieve-emotional-pain/>



# Effects of Self-Harm, Self-Injury

Written by [Natasha Tracy](#)

The effects of self-harm, also known as self-injury and self-mutilation, are varied and are both physical and psychological. While the physical effects of self-injury might be obvious and harmful, the psychological effects of self-mutilation are no less damaging. People are often devastatingly tormented by both their self-harming behaviors and their desire to self-harm.

The effects of self-injury are not all bad though, and this is why some people continue to self-mutilate. Some of the positive effects of self-harm might be:<sup>1</sup>

- Expression of difficult feelings
- Communicating that you need help
- Release of pain and tension
- A sense of control
- Distraction from overwhelming, painful emotions or circumstances
- Feeling alive or feeling something rather than feeling numb

The positive effects of self-harm, though, are temporary and are outweighed by the physical and psychological damage caused by self-mutilation.

## Physical Effects of Self-Harm

The physical effects of self-harm can be minor, such as a scratch or small bruise or, in rare cases, life-threatening. No matter how severe though, all physical effects of self-injury indicate the unmanageable pain the person is in and the severity of the injury does not indicate the severity of the pain. Most people who self-mutilate do so more than once, so any physical effect of self-mutilation seen may indicate a worrisome behavioral pattern.

Some of the physical effects of self-harm and signs of self-injury include:<sup>2</sup>

- Wounds or scars
- Infection
- Nerve damage
- Broken bones
- Hair loss or bald spots
- Injury caused by overdose or poisoning

## Psychological Effects of Self-Injury

Just because you can't see the harmful psychological effects of self-mutilation doesn't mean they aren't happening. Not only do strong emotions tend to drive people to self-harm, the self-harm itself, in turn, may cause strong emotional reactions. And, unfortunately, self-harm is a temporary measure that not only creates problems but also doesn't solve the problems that drove the person to self-harm in the first place.

Some of the psychological effects of self-injury include:

- Irritability
- A desire to be alone in order to self-harm or to hide the evidence of self-harm. This often leads to feelings of loneliness
- Shame and guilt at having self-harmed
- The stress and difficulty of having to lie to those around you about the self-injury
- Using self-injury to deal with any emotional stress instead of building positive coping techniques
- An overwhelming desire to self-injure to the point where it feels like you can no longer control the behavior
- Low self-esteem and self-hatred
- Depression

<http://www.healthyplace.com/abuse/self-injury/effects-of-self-harm-self-injury/>



# Self-Harm and Suicide: Can Self-Injury Lead to Suicide?

Written by [Natasha Tracy](#)

Because self-harm (also known as self-injury or self-mutilation) can involve physical injury (such as in the case of self-injury cutting), it can seem like self-harm and suicide are directly related. It's normal to think that cutting one's wrist, in the case of self-harm, may be a suicidal gesture; indicating that the person wishes to cut their wrist to die.

However, this is typically not the case. In fact, most people who practice self-injury don't intend to kill themselves and may even see self-injury as a way of avoiding suicide.

## The Relationship Between Self-Harm and Suicide

Self-harm that is not undertaken with the aim of committing suicide is called *non-suicidal self-injury* and most self-harm falls into this category. People who practice non-suicidal self-injury do so to deal with overwhelming emotions or to feel emotion when none exists. And while many people who self-mutilate consider suicide, the act of self-mutilation itself, is not generally a suicidal act.

A minority of people will practice self-harm with suicidal intent, however, so the specific relationship between self-harm and suicide is unclear. And while the act of self-harm has not been shown to lead to suicide, it is understood that the pain that causes people to self-harm may also drive a person to suicide. This is seen in the following statistics about individuals with a history of non-suicidal self-injury as compared to those without a history of self-harm:<sup>1</sup>

- They were over nine times more likely to report suicide attempts
- They were seven times more likely to report a suicidal gesture
- They were six times more likely to report a suicide plan

Because of these numbers, any act of self-harm should be taken seriously and can alert others to significant emotional distress. It's important to get professional help for self-injury, as a professional is more likely to be able to assess the likelihood of suicide in a person that self-harms. This is critical, as the treatment for non-suicidal self-injury and a suicide attempt are quite different.

