

Emotional Pain and Self-Injury

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People often feel isolated and alone. Yet we're all part of Christ's body: when anyone feels pain, the body suffers, too. *...there are many parts, yet one body...the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable... But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together* (1 Corinthians 12:20, 24-25). We need to be present for those suffering, providing an environment of unconditional love and practical support.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition (DSM-5), describes nonsuicidal self-injury (NSSI) as a growing problem among all ages. The National Library of Medicine states, "self-inflicted injury, including cutting or burning, is the most frequent reason for psychiatric visits to medical emergency departments." In their book, *Inside a Cutter's Mind*, Jerusha Clark and Dr. Earl Henslin state, "people who engage in self-inflicted violence are usually not trying to end their lives; instead, they are attempting to find temporary relief from their pain...self-inflicted violence is all at once a psychological, physical, and spiritual battle."



Dr. Armando Favazza describes the phenomenon as "a morbid form of self-help." NSSIs are **not** generally an attempt to get attention. Dr. E. David Klonsky said, "NSSI is most often performed in private as a way to quickly alleviate intense negative emotions." Without consciously deciding to harm themselves, many do—cutting, burning, scratching, banging, hitting themselves with whatever is handy. Many say their self-injurious behavior began with an idea that came "out of the blue." Others learn about self-harm at school or online. In 1 Kings 18:28, the prophets of Baal and Asherah who met Elijah on Mount Carmel *cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances...* Self-injury is not new!

Self-injury is a form of self-medication, like drinking alcohol or using drugs, and it's vital to turn from "placebo help" and discover God's provision for long-term relief. By God's grace coupled with wise counsel, self-harming behaviors can be determinedly replaced with healthy, healing choices. Developing an intimate walk with God while learning emotional regulation skills can provide lasting relief and authentic help.

What can you do if a friend or loved one is self-injuring?

- 1. Respond, don't react. Listen; be fully present.**
- 2. Work on your own emotional regulation**, wondering what your family member or friend observes in you. Notice what you do whenever you're upset and immediately apply God's Word to your concerns.
- 3. Don't embarrass your loved one** by demanding explanations.
- 4. Do find expert help.** One option: the South Florida Association of Christian Counselors, <https://sfacconline.org/>, offers contact information for Christian counselors. Nationally, the American Association of Christian Counselors has a "find a counselor" section at aacc.net
- 5. To learn more: read *Inside a Cutter's Mind*** by Jerusha Clark with Dr. Earl Henslin (NavPress).

For additional ideas on dealing with emotional pain, you can work through *Core Healing from Trauma*, a biblical counseling workbook for individuals or groups, available on Amazon (<https://cutt.ly/occdejH>). You can also watch "Strengthening Your Core," a 12 - video series on YouTube at <https://cutt.ly/Or6EiiW> or subscribe to my blog at <https://corehealingfromtrauma.com/>.