

HEALTH, BEAUTY & FITNESS

Youths who harm themselves

Cutting is a symptom of emotional issues

Teenagers who do not feel good about themselves may use some distressing ways to handle their feelings. One of those ways is self-injury or cutting behaviours.

For a small percentage of teens, cutting is a way to cope with emotional tension or pain.

It is not uncommon for these teens to cut themselves repeatedly with razor blades or pieces of glass leaving rows of scars on their skin. Cutting frightens parents and their loved ones, causing them to sometimes feel helpless.

Most teens, who cut themselves are not trying to end their lives. It is usually an attempt to feel better. Dr. Elizabeth Baerg Hall, an adolescent psychiatrist at the Mood and

Anxiety Disorders Clinic of B.C. Children's Hospital describes cutting as "faulty problem solving". This behaviour can become a difficult habit to break. When a teen cuts and feels pain, the body releases natural painkillers called endorphins. Endorphins make a person feel calm. This phenomenon can become addictive. It may take years for this behaviour to stop, because the person experiences difficulty controlling their impulses and they enjoy the sensation that the endorphins provide.

Occasionally, cutting may be a symptom of anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems. Some teens who cut report that the physical pain associated with cutting is easier to cope with than the emotional pain that they are experiencing. Even though cutting often leads to scarring, it is not always a deterrent for this behaviour.

It is important for a teen that cuts to practice healthier ways of dealing with troubles instead of cutting. Dealing with cutting behaviour can start by letting someone your teen trusts know about their distress. Identifying the troubles that trigger the cutting behaviour is also helpful. Triggers can include anger, perfectionism, relationship trouble, loss or trauma, bullying, and abuse. Mental health professionals can be helpful in identifying

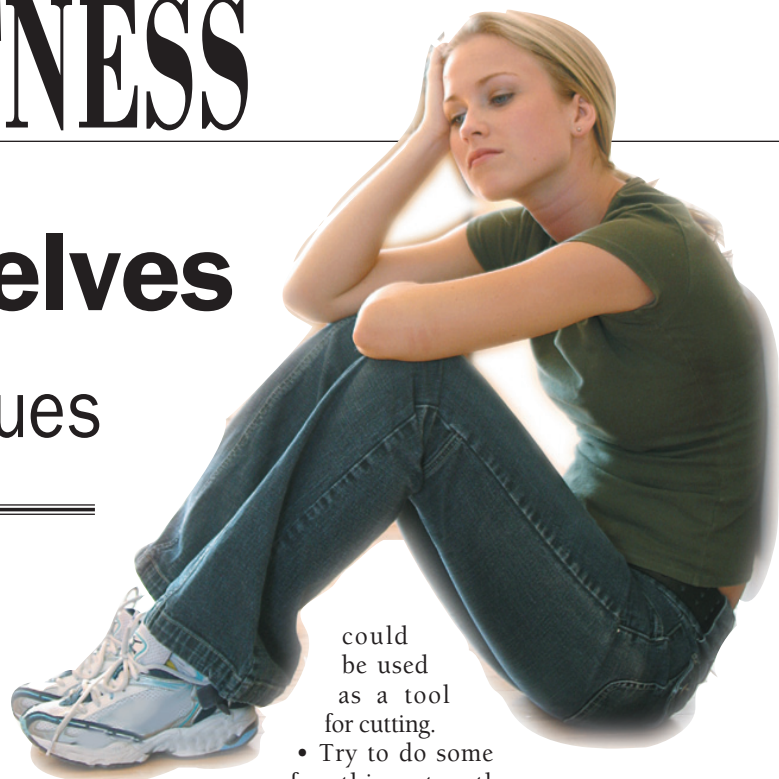


HealthNotes

these issues and providing further help.

As a parent you can:

- Be a good role model.
- Provide your teen with access to professional support if they are receptive to it, for example, counselling or seeing their doctor.
- Help your teen identify which feelings/troubles may trigger the cutting and help them to build strategies that can replace the cutting behaviour.
- Accept your child even though you do not accept their behavior.
- Let your child know how much you love them.
- Understand that this is their way of coping with the intense pain that they feel inside.
- Encourage healthier methods of coping by allowing them to brainstorm other methods than hurting themselves.
- Keep communication open by talking about things that interest them even if they don't interest you.
- Allow them to share what they're feeling deep inside either with words (journaling) or in art (drawing, painting, creating, or any other way they can communicate their feelings).
- Make your home a "safe place" by removing anything that



could be used as a tool for cutting.

- Try to do some fun things together.

Although they may complain at first, your child really does want to spend time with you.

- Discover what their personal strengths are and encourage them to use those strengths during difficult times.
- Help your child to get involved in an area of interest.

In addition to the Health Department, there are other community resources that parents and their teens can access.

- Family doctors
- School services - social workers, child and youth counselors or chaplains
- Halton Child and Youth Services 905-634-2347
- Teen Crisis Line 905-878-9785
- Halton Trauma Centre 905-825-3242
- Alcohol & Drug Addiction Program (ADAPT) 905-639-6537
- Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Services (SAVIS) 905-875-1555
- Halton Healthcare Services, Georgetown 905-873-0111

For more information call the Halton Region Health Department, 1-866-4HALTON (1-866-442-5866), TTY 905-827-9833, or visit www.halton.ca.

Health Notes is prepared by staff of the Halton Region Health Department.

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Yoga with SHERRY LAWSON
Terra Cotta Community Centre
High Street, Terra Cotta
Starts Monday, April 17th, 2006
and ends Monday, June 26th, 2006

*Monday	7:30- 9:00 pm	- 10 wks
Tuesday Meditation	9:15- 9:55 am	- 10 wks
Tuesday	10:00-11:30 am	- 10 wks
Tuesday	7:30- 9:00 pm	- 10 wks
Wednesday	7:30- 9:00 pm	- 10 wks

*There will be no class Monday, May 22nd (Victoria Day Weekend)

Rampulla's Martial Arts
211 Armstrong Ave. (at Sinclair)
Starts Tuesday, April 18th, 2006
and ends Friday, June 23rd, 2006

Tuesday	1:00- 2:30 pm	- 10 wks
Thursday	10:00-11:30 am	- 10 wks
Thursday	Moms and Babes	
	1:00- 2:15 pm	- 6 wks
Thursday	7:45- 9:15 pm	- 10 wks
*Friday	7:30- 9:00 pm	- 9 wks

*There will be no class Friday, May 19th (Victoria Day Weekend)

For details and registration call: **519-833-9402**

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