

Self Injury ("Cutting")

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Note: The "Scripture Sheet" or handout, mentioned several times in the article, refers to the "Who Am I in Christ Scriptures," listed at the end.

Part One: What Is Cutting All About?

I'm Fine

I bleed away my problems
I scratch them all away
My problems drip away from me
And slither down the drain

My problems are dissolved in crimson
My scarlet poison makes them die
A piece of metal shatters them
And through my veins the pieces fly

These scars upon my skin
Tell tales of secret pain
But come and listen to them
Of the truth I'm not ashamed

My problems are hidden from you
I hide them oh so well
What's wrong? I tell you nothing
'Cause you can't save me from this hell

I know, it's stupid that I can only get everything out like that. Whatever.

Introduction to Self-Injury

Somewhere today, there is a young girl locked in her bedroom, her eyes swelled up with tears, struggling to express with words the turmoil she really feels deep down inside. In a bathroom stall, a young man is hovered with hate and anger, overwhelmed with the constant reminder of his unbearable pain and looks for a way to get it out.

In a classroom setting, you see her gazing at the teacher as if she is listening, but no one knows her mind is a thousand miles away, lost in her despair. You see them smiling in public, but in private they are showered in disgrace. They may be active enough to seem involved in the world, portraying they are “living life”, but their soul is scarred, detached, dripping with blood, slowly vanishing away.

In desperation, they wish someone could just read their mind, peak behind the door of their soul and see what is really going on, but no one seems to notice, no one seems to care that their road is headed down the fiery storm. “If only I had someone that would understand what I’m going through,” they may say. But, their secret is so devastating and shameful they can’t even fathom confessing what it is they do behind closed doors. They fear people calling them “crazy,” “stupid,” “weird,” or “suicidal.”

If you could see inside their soul, you would be surprised with what you’d find: confusion, torment, loneliness, numbness, hopelessness, hate, anger, and the list goes on. You would see them agonizing over the inability to express the insurmountable pain they hold within. The emotional pain is so excruciating they are desperately seeking a means to escape, even if just for a minute. Something quick to alleviate the broken and shattered heart is what they are looking for, something to help them express their pain.

They wake up and walk out of habit, but their soul has fallen asleep and slowly dies away, not knowing how to “wake up” again. Some have forgotten what it was like to “feel” emotional. Some force themselves to “feel” something stronger, more powerful, and perhaps more painful, than the throbbing grief they feel in the depths of their heart. The day of remembering the use of their emotions is long gone.

The memory of “What I was” is now overshadowed by the nightmare of “What I am.” The dream and inspiration of “What I will be” is now seemingly destroyed by a dreaded mental whisper of “What I’ve become.” The constant reminder of their ‘failings’ feed the inner voice that leaps to staggering profusions of sounds calling them names that demean the “self” and torture the mind. Every day they wake up hoping things will be different, but hope is often not there to greet them.

It is a vicious cycle of spiritual, emotional, and physical abuse the enemy has used to leave the victim so mentally defeated that they feel there’s only one way to cope with this insurmountable emotional ache. And, many of them find their relief through the destruction of their own bodies. It is called “Self-Injury,” but it is better known among its targeted population of teens as “cutting.”

It is an epidemic that seems to be hitting our teens in record highs and sweeping across our nation and even perhaps across the world in an intensifying way. It is a phenomenon that many parents, grandparents or guardians of children do not even know it exists because it happens behind closed doors and the scars often go unseen. Their own children may actually be “cutters” themselves and they don’t even know it. Even those adults that do discover it taking place among their teenagers find themselves at a loss with how to deal with it.

This alarming behavior encapsulates the heart and soul of the young person's state of despair and leads them down a path of destruction, not only physically, but also emotionally and spiritually.

Since the beginning of time, man has tried to find different ways to cope with the struggles and challenges of life. Even tracing back a few years, looking at our nation's history we see the generation of the 1930's begin to struggle with alcoholism. Later, in the 1970's the issue of drug addiction came on the scene. In the 1980's, treatments for food and gambling addictions came into play. In the 90's to the present, sexual addictions have become a stronghold in the lives of many, even in the body of Christ.

