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| **Teen Self-Mutilation and Injury** |
| [**Home**](http://www.teenhelp.com/index.html) >>[**Teen Health**](http://www.teenhelp.com/teen-health/) |
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| **What is Self-Mutilation?**  Self-mutilation, sometimes called self-injury, self-harm, self-abuse, or self-inflicted violence, is the deliberate harming of one's own body without the intent to commit suicide. Researchers have identified five elements common to all self-injury behaviors.   1. The injury is done to the self. 2. It is done by the self. 3. It involves physical violence. 4. The injury is intentional. 5. There is no conscious intent to kill oneself. (1)   Self inflicted violence, or SIV, takes many forms, including:   * ripping or picking the skin * hair pulling * punching * head banging * bruising * burning * branding * scratching * bone breaking (2)   Among teens, the most common, and perhaps the least noticeable, self-mutilation behaviors are skin picking and hair pulling.  **Why Do Teens Self-Mutilate?**  To those who have no inclination to purposely injure themselves, the concept of self-mutilation can seem bizarre and frightening. But teens engage in self-harm for many reasons. Among them, to:   * release tension * express anger, or other unacceptable feelings * punish themselves * "numb out" * feel "alive" * have control * relieve feelings of emptiness * stop "bad" thoughts * to calm down * feel euphoric   Self-injury works as a coping mechanism to help teens release tension, relieve stress, and overcome feeling of depression. This kind of behavior can be used almost like a drug - to provide temporary relief from pain or other overwhelming feelings the teen can't otherwise deal with. And like some drugs, SIV can even be habit forming. (3)  Teens who lack the skills or maturity to verbally express their feelings may demonstrate their emotions through [self-mutilation](http://www.teenhelp.com/terms.html). Typically, these adolescents also lack other more healthy physical outlets, like involvement in sports or engaging in exercise, to release tension or deal with strong emotions. (4)  **Who is at Risk for Self-Mutilation?**  More teen girls than boys self-injure, although recent studies suggest the numbers may be about equal. Many who engage in SIV have been victims of physical or sexual abuse, have an alcoholic parent, a substance abuse problem, an eating disorder, or suffer from another mental condition like bipolar or obsessive-compulsive disorder. (5)  Teens who self-mutilate often display these characteristics.   * low self-esteem * difficulty controlling impulses * high anxiety levels * difficulty coping with stressful situations * tendency to hide away in their own space for hours on end * hyper-sensitivity feeling unaccepted by parents or peers.   **What are Some Signs of Self-Mutilation?**  Self-injury often goes undetected because teenagers are ashamed of the behavior and often go to extreme lengths to prevent parents, family members, and even close friends from discovering their secret.  Here are some common signs of self-harm. If you observe any of these, you'll likely want to do some further investigation. - Family members telling you that they are finding sharp objects in strange locations.   * Evidence that your teenager's friends are self-mutilating. * Teen regularly locking himself/herself away for long periods in their room or the bathroom. * Loss of interest in usual friends or social activities. * Finding sharp objects hidden in your child's room. * A reluctance to wear clothes such as short-sleeved shirts or shorts, even in hot weather. * The appearance of an abnormal number of injuries or scars. (6) |

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