



**Chapter 2:
Healthy Minds**

Self-Harm

Ineffective Problem Solving

What is Self-Harm?



It's hard to smile when you're feeling sad, angry or alone. Maybe you've been having trouble at school; you've just had a fight with a good friend; someone close to you has hurt you; you feel embarrassed or ashamed; or maybe you don't really know why you feel this way, but when our emotions get the best of us, it's important to have someone to turn to—a friend, a **Big Brother** or **Big Sister**, a parent, or teacher— someone we can confide in, someone to support us, **someone who will listen**.

So how do you let the inner feelings out? How do you express the pain you feel on the inside, when the words just aren't there—when the words won't come out right?

The best way to solve inner pain is to externalize it, to *get it out*, by talking about it, keeping a journal of thoughts and emotions, painting, writing poetry, exercising, or playing a favorite piece of music. When people keep silent about their inner emotions the pain continues; trapped and helpless, they begin to hurt their bodies as a form of release. They choose to hurt the outside of their body because they believe that might set free the negative emotions trapped within. Doctors simply call it "Cutting". It's a form of self-harm that uses razors, scissors, pins and needles, or other sharp objects to intentionally hurt the body.

How do I know if Someone is 'Cutting'?

Some of the following warning signs may tell you that someone you know is 'cutting,' and needs help:

- Cuts, burns, scars on the body.
- Finding razors, knives, pins/needles.
- They have friends or family who cut or hurt their bodies.
- Wearing long pants or long-sleeved shirts even in warm weather.
- Blood stains on clothing.
- They tell you.

For these people, injuring their body allows them to focus on physical pain, while temporarily "forgetting" about their inner anguish. The wounds and scars left on the body tell a story of an inner pain that is kept silent. "Cutting" does not necessarily mean that a person is suicidal. Those who wish to take their own life have a desire to feel nothing at all, while people who "cut" are looking to *replace* negative feelings with positive, good feelings about their lives. After all, it's normal to feel bad on the inside sometimes.

**In an Emergency
Situation call 9-1-1**

Crisis Lines:

Fraser Valley East (24 hrs):

(604) 820-1166 or toll-free
1-877-820-7444

**Central Fraser Valley
Telecare**

(604) 850-5106

Kids Help Phone (24 hrs)

1-800-668-6868

Fraser Health:

(604) 587-4600 or toll free
1-877-935-5669

Youth in BC Live Chat:

www.youthinbc.com

**Ministry of Children and
Family Development**

**Child and Youth Mental
Health and Protection**

(604) 870-5880

Free Online Article:
*Helping Those Who
Hurt Themselves*

http://www.tponline.org/article.cfm/Helping_Those_Who_Hurt_Themselves



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“But if it works, why shouldn’t I do it?”

There are many ways to chase away the negative emotions we feel, without hurting our bodies or putting our lives at risk. “Cutting” can become a very dangerous habit, especially when it’s kept a secret. It can leave lifelong scars and painful wounds that are difficult to heal and easily seen.

Even though cutting is not typically about suicide, accidents and infections that may result can put your life at risk.

The key is **communication**. When we keep painful feelings and emotions a secret, they become difficult to control and even more difficult to resolve. Expressing emotions and inner pain is neither embarrassing nor shameful, and is a healthy part of understanding and managing our feelings—so it’s important to tell someone you trust. There are caring people who are willing to listen: moms and dads, **Big Brothers** and **Big Sisters**, friends, and doctors. Best of all, these people are there to help you feel good about yourself and your life.

QUICK FACTS ABOUT “CUTTING”:

Note: Cutting is not the only form of self-harm, but is one of the most common

- ⇒ **Common sites** for “cutting” include arms, wrists, ankles, upper legs, chest, stomach, and other areas of the body that are not easily seen.
- ⇒ People who “cut” will often **wear long sleeves and pants** to hide scars or wounds.
- ⇒ Both boys and girls cut themselves, although cutting is **more common among girls**.
- ⇒ **Variations** on cutting might include intentionally pinching, burning, scratching, biting or bruising the skin, pulling out eyelashes, picking scabs, pulling hair, taking tablets, and swallowing objects.
- ⇒ Many people who cut themselves **lie about their injuries**. Deception is a way of reducing feelings of embarrassment and protects against anger, disgust, or rejection from others.
- ⇒ **Cutting is compulsive and is usually done more than once**. When a person cuts, the brain releases natural chemicals called ‘endorphins’, which are the body’s natural pain killers.
- ⇒ **Cutting occurs or begins primarily in youth grades 7 through 8**, although some cases involve younger children. It may persist through teen years into adulthood.
- ⇒ Many self-cutters (but not all) have been **victims of physical, emotional or sexual abuse** at some point. Cutting can be considered an expression of emotional angst.