Among teens, one of the most prevalent issues being discovered during this era of time is that of "cutting". Thus, the aim of this booklet is to help explain what "cutting" is all about, indicate some of the triggers that cause it, and what we can do to help someone who is in bondage to this activity. This informative review will not focus on any acts of self-injury that are inflicted for reasons of sexual pleasure, tattooing, or conscious suicidal intentions. Only that of cutting for the sake of relieving emotional pain will be mostly discussed.

Defining Self-Injury

Whenever we talk about "Self-Injury" we are describing the person that inflicts physical pain upon oneself for the purpose of relieving or lessening the amount of emotional pain or stress one may be experiencing at a given point in time. It is a coping mechanism the young person has incorporated as a way of life in order to survive the emotional pain levels that may seem unbearable to them.

These injuries are usually done in private, are self-inflicted, not involving the assistance or control of anyone else. The seriousness of the injuries will vary anywhere from heavily scratching of the skin to marks and lesions causing tissue damage severe enough to leave permanent scarring. It is my belief the act is addictive and progressive. One may start with giving into the desire of heavy scratching, but eventually the 'high' felt during the scratching period will no longer satisfy the desire. Thus, some other form of self-injury will start taking form. Eventually, the person may find themselves cutting their bodies more consecutively, and in more harmful ways.

Methods of Cutting

There are different ways the individual will satisfy the need to self-injure. The most common practice is "cutting" with the use of razor blades, broken glass, or even writing utensils. Anything that is sharp in nature could end up in the hands of a "cutter" to serve this purpose. Although cutting has been found to be the most common type of self-injury, other actions such as burning and head banging can follow suit. Other methods include self-punching, biting, skin picking or carving, interference with wound healing (re-opening wounds), hair pulling, or needle sticking, but not only limited to these.

This behavior often occurs sporadically and repetitively. Oftentimes, it develops an "addictive" cycle and becomes an overwhelming preoccupation for some people. Both in clinical studies and informal surveys, it was found that the most popular areas of the body to inflict the injuries were wrists, arms, and inner thighs.

Who Self-Injures and Commonalities Found

Expressing Emotions: The difference between Men and Women

“Cutting” behavior seems to be found more commonly among women, partly because men are more likely to express strong feelings such as anger outwardly and tend to display their aggression towards other people or inanimate objects.

According to one study, it was noted that the majority of injurers were female because women are not socialized to express violence externally (Miller, 1994). When confronted with the vast rage many self-injurers feel, women tend to vent on themselves. They tend to turn the hurt and pain inward upon themselves. While men tend to react the opposite and act out, women act out by acting in.

Perhaps another reason fewer men are cutters may be that men are socialized in a way that makes repressing feelings the norm. Linehan’s (1993) theory that self-harm results in part from chronic invalidation, from always being told that your feelings are bad and wrong or inappropriate, could explain the gender disparity in self-injury; men are generally brought up to hold emotion in. But, since emotion needs to be expressed some how, the men that do injure themselves tend express their pain through roughness, aggression, or hitting objects or themselves.

Studies have shown that many people who self-injure have a history of sexual or physical abuse, but this is not always the case as we know it. There are many different backgrounds and life-stories from others that come from broken homes, alcoholic environments, emotionally absent parents, etc.

Common Personality Characteristics Found in Self-Injurers

Lack ability to express emotions verbally (have a tendency to “stuff” their problems).

Lack ability to handle intense feelings (“intense feelings” overwhelm them and only leads them to confusion—“I don’t know what to do!”—and isolation, especially if they lack communication skills).

Perfectionism (they feel pressure to live high standards, which often times are unrealistic and unobtainable, so they continue to feel like they are “failing” and will try harder to no avail).

Tend to experience severe mood swings (one day they are “happy,” other days “extremely low”).

A dislike for themselves and their bodies. (Do not like what they see in the mirror. No matter how good they are, they continue to pick out their flaws)

Common Misconceptions

Due to the complexity of this behavior, many may think that the person that is cutting is acting upon suicidal tendencies. It is often difficult to understand the “why?” someone would cut. Suicide is not the end goal of cutting. Although they are closely related, they are very different in nature. This behavior is not practiced by the individual with the intent to commit suicide or bring about sexual pleasure, but for a means of tension/emotional relief. One important

thing to note is that self-inflicting injuries, such as those practiced as part of spiritual rituals or body markings (tattooing) are usually not considered self injury.