Nevertheless, it's important to remember that the majority of people who self-mutilate (60%) report not considering suicide.

<sup>1</sup>Cornell Research Program on Self-Injurious Behavior in Adolescents and Young Adults, What do we know about self-injury? <http://www.crpsib.com/whatissi.asp>

<http://www.healthyplace.com/abuse/self-injury/self-harm-and-suicide-can-self-injury-lead-to-suicide/>



# Self Injury Self Help: Self Help Coping Skills for Self Harm

Written by [Samantha Gluck](#)

*Self help for self-injury does exist and can be effective in curbing self-harm behaviors. Learn more about self-harm, self help coping skills.*

Most people who self-harm want to stop hurting themselves and they can do this by trying to develop new ways of coping and communicating. However, some people feel a need not only to change their behavior but also to understand why they have resorted to harming themselves.

There are a number of self-harm, self-help techniques that can reduce the risk of serious injury or minimize the harm caused by self-injury. This list is not exhaustive - different people find different things useful in various situations. So if one self-help tool doesn't work, try another. You might also find these suggestions become more effective if you are getting professional self-injury treatment; working with a mental health professional.

## Self-Injury Self Help Techniques

- Stop and try to work out what would have to change to make you no longer feel like hurting yourself
- Count down from ten (nine, eight, seven)
- Point out five things, one for each sense, in your surroundings to bring your attention on to the present
- Breathe slowly - in through the nose and out through the mouth.

**If you still feel like cutting yourself or using other ways to self-harm, try:**

- Marking yourself with a red water-soluble felt-tip pen instead of cutting
- A punch bag to vent the anger and frustration
- Plunging your hands into a bowl of ice cubes (not for too long, though)
- Rubbing ice where you'd otherwise cut or harm yourself

## Self-Harm Self Help Coping Tools

**There are several other self-injury, self help ideas you can implement to help yourself better cope with self-injury:**

- Acknowledge that this IS a problem, that you are hurting on the inside, and that you need professional assistance to stop injuring yourself.
- Realize that this is not about being bad or stupid - this is about recognizing that a behavior that somehow was helping you handle your feelings has become as big a problem as the one it was trying to solve in the first place.
- Find one person you trust - maybe a friend, teacher, minister, counselor, or relative - and say that you need to talk about something serious that is bothering you.
- Get help in identifying what "triggers" your self-harming behaviors and ask for help in developing ways to either avoid or address those triggers.
- Recognize that self-injury is an attempt to self-soothe, and that you need to develop other, better ways to calm and soothe yourself.

<http://www.healthyplace.com/abuse/self-injury/self-injury-self-help-self-help-coping-skills-for-self-harm/>



# Stop Cutting Yourself! Here's How

Written by Vanessa

*Stop cutting yourself. End the desire to self-injure and feelings that motivate you to cut yourself. Stopping the cutting and self-injury takes work. Here's how.*

*However much it hurts  
However much it takes  
Believe and all your dreams will all come true  
However hard it gets  
However much it aches  
Always believe in me  
As I believe in you  
Dredd Song - The Cure*

## How to Stop Cutting Yourself

Stopping the cutting is easier said than done. I have read a lot of different suggestions. Basically what it boils down to is that you have to *want* to stop cutting yourself. Of course, self-injury cutting releases pain and tension. Of course, it makes you feel better immediately, but in the long run, it makes you feel worse. When you cut, you generally end up feeling ashamed that you hurt yourself and embarrassed by the scratches and self-injury scars. There are other ways to cope with your pain that won't make you feel bad about yourself. Here are some of my suggestions on how to stop cutting yourself:

