

Adolescent Self-Injury

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3 Non-Suicidal Self-Injury in Adolescents

By Elizabeth E. Lloyd-Richardson, Ph.D.

While awareness of non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) appears to be increasing it remains one of the most difficult behaviors to encounter, with few professionals feeling well equipped to handle these situations. This introductory article aims to define NSSI, describe its prevalence, and identify common risk factors among adolescents; distinguish NSSI from suicidal behaviors; and explore the motivations for engaging in NSSI.



8 Untangling a Complex Web: How Non-Suicidal Self-Injury and Suicide Attempts Differ

By Jennifer J. Muehlenkamp, Ph.D., and Patrick L. Kerr, Ph.D.

The relationship between NSSI and suicidal behavior is complex and often difficult to untangle. One way to enhance the likelihood someone with NSSI will seek help is by educating professionals about the key ways in which NSSI and suicide differ so that inappropriate "over-reactions" to the NSSI can be minimized and effective treatment can occur. This article describes the primary differences between NSSI and suicide.



11 Non-Suicidal Self-Injury in the Media

By Amanda Purington, M.P.S., and Janis Whitlock, Ph.D.

This article explores the role of the media in the transmission of NSSI acceptance and adoption. The increasing reach of the media, the particular susceptibility of adolescents and young adults to it, and the growing presence of NSSI content is examined. Mechanisms for media influence as well as a brief review of an approach to counter them, that is, promoting the development of media literacy skills, are included.



14 School Response to Non-Suicidal Self-Injury

By Jessica R. Toste, M.A., and Nancy L. Heath, Ph.D.

Many school-based professionals feel that they lack information about NSSI and how to deal with it. This article provides guidelines for responding to NSSI on a personnel and system level. It includes critical information for school-based professionals working with youth who self-injure.



18 Collaborative Strengths-Based Brief Therapy with Self-Injuring Adolescents and Their Families

By Matthew D. Selekmán, M.S.W., L.C.S.W.

This article presents a family competency-based treatment approach for self-injuring adolescents and their families. Throughout the article, the author provides therapeutic tools and strategies that he has found effective in his clinical practice of working with self-injuring youth and their families over the past 25 years.

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From the Editor's PC

Dear Colleagues,

Whether called self-injury, cutting, burning, deliberate self-harm, non-suicidal self-injury, or something else, when young people deliberately destroy their own body tissue it is often difficult for adults to know what to do. It is especially alarming, when one considers that an estimated 12 to 40% of adolescents have engaged in self-injurious behaviors. In this issue, we explore the latest research- and evidence-based knowledge in understanding and responding to adolescent self-injury.

We begin this issue with an overview of self-injury by Elizabeth Lloyd-Richardson. This overview provides a foundation for this issue by defining self-injury, describing its prevalence, and exploring teens' motivations for engaging in this behavior.

Self-injury has a complex relationship with suicidal behavior, and the relationship between the two behaviors deserves special attention. Our second article, by Jennifer Muelenkamp and Patrick Kerr, describes the primary differences between self-injury and suicide. This article is filled with information and implications about the differences between the two behaviors and what it means for the people who work with youth.

A concern amongst those who work with youth is that of "social contagion" or the spread of self-injury from one person to another. One way that self-injurious behavior is spread is through the media, including movies, books, music, and the Internet. In our article, "Non-Suicidal Self-Injury in the Media," Amanda Purington and Janis Whitlock explore the influence of the media and how media literacy might be used to reduce its influence.

We conclude this issue with two articles specifically about working with youth who self-injure. The first, by Jessica Toste and Nancy Heath, discusses how schools and school personnel can best respond to youth who injure themselves. Then Matthew Selekman, a therapist with 25 years of experience working with youth who self-injure and their families, provides insight into his family competency-based treatment approach.

Back in the year 2000, we published our first issue on self-injury. At that time, research and knowledge in this area was in its infancy. I am glad to report that in the past ten years we've learned a lot about self-injury. Hopefully, this issue will help our readers better respond to the youth in their lives who engage in this alarming behavior.

All the best,

Steven Ungerleider, Ph.D.
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