



## Cutting an Addiction

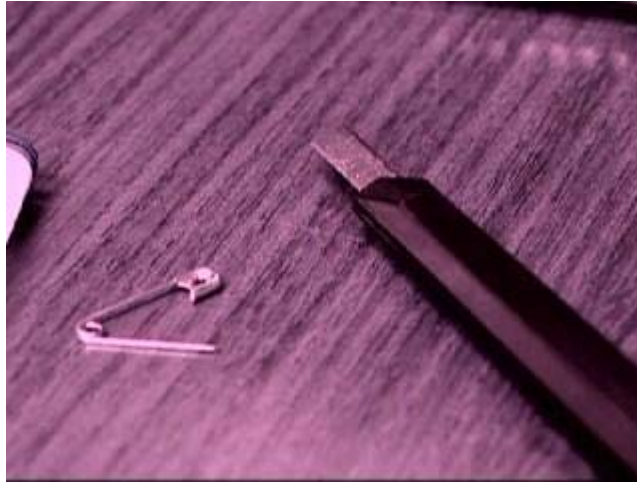
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It used to be something we heard about only in the movies: Self injury or SI. It's also known as self-abuse, self-mutilation, deliberate self-harm, is becoming much more prevalent in today's society.

According to recent research, 17 to 20 percent of high school and college students are intentionally harming themselves. A large percentage of them never talk about it.

25 year old "Jane" as we will call her, speaks with us about her lifelong struggle for the very first time.



*Cutting an addiction*

"I have always been punishing myself."

The last time Jane hurt herself was just a week ago, with a razor.

"I cut myself, burn myself, pull out my hair, I get angry and get frustrated, I will pull cups of my own hair. I have tried to break my own bones. It is really embarrassing to admit, I have bruised myself."

Self harmers inflict pain in a variety of ways, for various reasons.

"Sometimes I do it to punish myself. Sometimes I do it just to express or communicate with myself what I am feeling, whether it be a good feeling or a bad feeling. Sometimes I do it to cope with that I am going through. It's not always necessarily a bad thing. I can be I just got an A on a test. It can be really stressed out, because I got into an argument with a friend."

Understanding SI is tough, even the medical community has a hard time grasping the idea of causing injury without trying to commit suicide.

Tiffany Brown at the Center for Addiction and Recovery on the campus of Texas Tech says there is a misconception of this issue.

"It's this misconception that it's a personality disorder, or people think it's suicide related," says Brown. "And so for those who are self harming, it's not about wanting to kill themselves, it's not about wanting to kill themselves, it's not about wanting to die."

Individual triggers vary, but it boils down to not being able to express emotion.

Jane says, "I am making sure the emotion real and concrete to myself, because it's all trapped inside my head, but it's ok I am frustrated and I'm mad and well now there's blood on my arm now, there's a mark on my leg, or now there's hair in my hands. I have a physical representation of some abstract term. It makes it concrete and so much easier to deal with the concrete than it is the imaginary."

Many times self harmers experienced trauma during their childhood. Many were shamed for simply expressing emotion. Now they feel the only way to deal with emotional pain is through physical pain.

"I'm afraid to go to the doctor when I am sick, because accidentally, if by chance I have cut myself the week before or if I bruised myself I will avoid going to the doctor because they are

going to see something if they see something they are going to lock me up," says Jane. "There is so much fear involved."

Jane won't go out in public without completely covering up. Her social life is almost non-existent.

"I avoid going out a lot during the summer, I avoid the pool, I avoid a lot of social situations."

Seeking the right kind of help is the first step in the recovery process. A step that takes a lot of courage, says Brown.

"It is definitely a reprogramming, on the level of doing things differently," says Brown. "And so for someone who is triggered and has that urge they have to reach out and use different resources and different coping mechanisms."

And learn healthy ways of self expression.

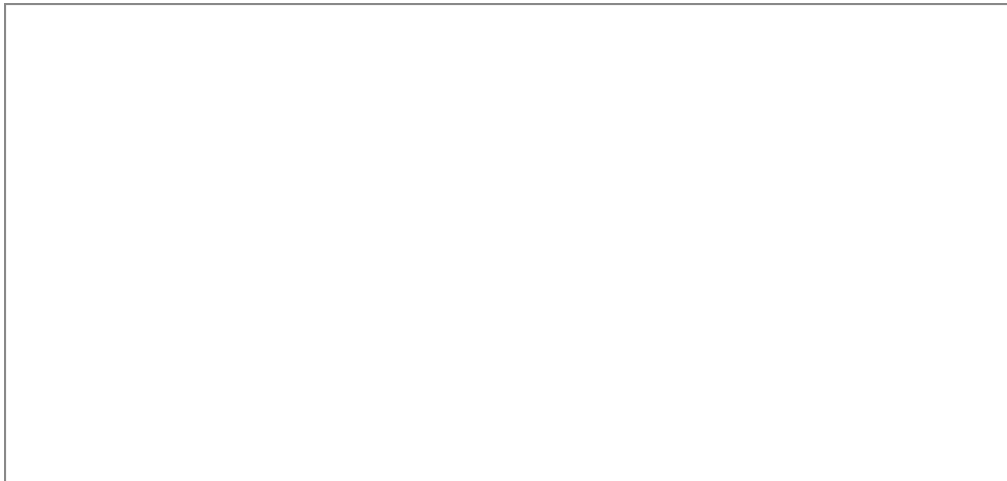
"Really learning how to speak about what's happening inside," says Brown. "To truly get to a place where they feel safe, and they feel comforted and they can be taken care of."

Sadly, SI is becoming a common coping strategy for young adults. Brown warns as with any other "addiction", SI can progress to the point of no return.

"For drugs and alcohol, there is a tolerance that comes with it you know," adds Brown. "That they can drink so much and they need more to get that same affect, or more drugs. I think it's the same for someone who self harms. The type of cut where they cut and how deep they cut. And their tolerance for that increases over time. So it can be fatal."

If you or someone you know struggles with self injury, you can contact the center for the Study of Addiction and recovery at (806) 742-2891.

Since the interview, Jane decided to seek help. She has found a place called Safe Alternatives, located at the University of Behavioral Health, in Denton.



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