

Stopping the Pain

A Workbook for Teens Who Self-Injure

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Publisher's Note

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what you say is private

1

you need to know

What you write in this workbook or what you tell a counselor is private. No one will know about your thoughts and your feelings unless you want them to. The only exception is if your life is in danger, because saving your life is more important than protecting your privacy.

Sometimes counselors will want to talk to your parents or even your teachers about your problems. If they want to do this, they should ask your permission first. If they talk without your knowing, it may be hard for you to trust them.

If you like, you can ask your counselor, or other people you confide in, to sign the confidentiality statement on the next page. It will help people understand that your privacy is important.

Counselor's Confidentiality Form

I agree to keep what I am being told confidential and private. Even if I don't like what I'm hearing, I will not repeat it unless I have your permission.

However, if I think you are doing something that will put you or someone else in real and immediate danger, I will do whatever I can to stop something bad from happening.

I also want you to know: _____

(Therapist 's Name)

(Date)

you need to know

Very few adults are comfortable talking about self-injury, and many teens keep their self-injury secret. They think that it will “freak out” their parents, and they are afraid that their parents or other adults will act in ways that make things worse. Many teens are ashamed or guilty about their SI and feel that there is something wrong with them. Naturally, they don’t want other people to think they are crazy.

Most teens keep their SI secret from their parents, and when parents find out about it, they typically keep it secret from other people in the family.

But keeping your SI secret doesn’t help you and probably makes your situation worse. Keeping SI, or any other problem, secret makes you feel alone, and when you feel alone, you are more likely to feel depressed and helpless. For teens who self-injure, these feelings can lead to even more self-injury.

Of course, telling a secret to people who don’t want to hear it is a real problem. Many teens say:

“If I tell my parents, they won’t be able to handle it.”

“If I tell my therapist, she’ll probably put me in a hospital.”

“If I tell my friends about my SI, they will just tell an adult about it.”

These things may all be true, but if you are ready to get help with your SI, then telling people your secret should be part of your asking for help. Everyone reacts differently when someone asks for help.

On the next page fill in the blanks and cross out sentences that you don’t agree with or that don’t apply to your situation.

activity 2 * si does not have to be a secret

Then use the statements you like as the basis for writing a letter to your parents about your SI. You don't have to give your parents this letter; that is up to you. You can give it to someone else or you can tear it up as soon as you write it. But even if you tear it up, you should think about what you have written and how you might want to share it with people you care about and people who care about you.

Dear _____

I don't want you to freak about what I'm going to tell you, but I need your help. If you freak out, you won't be able to give me the help I need. I want to tell you a secret that I've had for _____. Sometimes when I feel _____, I hurt myself. I hurt myself by _____.

I know that it is hard to understand, but when I do this I feel _____.
_____.

There is nothing that you have to do right now. I just want to talk to you, and I want you to know that I need your help. The best thing you can do to help me right now is to _____.

I also want you to understand that self-injury is a problem that will need your understanding and patience.

Thanks for helping me.

Signed,

Use the space on the next page to write a letter to your parents or to another adult who can help you with your SI. You can use sentences from the first part of this activity or you can create your own.

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what do you know about si?

you need to know

People have many myths and misconceptions about those who self-injure. The more you know about self-injury, the quicker you will find a way to help yourself.

Most people who self-injure keep their behavior secret. They might feel that they are the only ones in the world who act this way. Even people who are seeing counselors may be ashamed to admit that they hurt themselves.

In the last few years, more people have talking about self-injury, and it has become less secret. Many books have been written about self-injury. There are also many websites and blogs, although it is important for you to be aware that not everything you read on the Internet is in your best interest.

The more people talk about self-injury, the more we can understand how to help people with this problem. Separating myths from facts is always a step in the right direction. You may want to take the “quiz” on the next page yourself or give it to someone else.

what do you know about people who self-injure?

Put a check next to the statements that are true and an X next to the ones that are false. The answers are on the next page.

1. Only a few very sick people self-injure.
2. Teens who hurt themselves are trying to commit suicide, but they don't have the nerve.
3. There are many ways that people self-injure.
4. People who self-injure are crazy and should be put in hospitals.
5. Teens who self-injure are just trying to get attention from their parents.
6. Self-inflicted wounds are a way of being accepted at school.
7. Only teens who have other serious psychological problems will harm themselves.
8. If your wounds are superficial, your self-injury may be just a phase.
9. Girls and boys typically self-injure in different ways.

answers

1. *Only a few very sick people self-injure.* **FALSE**

Approximately 1 percent of the population has, at one time or another, used self-inflicted physical injury as a means of coping with an overwhelming situation or feeling.

2. *Teens who hurt themselves are trying to commit suicide, but they don't have the nerve.* **FALSE**

While some teens who self-injure are also suicidal and think often about death, most teens say that when they self-injure they are not trying to die. Most say that their self-injury is a way of coping with the pain in their lives, and some say that it has become just a habit.

3. *There are many ways that people self-injure.* **TRUE**

Self-injury is defined as intentionally hurting yourself. People find many ways to do this, but most commonly they cut or burn their skin.

4. *People who self-injure are crazy and should be put in hospitals.* **FALSE**

According to Tracy Alderman, author of *The Scarred Soul*, most self-inflicted wounds are not life threatening and may not even require medical attention. Some teens are put in a hospital for a short period because the adults in their lives are afraid and don't know what else to do. Experts in this field have suggested that hospitalization can actually make matters worse. Most teens who hurt themselves are trying to find control in their lives, and involuntary hospitalization makes them feel worse, potentially leading to even more self-injury.

5. *Teens who self-injure are just trying to get attention from their parents.* **FALSE**

Some teens say that they began to self-injure when they were trying to get attention for their emotional troubles, but when they thought about it, they realized that their behavior was really a silent cry for help and not designed to attract attention. In fact, the majority of teens who hurt themselves go to great

lengths to hide their scars and their behaviors from adults, particularly their parents. Many professionals believe that all psychological symptoms are ways of trying to get help, but the symptoms are often so disguised that people don't recognize them for what they are. That is, of course, a big part of the problem.

6. *Self-inflicted wounds are a way of being accepted at school.* **FALSE**
While some teens will form a clique with other teens who self-injure, very few teens say that they harm themselves just to be a part of a group. There is an expression that "misery loves company," and it is more likely that teens who are unhappy find comfort in being around other teens with similar feelings.
7. *Only teens who have other serious psychological problems will harm themselves.* **FALSE**
While it is true that some teens who self-injure do have other very serious problems, which they may have had for many years, this is certainly not the case with everyone. You can find more about the reasons that you self-injure in Activity 4.
8. *If your wounds are superficial, your self-injury may be just a phase.* **FALSE**
The severity of self-injury has very little to do with the feelings you might have. People have different tolerances to pain and they have different ways to hurt themselves. When teens hurt themselves, it should be taken seriously.
9. *Girls and boys typically self-injure in different ways.* **TRUE**
While it is true that girls more commonly fall into a pattern of self-injury, there are many boys who do this too. Some people think that girls who self-injure are just found out more often than boys. Others think that boys are more indirect in seeking self-injury and are more likely to hurt themselves through high-risk behaviors, such as extreme sports.