

## **SELF-INJURY: EXPLAINING CUTTING AND OTHER BEHAVIORS!**

*I hurt myself today to see if I still feel...I focus on the pain the only thing that's real  
the needle tears a hole the old familiar sting...try to kill it all away but I remember everything  
...Nine Inch Nails*

### **WHAT TO KNOW!**

- ❖ Self-injurious behaviors (SI) are those behaviors that people purposefully engage in to cause themselves bodily harm
- ❖ Common forms of self-harm include cutting, burning, biting, hitting, branding, pulling hair out, skin picking, poisoning, and self-embedding objects
- ❖ About 2 million people in the U.S. injure themselves intentionally but this is probably an underestimation as people often don't tell they self-harm
- ❖ While it is commonly thought that mostly girls self-injure, 30-40% are males
- ❖ Some people who self-harm do so to distract themselves from their emotional pain and end feelings of numbness through feeling physical pain
- ❖ Most self-harmers never developed ways to appropriately feel and express their emotions and never learned effective coping mechanisms to deal with distress
- ❖ Self-injury is often used as a coping mechanism to relive emotional pain rather than as a suicidal gesture although sometimes death does occur
- ❖ Self-damage is not usually used to get attention; rather, people who self-injure conceal and hide their wounds behind their clothing or in non-visible parts of their bodies
- ❖ Some people who feel powerless can feel a sense of control and power over their lives through hurting themselves
- ❖ Self-injury can also allow some people to express feelings they cannot express directly
- ❖ Some people who self-injure believe they deserve to be punished or their actions will avoid worse punishment from someone else
- ❖ Since self-injury can provide a release from strong emotions, it may become a conditioned pattern of behavior when strong emotions are generated
- ❖ Self-harm can also release endorphins which are natural pain killers; the good feelings from the endorphins thus serve to reinforce the self harm behaviors
- ❖ Many self-injurers inflict harm ritualistically by having special procedures and places where they will be alone, arranging their environment by using candles and music, and using a very specific razor in a very specific way
- ❖ Often self-injurers feel shame about their behaviors and keep them secret which only serves to isolate them from others and reinforces the self injurious behaviors

### **WHAT TO DO!**

- ❖ Understand that the person who self-harms is trying to express emotions and have some power and control in their lives
- ❖ Encourage them not to isolate and to verbally express their feelings of anger
- ❖ Remove any objects that can be used to harm oneself from the self-injurer
- ❖ Encourage engagement in feeling activities such as taking a very cold shower, eating something with a sharp taste, getting a massage, etc.
- ❖ Alternate behaviors such as keeping busy, journal writing, exercising, and socializing can be quite helpful when the self-injurer has the impulse to hurt themselves
- ❖ Antidepressant medications and cognitive behavioral psychotherapy where coping mechanisms can be taught can be quite helpful to the self-injurer
- ❖ Seek professional help if the self-injurer is unable to stop harming themselves

## **WE CAN HELP!**

Call us at **954 755-2885** or email us at **DrKimmel@aol.com**.

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