

Helping Hand

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Self-Inflicted Violence

Self-Inflicted Violence, or SIV for short, is the intentional injuring of one's body as a means of coping with severe emotional and/or psychic stressors. SIV is an effective coping tool for some people; inflicting pain on themselves helps them to cancel out other pain or trauma in their lives. While cutting is the most prevalent form of SIV, there are many others, such as burning, punching, or picking at one's skin or nails. Typically, females engage in this behavior more often than males.

According to experts, SIV should not be interpreted as a suicide attempt but as a coping mechanism. People who self-injure often say that knowing they can use self-injury to manage intense feelings is the only thing that keeps them from suicide. Some mental health professionals now recognize that focusing on the elimination of SIV at all costs is actually harmful and may even increase suicidal thinking or attempts.

People heal from SIV in various ways. Some focus their energies on eliminating SIV from their lives, others find that the need for SIV diminishes as they heal from the traumatic experiences they have survived.

The trauma that leads to self-injury may include profound emotional pain and shame, disconnection from one's own body, the environment, and other people. The first step to healing is to confront past trauma. People who use SIV are often helped significantly by talking with others who themselves have healed from the need for SIV. Just knowing that others have gotten past the need creates hope for a life without self-injury.

NOT SURE WHAT TO LOOK FOR?

Signs that someone is injuring themselves:

- **unexplained frequent injury incl. cuts/burns**
- **wearing long pants/sleeves in warm weather**
- **low self-esteem**
- **difficulty handling feelings**
- **relationship problems**
- **poor functioning at work, school or home**

Parents and Homework: When Is It Too Much Help?

As parents, we all want to see our children succeed in school. While it's important to teach children good study habits, it is just as important to teach children responsibility and independence.

Here are a few signs that you may be doing more than you should on your child's assignments:

- You complete difficult problems for your child or don't allow your child to work out the problem on their own.
- You do Internet/library research for your child's project.
- You type up their papers for them and correct the assignment as you go.
- If your child has a special project due like a diorama or poster project, you do most of the work.
- You decide the topic for your child's project instead of letting them pick out their own topic.

Battling Stress at Work and Home

Stress can arise from a variety of sources. It's hard to stay calm and relaxed in our hectic lives if we have many roles: spouse, parent, caregiver, friend, and worker. Stress takes on different forms, and contributes to symptoms of illness.

Common symptoms include:

- headache
- sleep disorders
- difficulty concentrating
- short-temper, upset stomach,
- job dissatisfaction, low morale, depression, and anxiety.

TIPS TO HANDLE STRESS

LISTEN TO YOUR BODY, SO YOU KNOW WHEN STRESS IS AFFECTING YOUR HEALTH.

- **Make time for yourself**
- **Get enough sleep**
- **Eat right and get exercise**
- **Talk to friends**
- **Get help from a professional if you need it**
- **Compromise**
- **Write down your thoughts**

- **Help others**
- **Get a hobby**
- **Set limits**
- **Plan your time**

DON'T DEAL WITH STRESS IN UNHEALTHY WAYS

Using Alcohol/Tobacco/Other Drugs • Over-Eating • Gambling

Counseling Helps Children of Divorce

Most children of divorced parents in the United States (40% of all children) adjust well to their parents' split. But 20-25% of children have trouble dealing with their parents' divorce. Many of the problems these children have can last into their adult years. Researchers at the University of Arizona tried to find out whether post-divorce counseling for children helped prevent some negative outcomes of divorce: conduct problems, dropping out of school, substance use, high-risk sexual behaviors, and depression during the teen years.

According to the researchers, teens who received counseling as children were more likely than those with no counseling to avoid mental health problems. Surveys revealed that 23.5% of the teens who had no counseling or other help had mental health problems, compared with 11% of the teens who had been in the programs. Researchers also found that counseling in childhood reduced marijuana, alcohol, and other illegal drug use and number of sexual partners during the teen years.

Teens whose mothers had post-divorce counseling also fared better than teens whose mothers had not. Teens whose mothers took part in the counseling program—even when the teens received no counseling—had fewer symptoms of mental health problems and lower rates of alcohol, marijuana, and other illegal drug use.