Each person has their own motivations and mix of self injury and suicidal feelings. The difference between self-injury and suicide comes to a distinction in the reasoning behind the behavior. The person that practices “cutting” is trying to alleviate themselves from the internal emotional pain they are experiencing, while those that attempt “suicide” are trying to “end” all their feelings.

Most researchers recognize that the self-injurer does not intend to die as a result of his cutting behavior. But, although self-injurious behavior is not suicidal in intent, it can easily lead to suicidal ideation or even death, when a self-harmer goes too far, accidentally.

Other misconceptions of cutting include that of it being a way to “get attention,” “they are crazy or have gone mad,” or that they are a “danger to others.” But, again, for those that seriously struggle with the addiction of cutting, this activity provides them with a means to cope with their great internal pain, and has little to do with attention seeking.

They are not a danger to others, since their actions of anger and hurt are inflicted upon themselves. And they are not going “crazy” or “mad,” they just don’t know or have not learned other ways to express their conflict. The important thing is to help them ease their pain, rather than trying to label their behavior.

Reasons Why People Turn To Cutting

Studies are bringing forth evidence concluding that self-injurers, when faced with strong emotion or overwhelming situations, tend to choose to harm themselves because it brings them a rapid sense of release from tension and anxiety. The person seeks to find immediate relief from their emotional pain by exposing themselves to external pain. The self-injurer may feel a release of the emotional agony, but even if he/she feels guilty or angry afterward, it won’t be an oppressive, pushing, demanding tension-filled feeling like it was before. Malon and Berardi (1987) believe that the person struggling with self-injury “is at high risk to injure but not kill himself or herself...but produces tension relief”. They continue to say that those at risk are those with an inability to cope with increased psychological/physiological tension in a healthy manner, feelings of depression, rejection, self-hatred, guilt, and a member of a dysfunctional family, to name a few.

Why Is It So Addictive

What does the person experience when they practice “cutting” that makes it so addictive?

Helps them express their emotional pain because they can’t seem to find the right words or have an inability to express their feelings through words.

It’s a means to escaping numbness (many of those who self-injure say they do it in order to feel something, to know that they’re still alive because they sometimes feel like walking “zombies,” breathing, but with no feelings).

They find it helpful to ease tension.

Provides momentary escape from emptiness, depression, and feelings of unreality.

Helps them get their mind off of the reality that is causing extreme irritability or emotional agony and escape into their own world

Feelings of relief: When intense feelings build, self-injurers are overwhelmed and are unable to cope. By causing pain, they reduce the level of emotional and physiological arousal to a more bearable one.

Gives a feeling of euphoria (feeling very happy)

If they see themselves as a “bad” person, then they may “cut” to confirm the way they feel inside or confirm what negative statements others have said about them. They continue to relive the abusive patterns. (I.e. if they were abused as children and were always told they were “bad,” they may grow up believing it and now act out through “cutting” to punish themselves whenever they do something “bad.”)

They find a release and relief of their suppressed anger/rage (many self-injurers have enormous amounts of rage within. Afraid to express it outwardly, they injure themselves as a way of venting these feelings.

Obtaining or maintaining influence over the behavior of others.

Makes them feel a sense of control over their body where nobody else has say.

Because of insecurity or low self-esteem, the individual may become dependent on the behavior that made them feel “different” or “unique” from everyone else.

It helps them cope with feelings of alienation or rejection.

Part 2: Steps to Overcome “Cutting”

1. One must acknowledge Christ as our primary source of help through:

Prayer

Word Study and Meditation

(See “Who You Are in Christ” References)

Church Fellowship

2. One must decide to Change their way of coping.

Unless God does a miracle, it would be unrealistic to expect the person to change their habit from one day to the next. God is well able and powerful enough to do so if he wants to, but there are times where he chooses to take a person through the process of change. One thing is certain according to Romans 6:18, he has set us free. The problem is we have allowed the circumstances of our environment (problems) to take control of our minds and we begin to live life through our feelings, instead of the spirit God has put in us. But, it is not unrealistic to say that one CAN change.

