

March is  
Self-Injury  
Awareness  
Month



**TEXT 'Home' to 741741 to reach a Crisis Counselor**

free, 24/7 national text line

To become a volunteer, see <https://www.crisistextline.org/>

## Self Injury (definition)

**Self-injury is any deliberate, non-suicidal behavior that inflicts physical harm on your body and is aimed at relieving emotional distress.**

- It is about emotional control.
- Physical pain is often easier to deal with than emotional pain because it causes 'real' feelings.
- Injuries can prove to an individual that their emotional pain is real and valid.
- Self-injurious behavior may calm or awaken a person (they believe).
  - ❖ Yet self-injury only provides temporary relief, it does not deal with the underlying issues.
  - ❖ Self-injury can become a natural response to the stresses of day-to-day life and can escalate in frequency and severity.

- Self-Injury is
- About emotion control
  - May become an addiction if not treated
  - May become a sense of identity; something someone identifies with.



- Self-Injury is NOT
- A failed suicide attempt
  - A group activity
  - Attention seeking
  - Decorative...tattooing, piercing, scarring, or anything done of spiritual enlightenment, not done to be cool or for acceptance

First emerges about age 14 (average age);  
if left untreated, it is generally gone by age 28 or 29

## Prevalence

- Three million Americans engage in some form of self-injury
- Most report childhoods of neglect or abuse
  - ↳ Self-injuring individuals were often raised in families that discouraged expression of anger and tend to lack skills to express their emotions.
- Self-injury is prevalent across all ethnicities and economic backgrounds
- 20% of all teenagers have self-injured
  - ↳ Of those who self-injure – 60% female, 40% male
    - ↳ less than 18% of them have sought help while engaged in the behavior.
- Many self-injurers have co-existing problems of substance abuse, obsessive-compulsive disorder (or compulsive alone), or eating disorders.



## What research shows

- Most people who self-injure tend to be **perfectionists**, are unable to handle intense feelings, are unable to express their emotions verbally, have dislike for themselves and their bodies, and can experience severe mood swings. *They may turn to self-injury as a way to express their feelings and emotions, or as a way to punish themselves.*
- A study by Favazza and Conterio (1989) states that *repetitive self-mutilation is frequently seen in conjunction with, or as a replacement for, eating disorders.*
  - ↪ In a study of 290 self-mutilating women, they found that 22% of the subjects suffered from only bulimia nervosa, 15% from anorexia nervosa and 13% from both disorders, for a total of 50%. Among these subjects, the average age when the eating disorder first became evident was 16 years.



# Why do people Self Injure?

Even though there is the possibility that a self-inflicted injury may result in life-threatening damage, self-injury is not suicidal behavior. Although the person may not recognize the connection, **SI usually occurs when facing what seems like overwhelming or distressing feelings.**

The reasons self-injurers give for this behavior vary:

**Some people rely on Self-Injury as a coping mechanism!**

1. self-injury temporarily relieves intense feelings, pressure or anxiety
2. self-injury provides a sense of being real, being alive – of feeling something
3. injuring oneself is a way to externalize emotional internal pain – to feel pain on the outside instead of the inside
4. self-injury is a way to control and manage pain – unlike the pain experienced through physical or sexual abuse
5. self-injury is a way to break emotional numbness (the self-anesthesia that allows someone to cut without feeling pain)
6. self-abuse is self-soothing behavior for someone who does not have other means to calm intense emotions
7. self-loathing – some self-injurers are punishing themselves for having strong feelings (which they were usually not allowed to express as children), or for a sense that somehow they are bad and undeserving (an outgrowth of abuse and a belief that it was deserved)
8. self-injury followed by tending to wounds is a way to express self-care, to be self-nurturing, for someone who never learned how to do that in a more direct way
9. harming oneself can be a way to draw attention to the need for help, to ask for assistance in an indirect way
10. sometimes self-injury is an attempt to affect others – to manipulate them, make them feel guilty or bad, make them care, or make them go away

Some other reasons teens give for self-injuring or self-mutilating include:

1. Not knowing how to deal with stress
2. An unresolved history of abuse
3. Low self esteem
4. Feelings of loneliness or fear
5. A need to feel in control
6. Mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, or obsessive-compulsive disorder
7. Wanting to get the attention of people who can help them
8. Peer pressure/curiosity

## How to deal with Self-Injurious feelings in a healthy way

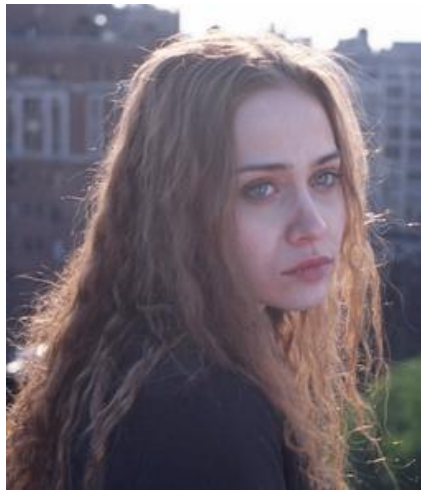
1. deep breathing and relaxation techniques
2. call a friend, your therapist or a crisis line
3. try not to be alone (visit a friend, go shopping, etc.)
4. take a hot bath
5. listen to music , go for a walk or write in a journal
6. take up a sport (a form of exercise can help you release tension, etc.)
7. wear an elastic around wrist and snap it when you have the urge to harm yourself
8. some people find it helpful to draw red lines on themselves with washable markers instead of cutting themselves
9. hold ice cubes in your hands - the cold causes pain in your hands, but it is not dangerous or harmful (some people find it relieves the urge to harm themselves for that moment)

## Temporary coping if a physical expression is needed

10. punching a bed or a pillow (when nothing but a physical outlet for your anger and frustration will work).
11. scratch draw a picture on a thick piece of wood or use a screw driver and stab at the piece of wood. (It's a physical way to release your emotions without harming yourself.)
12. break the object that you use to self-injure as a way to show that you have control over it.



# Famous Self-Injurers



Fiona Apple  
Singer/Songwriter  
Raped at age 12. Self-loathing  
Eating disorder, felt misunderstood  
by media. Started cutting herself  
at first negative review of album 'Tidal'

Johnny Depp  
Actor  
'21 Jump Street' 'Pirates...'  
Insecure as teenager, to LA

Colin Farrell  
Actor  
'Minority Report' 'Harry Potter'

Angelina Jolie  
Actress

Christina Ricci  
Actress – 'Casper', 'Addams Family'  
'Sleepy Hollow'



Princess Diana

Miley Cyrus

Kelly Holmes  
Olympic gold medalist for England in 2004 (800m, 1500m)  
anxiety, depression, insecurity and low self-esteem linked to body image