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## Could my teen be a cutter?

### Teens And Self-Injury

- Posted on May 16, 2011 2:01 PM by Tieman McKay
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Cutting, a form of self-injury, is a disturbing trend among teens that often takes parents by surprise. Like many behavioral issues, it is often a sign of a deeper problem and, as such, should be taken seriously. What causes a teen to be a cutter and how do we deal with it as a parent?

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Cutting has definitely moved to the forefront of **parental issues** in recent years, especially given the rash of alleged **celebrity cutters**. Dr. Wendy Lader, President and Clinical Director of S.A.F.E. Alternatives sheds some light on this taboo issue.

### Trying to cope

Few would argue the fact that the **teenage** years are trying. Between raging hormones, academic pressures and the challenge of finding a place in the world, some kids become overwhelmed. "Essentially, cutting, like all forms of self-injury is a coping strategy to deal with intense emotions," says Dr. Lader. "When someone is experiencing an intense emotional state such as anger or sadness, self-injury serves as an immediate way to calm; much like using a drug."

### A portrait

While it is difficult to pick a cutter out of a crowd, there are some characteristics that predispose some teens to self-injure. "People who experience emotions acutely, and have a difficult time expressing them directly in words are most vulnerable," says Dr. Lader. "Those who are perfectionists, who believe they should be able to handle everything themselves, are also vulnerable. Kids who have a history of trauma and loss -- such as divorce or abuse -- are especially at risk." Girls are also more likely to cut than boys.

### The signs

As a parent, how to know if your teen is a cutter? Dr. Lader suggests you look for the following signs:

- Unexplained cuts or bruising
- Wearing long sleeves or pants in warm weather
- Bloody tissues in bathroom or bedroom
- Finding sharp implements in their room or backpack

### Communicate

If you are worried about your child injuring herself, you are probably even more worried about **approaching** her about your concerns. Don't be. "**Honest dialogue** is always okay," says Dr. Lader. "Try not to be judgmental. Instead, express caring, and let her know that she can come to you with any problem that she may face." Look at your concerns as an opportunity to improve upon a precarious situation. "If a parent pays attention to the signs and responds by **seeking help and support for their child**, the prognosis can be excellent," says Dr. Lader.

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