

Self-Hurting Teens TEACHER'S GUIDE

What teachers need to know:

"Cutting" is a form of self-injury. People who cut make scratches and cuts on their body with a sharp object such as a knife or razor blade. The most common areas exposed to cutting are a person's arms, legs, wrists and belly. Other forms of self-injury include burning the skin with cigarettes or matches; biting, and bruising. Psychotherapist Steven Levenkron has found:

- 18% of high school students reported hurting themselves on purpose (self-injury).
- 85% of all cutters started in high school, with the other 15% starting after age 20.
- 38% of all cutters had a history of being sexual abused.

Most self-injurers share common personal issues: an inability to express feelings; inability to deal with stress in healthy ways; depression. Cutting usually starts as an impulsive reaction to emotional stress, but can often become a habit. Many self-injurers say they hurt themselves in order to release pain, or to make themselves "feel something."

Lesson Plan

NOTE: *Self-Hurt* covers a very sensitive topic and contains specific information about self-destructive behaviors including cutting and suicide. CWK Network recommends that the program and accompanying resource materials be carefully screened by an adult prior to use, and that students who view the program have a back-up system of support through trained counselors and/or school psychologists.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Identify common feelings of adolescence
- List positive AND negative ways of dealing with and expressing feelings

Materials:

- Black/white board; paper, pens/pencils

Project and Purpose:

Students will identify common adolescent feelings and brainstorm positive and negative ways to deal with those feelings.

1. Have students discuss and list on the board the feelings expressed by the teenagers in the video. The list should include but is not limited to: anger, disappointment, rejection, sadness, frustration, loneliness, and feeling unloved.
2. Create three columns on the board to lead a class discussion about the feelings listed on the board. Label column one: Positive Ways to Deal with This Feeling; label the middle column: Specific Feeling; label the third column: Negative Ways to Deal with This Feeling. Write one of the feelings in the middle column, along with a brief description of the situation or events that caused the teenager in the video to feel that way.
3. Ask the class: *We all watched how one of the teenagers in the video dealt with this emotion and situation. You may have experienced the same feeling yourself at some time – or may know someone who has. We have a choice about how we deal with (feeling), and our choices usually have positive or negative outcomes. Let's identify various positive and negative reactions.* Work with the class to identify how a teenager might react negatively (self injury, fist fight, break things, become withdrawn or angry, etc.) and positively (become motivated to change, grow more confident, draw closer to true friends, etc.) to the identified feeling.
4. Break the class into groups of four students each; have each group copy the columns from the board on a piece of paper, and ask each group to repeat the process for at least three feelings. Give the groups 15 minutes to discuss and record their ideas.
5. Take your remaining class time or another class session to allow a representative from each group to share their work. Allow time for class discussion.
6. To close this lesson, you might ask: *What do these positive and negative reactions have in common? How are they different?*

Class Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think of the statement: "Kids aren't developed enough to refrain from impulses. They feel, therefore they act." Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer.

2. Answer the following question: "Are kids somehow learning that they shouldn't have to feel sad or angry or any pain in their lives?"

Self-Reflection Questions:

1. What are some secrets that kids keep? Which secrets are unhealthy? How do you decide what to keep private and what to share?
2. Why do you think some teens can deal with their emotions in healthy ways while others turn to self-injury? Have you ever had to deal with something painful? How did you work it out? Did you find someone to help you?
3. What are the "red flags" of suicidal behavior? What would you do if you noticed the signs of suicide in a friend's behavior? What are some ways you can be open to a friend who needs to talk about his or her pain?

Evaluation:

- Did students participate in the class discussions?
- Did each student work productively in a group?
- Did each group produce a chart of at least four feelings and reactions?