

# SELF-HARM



## **A Guide for Youth, Families, Educators, Human Service Workers**

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**MS ESE, MA CMHC, QPPE, PhD Candidate**

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Service Workers

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## Dedication

This book is dedicated to the precious and brave friends, family, students, and clients who showed me, through their personal experience, how to understand, recognize, respond, and have compassion for individuals who engage in self-harming, also sometimes referred to as self-mutilation.

## Introduction



Self-harming is a widespread problem in our fast-paced and ever-changing society. Many young individuals grapple with emotional, social, and psychological challenges that can seem too heavy to bear. Those who care about a person who self-harms search frantically to find reasons for, and make sense of, this self-destructive behavior. Youth who engage in self-harm struggle to feel peace, happiness, and acceptance in a complex and painful world. Most importantly, they are looking for help!

Perhaps you feel or have felt the urge to harm yourself; or maybe you have a child, friend, or student who self-harms. This can feel devastating, and you may feel lost and need help navigating through the frustrating and complex situation. You

## Myths and Truths About Self-Harm



**Being truthful with oneself and professionals is crucial on the path to healing and recovery.**

**MYTH:** *Young people self-harm to lash out at, get back at, or seek revenge on others.*

**TRUTH:** Self-harming uses nonproductive and dangerous behaviors as coping mechanisms to deal with perceived overwhelming life challenges, stress, and emotional pain. These youth need support and professional guidance to develop effective and mature alternatives for managing and responding to personal struggles.

**MYTH:** *Self-harming is a way for young people to get attention and manipulate others.*

**TRUTH:** Most young people who self-harm are secretive about self-harming behavior. Youth who cut, for example, may wear long sleeves or long pants (even in summer) to hide self-inflicted wounds. Self-harming behaviors, including self-mutilation and eating disorders, are typically associated with deep shame and intense emotional and psychological suffering. Please respond to self-harming behavior in a respectful way that recognizes the deep pain of the young person and focuses on getting professional support to work toward recovery.

**MYTH:** *Self-harming is a form of intentional misbehavior.*

**TRUTH:** Self-harming is a serious emotional and behavioral problem; it is not a form of disobedience. Young people who self-harm are responding to inner challenges and pain that they are otherwise unable to handle. These individuals require professional support to resolve inner conflict, develop effective life coping skills, and establish healthy behaviors that support their mental and physical health and wellbeing.



**MYTH:** *Young people who self-harm just need stricter parenting and more discipline.*

**TRUTH:** Stricter parenting is neither a recognized treatment nor solution for self-harming. When parents of youth who self-harm adopt a more stringent approach to discipline, they face the risk of aggravating the underlying problem that initially led to the self-harming. Self-harming is a serious problem that requires professional care; parents can support the healing process, but no amount of strict parenting is going to replace professional treatment of self-harming behaviors.

## References & Valuable Resources

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[www.selfinjury.bctr.cornell.edu/perch/resources/what-is-self-injury-9.pdf](http://www.selfinjury.bctr.cornell.edu/perch/resources/what-is-self-injury-9.pdf)

## Non-Internet Resources

If you do not have access to the Internet, you have options:

- Dial 911 for emergency services.
- Call your local police department.
- Contact the United Way by dialing 211. If 211 does not work in your area, call United Way's national phone line directly at (703) 836-7112.
- Call Lifeline Crisis Chat, which is a national coalition of crisis outreach and intervention agencies and providers, by calling 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Additional non-internet resources for mental health support include:

- Your family physician, the young person's pediatrician, or primary care provider
- A community mental health center
- Local hospitals and emergency rooms
- Your health insurance company, which may have a list of mental health providers covered by your insurance plan

## About the Author



### [Darleen Claire Wodzinski](#)

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### **Uplifting Lives by Counseling, Educating and Caring!**

She specializes in promoting healing, growth, and development for individuals who experienced a disruption or interruption of attachment development. A national presenter, Clinical Mental Health Counselor, Exceptional (Special) Educator, and Parent and Teacher Trainer, her work represents a unique blending of the areas of psychology, brain-based learning, and human development.

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