3. One must decide to be Honest with someone trustworthy.

Talk to them and set accountability. If you go to someone and talk about the urge, it will help you reduce the distress you may be experiencing at the moment. Therefore, begin to build a network of godly friends that you can be honest with. They will support you during the difficult times. Above all, know that God is always there for you.

4. One must set up Accountability.

As you are building your network of friends, you will need to help them help you by instructing them on what you expect from them and how they can be of support to you. If you only want them to lend a listening ear to help you process what you are thinking and feeling, then you will have to let them know. If you want them to ask you specific questions when they see you, then tell them what questions you want them to ask. If you want them to pray for you, simply request it. If in the beginning of your new decision to walk in freedom you need someone to be with you during the moments of temptation, you will need to let them know in advance so they can know what to expect and how to help.

(But remember, this is a battle only you can fight and win with the help of Christ. We can have friends that will help us with emotional support, but you should not place all your dependency on them. Your full dependency should be on Christ alone. The body of Christ is available for us to pray with, confide in, and fellowship with, but remind yourself they are not your Savior, Jesus is. They are there to support and help you through this difficult time in life.)

5. One must put new skills into Practice

In the past, whenever you felt the overwhelming sense of life's problems, you may have dealt with them through cutting. But, if you want to stop hurting yourself, it will be vital for you to start practicing new coping skills to overcome the urge to injure yourself.

Below is a list of suggestions that might help you to overcome that urge. Please be advised that not all of these suggestions will be helpful to everyone, as not all battles will be the same. So, what is helpful to one person may not necessarily be helpful to someone else.

Review the options with your accountability partner or support team and discuss which ones are helpful to you. As you go through the list and you identify that one of the suggestions actually tempts you rather than help you, then do NOT use that suggestion. Keep in mind that these are only suggestions. Ask the Lord to help you through this process and ask him for supernatural wisdom to help you come up with your own new practices that will help you overcome during temptations. The more you say no to the desires of the flesh, the more you will be satisfied with life through the spirit of God living in you.

During times of Temptation:

Go after your memory verse and read it. It's time to meditate.

Practice deep breathing (inhale a big breath and exhale, ten times).

Try relaxation techniques by tensing up your body muscles for 8 seconds, then relaxing them for 15. Repeat the exercise in group rotations (legs, arms, upper body). You gain the most of this technique when you incorporate it with your scripture meditation.

Call a friend, your therapist or a crisis line for help.

Try not be alone when you are fighting an urge (visit a friend, go shopping, etc.).

Take a hot bath to help you relax.

Listen to music that you enjoy or relaxes you.

Go for a walk (leave any objects behind).

Write in a journal. (Express your anger, anxiety, stress, etc. Explore for your trigger points. Ask the Lord to reveal to you what is causing you to be tempted to bring harm to yourself.)

Exercise for at least 20 minutes (run, fast-walk, aerobic or anaerobic exercises).

Avoid temptation (i.e. avoiding the area where cutting objects are kept, etc.).

If the temptation is coming at you due to emotional conflict with someone, challenge yourself to approach them in a healthy way making your own feelings known instead of keeping them inside. Ask if they have time to talk and let them know what troubled you and how things can improve.

Yell into a pillow how you feel, but follow up with scriptures from the "Who you are in Christ" list to speak to your inner-man. Remember, we are not to be ruled by our feelings, we must rule our feelings with the Word of Truth.

Go outside and practice breathing technique (10 big breaths, inhale/exhale).

Take up a sport (a form of exercise can help you release tension, etc.).

Work with paint, clay, play-doh, etc. and try to make a sculpture of the tension you are experiencing. It can help you put your words together and give you some idea of what might be the cause of the underlying pain. Once revealed to you, surrender them to the Lord and go the His Word for the truth.

Draw a picture of what or who is making you angry, then pray over that situation and begin to walk towards forgiveness.

Instead of harming yourself, remind yourself that you are God's temple and He esteems you, therefore you deserve to treat yourself and your body with love and respect. (Speak God's Word over yourself!)