To learn more about counseling programs in your area, talk to your school counselor or family doctor.

Help Prevent Suicide: Know the Warning Signs

Most youths who attempt suicide show some warning signs beforehand. Look for signs of substance abuse or depression and get professional help for the child if s/he needs it.

Some other possible signals of suicide:

- Talks, writes, or otherwise expresses a preoccupation with suicide or death in general.
- Complains of being a bad person or being "rotten inside."
- Gives verbal hints such as, "I'd be better off dead," "I won't be a problem for you much longer," "Nothing matters," "It's no use," "I won't see you again."

- Withdraws from friends or family.
- Significantly changes eating, sleeping, or appearance habits.
- Experiences sudden drop in academic performance.
- Puts affairs in order; for example, gives away toys, cleans room, or throws away important belongings.
- Acts in rash/hostile/irrational ways; expresses rage.
- Feels overwhelmingly hopeless, guilty, or ashamed.
- Shows little interest in favorite activities or future.
- Becomes suddenly cheerful after a period of depression (perhaps feeling “solution” to problems has been found).
- A suicide of a schoolmate, friend, or even a celebrity receiving media coverage can encourage suicidal impulses in your child. Suicides sometimes occur in clusters, in which one suicide influences other people already at risk for suicide.

If your child or a child you know seems constantly depressed, angry, or withdrawn, pay attention and encourage communication. If you are worried that he’s thinking about hurting or killing himself, ask, even though it may be difficult. Rather than putting dangerous thoughts into his head, asking shows him that you care and that he is not alone. **If you are concerned about any child’s safety, do not leave him alone.**

Take any suicide attempt seriously. If your child or someone you know is thinking about suicide, call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) to find a crisis center in your area.

Dealing with a Type-1 Diabetes Diagnosis at School

You just found out your child has Type-I Diabetes. Wondering how it will affect their school life? As parent or guardian, it is important that you are proactive about the situation and effectively make teachers and staff aware of your child’s special needs.

The most important thing to do is contact the school about your child’s diagnosis. Speak to the principal, any teacher the child will have, the gym, P.E. or coaching staff, school nurse, and cafeteria manager.

After you’ve spoken with the school, you should have a clearer idea of what you need to do to prepare your child for their day-to-day activities. Many parents prepare snack and supply “kits” for the school staff.

An ongoing, open relationship between you, your child, and the school is vital to your child’s well being throughout the year. Do everything you can to create the best possible environment for your child.

How Does Alcohol Damage the Brain?

Difficulty walking, blurred vision, slurred speech, slowed reaction times, impaired memory: clearly, alcohol affects the brain. Some of these impairments are detectable after only one or two drinks and quickly resolve when drinking stops. On the other hand, a person who drinks heavily over a long period of time may have brain deficits that

persist well after he or she achieves sobriety. Exactly how alcohol affects the brain and the likelihood of reversing the impact of heavy drinking on the brain remain hot topics in alcohol research today.

We do know that heavy drinking may have extensive and far-reaching effects on the brain, ranging from simple “slips” in memory to permanent and debilitating conditions that require lifetime custodial care. And even moderate drinking leads to short-term impairment, as shown by extensive research on the impact of drinking on driving.

One of the best tools we have to stop alcohol abuse is prevention. It is especially important to talk to teens about drinking as graduation time approaches. A teenager’s brain is still developing and it is very sensitive to alcohol’s effects on judgment and decision-making. If your graduates drink, they may temporarily feel elated and happy, but they should not be fooled. Ask them to consider these risks:

- Their inhibitions and memory soon become affected—so they may say and do things that they will regret and possibly will not remember doing at all.
- Their decision-making skills are also affected. They may become restless and aggressive. They may be more at risk for having an alcohol-related traffic crash, getting into fights, trashing a house, or making unwise decisions about sex.
- Then there is what happens to their physical control—loss of balance, slurred speech, and blurred vision. Normal activities—even crossing a busy intersection—can become truly dangerous.

Research shows that parents do make a difference. Talking with your graduate about alcohol now could prevent serious problems later. Tell your graduate to play it safe and party right at graduation.

For more information regarding these or other topics, contact:

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