Vocabulary:

Trichotillomania—excessively and repetitively plucking hairs from your body (eg. Head, eyebrows, eyelashes).

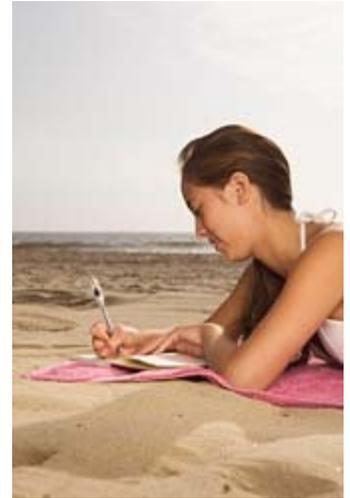
SI or SH (Self Injury or Self Harm) - deliberately inflicting injury upon your own body without suicidal intent. This may be aimed at relieving unbearable emotions, feelings of numbness or feelings of disconnection with reality.

Why do people cut themselves?

People cut the **outside** of their bodies as a way of releasing painful emotions or feelings trapped on the **inside**. When we fail to communicate our feelings to others, we look for other ways to express them. People who intentionally hurt themselves feel that outer pain helps to alleviate inner pain by shifting focus to the physical pain or self-harm rather than to the feelings that need resolving.

“What should I do if I am “cutting”?”

- **Don’t keep secrets.**
Tell someone immediately—a parent, someone in your family, a **Big Brother** or **Big Sister**, teacher, or a close friend you trust.
- **Do go to your doctor and/or see a therapist.**
- **Remember that its okay to feel pain on the inside.**
Feeling ashamed or embarrassed is normal.
- **Do try expressing your inner pain in other ways.** Write a poem or song, listen to music, play a game or sport, draw or paint.
- **Do call 9-1-1 if you think you are seriously injured. Call 9-1-1 or a Crisis Line (listed on previous page) if you are considering harming yourself.**



FREEZE!

Some ideas to try out next time you feel upset instead of “cutting”:

- Write down 5 things you like about yourself in your journal. Ask a friend if you need ideas.
- Get rid of all your cutting tools—throw them out or give them to a friend.
- Write a poem about how you feel.
- Go for a long walk.
- Call a friend to talk or meet for coffee.
- Take a bubble bath.
- Blast Music.
- Put an elastic band around your wrist and snap it when you want to feel pain, rather than cutting yourself.
- Squeeze ice cubes or have a really cold shower.
- Call a Crisis Line or talk to a Professional (like a therapist).
***TIP: Make up your own list at a time when you’re not feeling upset so you have a plan to refer to!**



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“What if my **Little** is Cutting?”

- **For serious injuries get your Little to a hospital.**
- Cutting is a mental health concern. Talk to your **Mentoring Coordinator** about approaching your **Little’s** parents to have him or her referred to a mental health professional, such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, or public health nurse.
- **Be available;** provide moral and nurturing support. Welcome dialogue with an open and understanding attitude.
- **Don’t get angry.** While anger is a common response when learning of a child’s secretive behavior, it may be perceived as negative judgement.
- Encourage your **Little** to **openly discuss their inner pain.** When communication is absent, feelings of isolation and alienation are increased. By addressing the issues of “cutting” you remove the secrecy which surrounds it and reduce the shame involved.



Thank you to the following members of our Panel for

Reviewing this Article:

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Resources

Available from the Fraser Valley Regional Library

For **TEENS (13-17)**

- *Girls Speak Out: Finding your True Self.* Andrea Johnston. New York: Scholastic Press, 1997.
- *See Jane Win for Girls: A Smart Girl’s Guide to Success.* Sylvia Rimm. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Pub., 2003.
- *Cut.* Patricia McCormick. Asheville, NC: Front Street, 2000.
- *The Dream Where the Losers Go.* Beth Goobie. Montreal: Roussan, 1999.

For **BIG BROTHERS/BIG SISTERS & PARENTS**

- *When Your Child is Cutting: A Parent’s Guide to Helping Children Overcome Self-Injury.* Merry E. McVey-Noble, Sony Khemlani-Patel, and Fugen Neziroglu. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, 2006.



“The Contagion Factor”

Sometimes adolescents cut themselves because they see family members, friends, or characters in the media doing it. Just like drug use and sexual activity can be influenced by friends, so can self-harming behavior. One study suggested that as many as 14% of adolescents engage in self-mutilative behavior. Don’t give into peer pressure—take care of yourself and your body.