Go to church for worship or fellowship with others.

Break the object that you use to self-injure as a way to show that you have control over it and it does not have control over you.

If you find unforgiveness or hidden anger towards someone that hurt you a great deal, try writing a letter to the person(s) and express how they made you feel and how they affected your life, but that you choose to forgive them. These letters do not have to be in perfect form and you do not have to cover your hurt, but express it in writing. You do not have to give these letters to the people, but it is a great way to release the feelings that you have been carrying within. After you write the letters, you can decide then what to do with them. Some people find destroying the letters help (i.e. tear them up, throw them in a lake, bury the letter, burn it, etc.). But, it is important that before you destroy it, you go before the Lord in prayer and present the letter(s) to him as an act of surrendering all unforgiveness to him and declaring your new choice to forgive, daily.

Do some household chores (i.e. cleaning, work on the yard, wash your car or someone else's, etc.) to get your mind off of the urges till the waves of temptation goes away. Remind yourself that the moment is like a wave, it will come, but it will also pass. Just hold on through the temptation.

Do some cooking or baking (be creative with it, invite some friends over and fellowship).

Recite a poem, prayer or anything else familiar that comforts you, multiple times.

Write down all your positive points and why you do not deserve to be hurt. Remind yourself what the Word of God says about you (see Scripture reference sheet).

Write in your journal why you want to hurt yourself and if you have hurt yourself, write down what caused it to happen so in the future you can prevent it from happening again. (Remember, find out what your triggers points are. Where and how does the enemy trick you into falling? What thoughts or mental whispers do you hear during these times of temptation? Write them down and you'll begin to see the strategy the enemy uses against you.)

Scripture meditation. Memorize the Word of God (see scripture hand-out).

Allow yourself to cry. Getting the tears out can promote healing. It allows the inside to release, as opposed to self-abuse. Picture your "hurts" pouring out as you cry before the Lord.

Take a shower.

Sing a song or write out what you are feeling as a prayer to God. Let the words just come out of you. The book of Psalms has plenty of examples.

Make a list of reasons why you are going to stop cutting. Every time you get the urge, read the list to remind yourself why you shouldn't. Also remember to put on that list that you do not deserve to hurt yourself. You are important, significant, and you do not deserve to be hurt.

Sometimes, even when you try your new skills, it may still feel like you are not advancing. These moments of desperation are understandable and not uncommon. But you must remember that God is faithful to His Word and that you must continue to stand up and try again, no matter what. The key is to immediately stand up after a “fall” and try again. They temptations will come and go. The more you deny the temptation, the easier it will become to say “no” because the stronger you are becoming in saying “yes” to your freedom and your new way of life.

The Bible tells us that we must resist the devil and he will flee! But, as you may already know, it seems the devil will try to come back and try to tempt you again later. It's during these times of temptations that the fight may feel overwhelming. Don't give up! Run to God, share with your support system, and continue to put on the “new man” and try again. You will overcome because you already are an over-comer through Jesus Christ. Remember, God's help and grace is there to help you overcome your greatest temptation.

Now, it's also important to take advantage of these moments to focus on what pain your heart is feeling. The following questions may be of help for you as you begin to allow the Lord to search your heart and identify the root of the problem. Take time to answer them honestly to yourself. No one has to see your answers unless you want to discuss them with someone for feedback. Do not allow the “urge” to control you, before you explore the urge. Answer the following questions to help you investigate what is going on internally.

Is there a deeper root you are trying to deal with? It's important for you to think about what your urge to hurt yourself is "saying" about your feelings and your life. This will give you clues about problems you need to face and work on. Eventually, it will be most beneficial for you to find a friend you can trust and share your deep thoughts with them about this internal struggle and what root lies behind it. You can also seek out the help of a professional counselor to help you process these questions.

Starting with the Basics

Have I put my “new skills” into practice faithfully?

Why do I feel I need to hurt myself? What has brought me to this point?

Have I been here before? What did I do to deal with it? How did I feel then?

What have I done to ease this discomfort so far? What else can I do that won't hurt me?

What word(s) would I use to describe the feeling(s) I am experiencing right now?

What do I tell myself or what do I hear my mind telling me during these times of struggle?

