

Children and self-harm



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A new study reveals that young people are influenced to an alarming degree by videos they watch on the Internet. This can include videos of other teens in the act of injuring or harming themselves. According to *MedPage Today*, most such videos lack warnings or viewing restrictions, making them popular among young adults and teens. Researchers worry that such videos may encourage copycat behavior of self-harm in children.

It is important for parents to be aware that some adolescents try to harm themselves due to emotional issues. This self-injuring behavior may include cutting, severe scratching, mutilating the skin with sharp objects, biting, poisoning, and more, and it occurs among 14 to 21 percent of children, teens, and young adults. Apart from the power of videos to sway their behavior, self-harm in children and young adults is linked to low self-esteem and depression, as well as other emotional health issues, such as bipolar disorder and obsessive-compulsive behavior.

Spotting the Warning Signs of Self-Harm in Your Child

Children and teenagers who hurt themselves do so in secrecy, which is often the main indication that something is wrong. While it is normal among adolescents to pull away from parents when they are highly involved with friends or experiencing pressure, it is not normal for them to be physically and emotionally withdrawn for long periods of time. Though self-harming behavior can be dangerous, the actions do not include suicidal thoughts or attempts to end life.

What are the red flags of self-injuring behavior? Could your child be doing this without you knowing? As a parent, it is important to know the following signs that your child may be self-injuring:

- Unexplained cuts or burn marks on different parts of the body, particularly on the arms, legs, and abdomen
- Presence of sharp objects, such as razors, blades, and knives, in your child's possession
- Prolonged periods of withdrawal or isolation, particularly in the bathroom or bedroom
- Changes in eating habits, such as deliberate self-starvation or binge eating
- Excessive exercising
- Wearing inappropriate clothing for the weather with the intention to hide the body marks
- Unhygienic practices, such as refusal to bathe or brush teeth

Common Reasons Why Children Self-Harm

It is estimated that around 10 percent of young people harm themselves at some point. Knowing the signs can help you understand the underlying origins and allow you to respond better.

Self-harm in children is often an attempt to manage overwhelming emotional issues caused by the following:

- *Social problems* -may include bullying, academic difficulties, relationship conflicts with family or friends, sexual disorientation, cultural adjustments, etc.

- *Traumatic experiences* -may be in the form of physical or sexual abuse, death of a loved one, or a violent event such as an accident or an act of terrorism.
- *Emotional causes* -such as dissociative disorder, borderline personality disorder, or schizophrenia.

These issues can cause intense feelings of anger, hopelessness, guilt, and self-hatred. If not addressed properly, the emotions can build up, triggering possible self-harm to release the pent-up feelings.

Discovering Your Child Is Self-Injuring

Learning that your child is engaging in self-harming behavior can be scary. Your initial reaction may be shock that your child is intentionally hurting himself or herself. You may also deny the behavior, as your memory conjures the image of a happy child, until the realization hits you that your child is in emotional distress.

It's a valid feeling to be angry or frustrated with the fact that your child has lied or hid the truth from you. You may feel guilty for not noticing the change in your child's behavior or for disregarding it as part of the growing process. At the end of the day, you may try to grasp how your child feels to help you understand his or her condition better. Finally, you may blame yourself if you think you have not offered enough love and attention to your child.

Help Is Available

The good news is that self-harm can be treated with professional intervention. Resolving self-harm in children doesn't require hospitalization

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unless the conduct is so severe it endangers life. Self-harm is generally not a sign of suicidal intent, but a struggle to overcome emotional pain; thus, it takes counseling to treat self-harming behavior issues in children.

Take the first step toward seeking help for your child at Carolina Counseling Services in Pittsboro, NC. One of the independently contracted counselors at CCS is the right-fit therapist to evaluate and help discover the root cause of your child's condition. Getting early help can be invaluable for your child to get over self-harm and get better. Call now to request an appointment.