- **Do something creative!** Everyone enjoys doing something creative, whether you're good at it or not! I have a friend that paints, one that journals, and still another that writes poetry. I have several friends that write and compose music to release their frustrations. Personally, I like to create/modify websites to get my mind off the things that are bothering me. Sometimes I'll take photographs, work on graphics, or just surf the web for ideas.
- **Entertain your mind!** You can do a lot of things to occupy your mind besides expelling creative energy. You don't have to dwell on your problems. You can watch TV, rent a movie, or read a book. I would suggest something comical, *not* dramatic! I would also suggest going to a theater to see a movie because it helps to get out of the house. Also, if you go to a theatre you can't turn the movie off halfway through and you'll be less likely to leave since you've paid money to get in
- **Talk!** This is probably the most obvious suggestion in the book! You *can* and *should* talk to others about your self-injury problem! You'd be surprised at how understanding people can be. I would suggest turning to a close friend or significant other first, but parents can be a good thing to fall back on. If you are not sure how to broach the issue, read about some suggestions on how to tell someone you self-injure. (If you are a parent or friend, how you react to self-injury disclosure is very important.)
- **Practice Violence!** Did I really say to do something violent? Yes, but not something that will hurt you or someone else. You can rip up or punch a pillow, scream your lungs off, jump up and down, or practice a combination of things. Exercise is also a good idea, since it can be good for you.

## Other Ways to Stop Cutting

If you're still wondering how to stop yourself from cutting, here are some ideas that a friend of mine suggests:

- **Journal!** Keep a self-injury journal of the bad times. Sometimes, writing can help sway your feelings and the desire to self-injure will subside. Afterwards, you can analyze your feelings and possibly avoid what triggered the desire to self-injure in you in the first place.
- **Music!** Listen to music. Make mood tapes. Tori Amos seems to be a favorite. Little bits of her music and snippets of quotes twist themselves around the edge of my friend's journal. She has a lot of tapes she has made for herself that help her when she is in the mood to self injure. She has sent quite a few of these tapes to me. They give her something to identify with, so she knows she is not alone.
- **Collages!** Another interesting thing that she does when she feels down is make collages. She has several that are very interesting, although most are painful to see. It hurts to know someone is in such pain, especially when

you know what they are going through and still don't know how to help them. We talk about her collages, why she chooses the images she does, and I try to reinforce that she is just as intelligent, beautiful, and important as the people in her collages.

Another thing to do, after you have calmed the urge to self-injure, is to go back through your day and try to determine what pushed you to want to SI. A self-injury test might come in handy for that. If you can recognize what is causing the problem, you can attempt to come to terms with it or handle it differently.

## **Stop Cutting For the Long-Term**

Here, you will find methods and suggestions to stop self-injuring permanently, as well as more spur-of-the-moment suggestions. Be prepared to make a commitment to yourself and stop the self-harm. Cutting help and professional cutting treatment are key to your recovery.

### **Heal**

I can't stress enough how important communication is in the healing process. If you want to get better, you have to come to terms with your problems, and the best way to do that is by getting self-injury help and support and another perspective by telling someone close to you about your problem.

### ***Emergency!***

If someone you care for needs to go to the hospital and wants you to go with them, there are a number of things you can do to ensure they get proper treatment. Sometimes the person that has injured themselves will feel meek or vulnerable. In this situation, you must stand up for them and be their "advocate."

*About the author: Vanessa, is a self-injurer and started the self-injury website, "Blood Red."*

<http://www.healthyplace.com/abuse/self-injury/stop-cutting-yourself-heres-how/>



# Self Injury Test

Written by [Natasha Tracy](#)

*Take this self injury test. Examine your mind and why you feel the need to self-injure.*

## Self-Injury Test Questions

If you feel the need to self-injure, try asking yourself these questions first. Write them down so you can refer to them later and really analyze your reasoning.

- Why do I self harm? Why do I feel I must self-injure? What has driven me to cut, burn, etc.?
- Have I done this before? How did I cope then? Did I feel the same way?
- What other paths have I pursued to ease my pain before now? Is there something else I can do, a self-harm alternative, that won't hurt?
- How am I feeling now?
- How will I feel later, when I am self-injuring?
- How will I feel afterward? How will I feel tomorrow morning?
- Can I avoid the problem that has driven me to this point? Is there a better way I can handle it next time?
- Must I self-injure?