What am I trying to say through my wounds?

What does the pain I inflict on the outside say about the pain I feel in the inside?

How do I feel about myself right now?

How will I feel when I am hurting myself? (satisfied, angry, pleasure, guilty, etc.)

How will I feel after I hurt myself? (satisfied, angry, pleasure, guilty, etc.) Was it worth it?

How will I feel tomorrow morning? (satisfied, angry, pleasure, guilty, etc.)

How can I avoid this stress or deal with it better in the future?

Do I really need to hurt myself or is there something different I could have done to deal with my emotional pain?

How close or distant do I feel God before I hurt myself?

How close or distant do I feel God after I hurt myself?

What do I think Jesus feels about me hurting myself?

What does he want me to remember during my times of temptation?

How will I feel if I don't resist the temptation?

How will I feel if I actually overcome this wave of temptation?

Part 3: For Those Desiring to Help

What can you do to help someone dealing with self-injury

The decision to stop “Cutting” is not an easy one to make for the person that has fallen dependent upon it. Yet, in order for them to be successful, the decision needs to come from the person that struggles with it. The individual has to own the personal decision in order for change to start taking place. There is hope and a new way of living but the individual has to declare his/her own right to walk in freedom.

As this decision is made, it is beneficial for the individual to set him/herself up to win. It will be a good idea to establish new boundaries and set guidelines to help the young person when they face temptations that will want to lead them to old behavior.

The Bible tells us in Ephesians 4 to “put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires” and to “be made new in the attitude of your minds.” It is up to us to make a personal decision to leave the old habits behind and start practicing new ones. We are responsible to renew our minds, according to Romans 12:2. We must put aside the old nature and start living in our new nature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”)

In Him there is hope, life, and a new beginning. Therefore, it is vital to prepare our mind for action through His Word, but we also need to practice new habits. For this reason, the following proposed checklist has been put together to help such individuals prepare for the journey towards freedom. The person seeking freedom from cutting can ask themselves the following statements and use them as guidelines to ensure that a plan has been put in place. The better the plan of action is, the better equipped the person will be to face and stand up against the storms of life.

Review the following questions and use it to help you or the person struggling to put something together that would work best for them. It is a means to give you an idea of what a plan should look like and perhaps spark personal creativity to adjust your plan according to your specific needs.

Start by taking sometime to seriously think about what you want to achieve. Go before the Lord in prayer and ask him to search your heart. Psalms 139:23 says “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.” There are many unanswered questions that tend to drive us to confusion and hopelessness. But, the truth is, we have Christ, the hope of glory to help us through these difficult times.

As you seek the Lord through prayer, ask him to help you see what the future would look like for you if you overcame this habit? How would you feel about yourself if you didn’t act out anymore? How would you see yourself different? What would be the benefits of you walking in your freedom? Pay attention to what God’s Word says about you and all the questions you ask Him (review the scripture sheet provided). God desires for you to live a life of purpose, joy, fulfillment, and peace. Things will not always be perfect, but you can rely on God to give you His strength and face any storm in life. If you choose to believe this, then you are ready to formulate a plan.

A plan is established when you want to improve or change something about yourself because you choose to believe there is something better to obtain. So, ask yourself, “What plan do I have in place for myself?” “If I am going to overcome this, what needs to change in my life?” “What things do I need to do?”, “Who do I want to bring into my support system to help me through this?”, “How will I be strengthening my inner-man in order to be able to control my emotions?” Next, write it out on a piece of paper and point out specifics, avoiding general statements, such as, “When I’m tempted, I will call someone”.

Your plan will be more successful and strategic if you were to say, “When I’m tempted, I will call Lisa at the following telephone numbers…” Use the following questions to help secure a solid plan.

