

Cutting

Okay, so you may have seen or heard something about cutting. Or maybe you're doing it personally. Whatever brought you here, we want you to know more about cutting: what it is; who does it; why people do it; and how to get help for you or a friend to stop hurting inside and out.

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, neck, breasts or genitals. Cutting on the arms and wrists is the most common because it's 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, or self-mutilation. Some people also call it slashing or slicing.
- Besides cutting, people may hurt themselves in other ways, including scratching, burning skin with a lighter, punching or headbutting.

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

Who cuts?

About two million people in the U.S. hurt themselves in some way. Most are teenagers or young adults, and they're from all races and backgrounds. To hide their cutting, they often wear clothing 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. But, 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's sick or a parents' 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 the reason, cutting is a serious, dangerous behavior, and may be a sign of another problem.

Many people who cut themselves also have an eating disorder like anorexia or bulimia. Some may be experiencing depression. Others may have been sexually or physically abused.

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.

If you or someone you know is thinking about killing themselves, contact 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) immediately to talk to a crisis center in your area. Suicide is never the answer to your problems.

How can I help a friend with this?

- **Ask about it.** Friends with cutting problems are often glad to be able talk about it. If you bring it up and this person isn't self-injuring, it won't start just because you said something about it.
- **Offer options** but don't tell your friend what to do. If someone's using cutting or some other kind of self-injury as a way to feel in control, it won't help if you try to take control. Helping someone see ways to get help - like talking to a parent, teacher, school counselor or mental health professional- may be the best thing you can do.
- **Seek support.** Knowing a friend is going through this can be frightening and stressful. Consider telling a teacher or someone else you trust. And remember, even if you don't want to share your friend's secret, you can still talk to a mental health professional about how it is affecting you.

Remember you're not responsible for ending your friend's self-abuse. You can't force someone to stop or to get help from a professional. What you can do, always, is keep being a good friend.

How can I help myself?

- **Talk to someone you trust.** Maybe it's a parent or a good friend or a school counselor. Tell them you're cutting yourself, and want to stop. Ask them to help you find help. Know that you may get some tough reactions like denial or sadness or anger, but that will pass. If you're not comfortable with that, contact a local mental health group or a HOTLINE.
- **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're 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. And remember, you can stop cutting.

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