If you'd like, print out this self injury test and your answers and share them with your doctor or therapist. Your insights into why you self-injure and how you feel about self-injury could prove very helpful in your self-injury treatment and recovery.

<http://www.healthyplace.com/abuse/self-injury/self-injury-test/>



# Self-Harm Alternatives That Work

Written by Vanessa

Here are some alternatives to self-harm (aka self-injury, self-mutilation). These tools are designed to relieve the desire to self-injure the next time you feel like self-harming.

## Self-Harm Alternatives

### Understand Yourself

What is causing your desire to self-injure? If you can get to the root of the problem, you can find alternative methods to absolve the pain and ways to avoid getting into a similar situation in the future. Go ahead, examine your emotions the next time you feel like self-injuring and try one of the following suggested alternatives to self-harm instead.

#### *Do you feel Angry, Frustrated, Anxious?*

- **Violence** is the key, as long as it is not directed at a living thing:  
As an alternative to self-harm, you can rip up or punch a pillow, scream your lungs off, jump up and down, or cut up a soda bottle or some other miscellaneous, irrelevant item. Break something that you won't regret breaking, like sticks.  
Mark on or tear up a picture of yourself. It's better than doing it to the real thing!
- **Positivity** can also be good. You could clean your room or house. Get some exercise! Dance, walk, jog, or run until you're exhausted. Play a sport or go swimming.

#### *Do you feel Depressed, Down, Sad, generally Unhappy?*

- **Wash** your problems away with a soothing bath is another good alternative to self-injury. A slow, relaxing dip in a warm tub filled with bath oil or bubbles is a good idea. Pamper yourself. You'll be surprised by what it can do for your mood. When you get out, try massaging body lotion into your arms and legs, or the places you'd like to cut.
- **Relaxing** is the best way to alleviate feelings of unhappiness. You can curl up in bed with a book and escape to an alternate reality or light some incense and just kick back listening to calming music. Call a friend and chat about nothing in particular. Eat yummy snacks and spend the evening watching TV or surfing the web.

#### *Do you feel Unreal, Inhuman, Alone?*

- **Hurt** yourself in a relatively harmless way, like holding ice, or rubbing ice on the spot you would normally cut or burn. Chew up a hot pepper or rub liniment under your nose. Snap your wrist with a rubber band. Another good alternative to self-harm, take a cold bath. Jump around, stomping your feet on the ground. Focus on something, like breathing or your heart beat. Notice the way your body feels and moves.

#### *Do you need Focus?*

- **Working** on something is a good way to focus your mental and physical energy. Do something on the computer, like playing Tetris writing a computer program, or creating a personal homepage. You can also pursue any other hobby you may have that is fulfilling and requires concentration.
- **Attentively** eat a raisin, or any other snack. Weigh it in your hand, feel it, look at the little details of it, including the texture. Describe it to yourself. How does it feel? How does it smell? Is it sweet or tart? You could also choose any object in the room and examine it. Then write a detailed description of it, including size, weight, texture, shape, color, uses, feel, etc. Include all of your senses. Choose a random object and try to list 30 different uses for it.  
Pick a subject and research it on the web. This can get your mind going and give you a new project to work on.

*Do you need to see Blood, pick Scabs, or see Scars?*

- **Draw** on your wrist with a red felt-tip pen. Pour red food coloring over the area you want to cut. This self-injury alternative may be more effective if you warm it up first. Paint on yourself with red paint.
- **Tattoo** yourself using henna. The henna goes on as a paste. After you've left it on overnight, you can pick it off as you would a scab and it leaves an orange-red mark behind.

If you're wanting to gain some insight into why you self-harm or what triggers your self-injury behaviors, take this self-injury test.