Securing a Plan of Action

- Have I made a personal decision to stop hurting myself?
- Have I chosen to surrender my desires to “cut” to the Lord and allow Him to help me through this process?
- Have I told at least two other people that I am going to stop hurting myself and have asked them to hold me accountable? (I will consider them my accountability group.)
- Have I discussed with my accountability group what I need and expect from them as I walk through this journey? Are they aware of what they need to do, say, act, or hold me accountable to, whenever I am being tempted?
- Have I established how many times I will meet or “check in” with my support system (accountability partner[s]) during my journey?
- Have I made a decision to confess and not hide my temptations and/or sins to God and my accountability group? (James 5:16 “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”)
- When being tempted, have I decided to seek out help beforehand while I still have spiritual strength and not wait until it’s too late when I am weak?
- Clean House: Have I collected all my “cutting” objects and have disposed of them myself or have given them to my accountability support system?
- Have I built or started working on building a solid emotional support system of friends, family, and/or professionals that I can use if I feel like hurting myself?
- Do I have at least two people in my life that I can call or visit if I ever want to hurt myself? I have their home or cell phone numbers handy?
- Have I put together a list of at least ten things I can do to wait out the wave of temptation instead of hurting myself?
- Do I have a list of places to go if I need to have to leave my house in order to not hurt myself?
- Have I thought of not putting myself in situations that will cause me to be tempted to cutting? If so, what are my boundaries?
- Am I committed to being honest and open about my feelings with my accountability group and not withhold the truth from them?
- As an exercise to work on expressing my feelings, will I journal (i.e. twice a week) how and what I “felt” that particular day, then, identify if that “feeling” helped me stay strong in my walk or if it tempted me to hurt myself? Will I practice sharing my “feelings” with my support system?
- Am I willing to feel uncomfortable, frustrated, and angry but approach it with God’s Word and accept His Truth? (See “Who I Am In Christ” Scripture list)
- Have I made a decision to not “quit” but to persevere no matter how tough it may get because I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me?

- Have I committed to not call myself “bad” names or “label” myself with negative thoughts, especially when I make mistakes? Instead, I will confess, declare, and accept the truth of God over me through His Word. (Use scripture sheet.)
- Do I commit to declare and accept my FREEDOM in Christ, no matter how long it takes me to walk in it? Will I make a decision to be patient with myself, as Christ is patient with me?
- Will I devote sometime to take care of myself, enjoy walks, practice favorite hobbies, listen to music, read spiritual books, journal, etc. as I need it to relax?
- Have I accept the fact that I am not perfect, but my faith is being perfected through Christ?
- Have I committed to daily put effort in acknowledging God as my supreme help for the day through prayer, Bible reading, meditation & memorization of scripture, worship, or devotional readings?

In Conclusion

For those of you that know of a loved one that is struggling or you suspect is struggling with “cutting,” first of all, thank you for taking the time to trying to understand what this is all about. I know it can be confusing, as well as frightening when one does not fully comprehend this behavior. But, keep in mind that this behavior is nothing new. It has only been more silently kept because of the guilt and shame it carries.

Therefore, if someone comes to you, it is important that you do not overreact to their confession in a way that will intensify their assumptions of being “rejected.” They are people deeply hurting that may not know how to deal with their presenting life problems.

Be a listener, as that is what they need the most at first. Yes, hearing how someone hurt themselves in this manner can be shocking and disturbing to you, but do not let your personal emotions make them feel “less than” for not knowing what else to do. Try to keep seeing the person in pain behind the injuries. The most precious thing you can offer them is a real extension of Christ’s love in the midst of their struggle. Let them know you do not see them as “weird” or “abnormal”, but rather as a real person with real hurting emotions. Let your friend know you understand that self-injury has become a means in which to help him/her cope with their internal pain. He/She is not "bad" or "mad" for doing it. They just simply need assurance that things can get better and that there are other means in which they can deal with life problems without hurting themselves.

You could invite them to talk about their feelings by using some of the questions noted above to help them think through the process and understand why they “cut.” Is it anger? are they depressed? Do they feel no one cares about them? Do they feel they are “bad” people? Where is God? At first, they may not have many answers to your questions because they’ve never thought about it. Be encouraged, progress is taking place if they are opening up to you and if you are listening to them. They are opening a doorway to their heart.