*About the author: Vanessa, is a self-injurer and started the self-injury website, "Blood Red."*

<http://www.healthyplace.com/abuse/self-injury/alternatives-to-self-harm-self-injury/>

# Explaining Self-Harm Scars to Others

Written by [Natasha Tracy](#)

Unfortunately, people who self-harm not only have psychological scars from their behavior but physical ones too, and explaining self-harm scars to others can seem almost like an impossible task. People with self-harm scars (also known as self-injury scars or self-mutilation scars) may be embarrassed and not want to talk about what was undoubtedly a painful point in their lives. This is completely understandable but there will always come a time when self-injury scars will have to be explained to someone in your life.

Self-harm scars may result from the different ways to self-harm, like burning or cutting, and self-mutilation scars most commonly appear on the:<sup>1</sup>

- Arms
- Hands
- Wrists
- Thighs
- Stomach

Depending on their placement, it can be hard to hide self-mutilation scars so for some people, more explanation is needed than for others.

## Isolation and Self-Harm Scars

Acts of self-harm, and to some extent the scars from self-harm, tend to keep people at a distance. Self-injury is something done in private and often with shame and guilt attached to the activity. These feelings may then also be associated with the self-injury scars. Many don't want to share the evidence of their shame and guilt.

This tends to bring about loneliness and isolation and may make a person believe that they are alone in their self-harm. This isn't true, however. Many people, of all ages, self-harm (yes, even adults self-harm) – the act is far more common than most people believe. But like you, most people don't want to talk about it.

Opening up about self-mutilation scars can help break the isolation and help you to understand that you are not alone and people do love you in spite of what you have done in the past or even the self-injury in which you currently engage in.

## Talking About Self-Injury Scars

It may seem like no one will be able to understand your self-injury or your self-injury scars, but this isn't true. Many people have experience with self-mutilation, and even those who don't can have understanding and empathy for what you have been through.

When talking about self-mutilation and self-mutilation scars:<sup>2</sup>

- **Focus on your feelings** – self-harm scars aren't about the physical, they are about the emotional. The details about what you physically did matter a lot less than the feelings that drove you to that place and people may be able to identify with your emotions more readily than your acts.
- **Tell the person why you're talking to them about self-harm scars** – you probably aren't talking about your self-mutilation scars for no reason. Likely, you want understanding, closeness and support and it's okay to tell someone that. When you tell someone what you need, you are much more likely to get it.
- **Communicate in a way in which you feel comfortable** – while it might always be ideal to have a face-to-face communication about self-mutilation scars, that might not be something you are comfortable with, so pick a method that makes sense for you. You might start the conversation in an email or letter, although you will still likely have to follow-up face-to-face. And remember, you don't have to share every detail – only share what you're comfortable with right now.

- **Give the person time to process what you're telling them** – what you're telling someone can be hard for them to immediately accept, so give them time to think about what you're saying. It's hard to hear that someone you love has been hurting his or herself and it's natural to act surprised at first. This doesn't mean the person won't understand, it just means they need some time to adjust to the news.
- **Provide education about self-harm** – if the person doesn't know about self-harm provide a way for him or her to learn about it. Provide a book on self-harm or give them the HealthyPlace.com Self-Injury website address where they can learn more, including self-harm statistics and facts. Knowledge dispels fear and creates understanding.

And remember, talking about self-injury scars may not go as well as you like sometimes, but that doesn't mean that everyone will react in the same way. Some people will be supportive.

(If you're on the other side, meaning someone is telling you they self-injure, your reactions to their self-injury disclosure are so important.)

<sup>1</sup>Janis Whitlock, John Eckenrode, Daniel Silverman, Self-injurious Behaviors in a College Population: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/117/6/1939.long>

<sup>2</sup>HelGuide.org, Cutting and Self-Harm: [http://www.helpguide.org/mental/self\\_injury.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/self_injury.htm)

<http://www.healthyplace.com/abuse/self-injury/explaining-self-harm-scars-to-others/>

**Website for Self Injury Articles at healthyplace.com:**

<http://www.healthyplace.com/abuse/self-injury/self-injury-articles/>