Be very careful to walk with care and sensitivity, and mostly, walk in the love of Christ. If you feel comfortable and if the situation is proper and you are allowed to do follow up, then you may consider letting them know that you are willing to listen some more and invite them to youth group, church, prayer gatherings, etc. and you can talk some more afterwards. Help them through the process as much as you can. And, be willing to discuss with the young

person a referral to a Christian professional if you feel more help is needed in the support system. Explain that you are not giving up on them and/or “passing them on” to someone else. Rather, you want to help them with establishing and building a solid support system to join you in the effort of securing their freedom from cutting.

Keep in mind that walking through this journey may be a “process” for some and not an overnight recovery, necessarily. We do not limit Christ’s power to such, but if Christ chooses to take them through a process instead, then we are to be there for them to be his extension of love and patience. Help them stay strong and never give up as God never gives up on us. Pray with them, encourage them, praise them, support them, speak life into them, for he already took our sorrow, pain, and punishment to the cross and he has set us “free.” Above all and through it all, let them see Christ in you, the hope of glory!

Who Am I in Christ Scriptures

- I am born again...through the living and enduring word of God (1 Peter 1:23)
- I am a child of God (John 1:12)
- I am saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9)
- I am loved by God and he gave his one and only Son for me (John 3:16)
- I am a new creation in Christ; the old has gone and the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- I have peace with God (Romans 5:1)
- The Holy Spirit lives in me (1 Corinthians 3:16)
- I have access to God's wisdom (James 1:5)
- I am helped by God (Hebrews 4:16)
- I am reconciled to God (Romans 5:11)
- I am not condemned by God (Romans 8:1)
- I am justified (Romans 5:1)
- I have Christ's righteousness (Romans 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21)
- I am Christ's ambassador (2 Corinthians 5:20)
- I am completely forgiven (Colossians 1:14)
- I am tenderly loved by God (Jeremiah 31:3)
- I am the sweet fragrance of Christ to God (2 Corinthians 2:15)
- I am a temple in which God dwells (1 Corinthians 3:16)

- I am blameless and beyond reproach (Colossians 1:22)
- I am the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13)
- I am the light of the world (Matthew 5:14)
- I am a branch on Christ's vine (John 15:1,5)
- I am Christ's friend (John 15:5)
- I am chosen by Christ to bear fruit (John 15:16)
- I am a joint heir with Christ, sharing his inheritance with him (Romans 8:17)
- I am united to the Lord, one spirit with him (1 Corinthians 6:17)
- I am a member of Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12:27)
- I am a saint (Ephesians 1:1)
- I am hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3)
- I am chosen by God, holy and dearly loved (Colossians 3:12)
- I am a child of the light (1 Thessalonians 5:5)
- I am holy, and I share in God's heavenly calling (Hebrews 3:1)
- I am sanctified (Hebrews 2:11)
- I am one of God's living stones, being built up in Christ as a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5)
- I am a member of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession and created to sing his praises (1 Peter 2:9-10)
- I am firmly rooted and built up in Christ (Colossians 2:7)
- I am born of God, and the evil one cannot touch me (1 John 5:18)
- I have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16)
- I may approach God with boldness, freedom, and confidence (Ephesians 3:12)
- I have been rescued from Satan's domain and transferred into the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13)
- I have been made complete in Christ (Colossians 2:10)
- I have been given a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7)
- I have been given great and precious promises by God (2 Peter 1:4)
- My needs are met by God (Philippians 4:19)
- I am a prince (princess) in God's kingdom (John 1:12; 1 Timothy 6:15)

- I have been bought with a price, and I belong to God (1 Corinthians 6:19,20)
- I have been adopted as God's child (Ephesians 1:5)
- I have direct access to God through the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:18)
- I am assured that all things are working together for good (Romans 8:28)
- I am free from any condemning charges against me (Romans 8:31f)
- I cannot be separated from the love of God (Romans 8:35f)
- I have been established, anointed, and sealed by God (2 Corinthians 1:21,22)
- I am confident that the good work that God has begun in me will be perfected (Philippians 1:6)
- I am a citizen of heaven (Philippians 3:20)
- I am a personal witness of Christ's (Acts 1:8)
- I am God's coworker (2 Corinthians 6:1, 1 Corinthians 3:9)
- I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realm (Ephesians 2:6)
- I am God's workmanship (Ephesians 2:10)
- I can do all things through Christ, who gives me the strength I need (Philippians 4:13)

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