

Being Supportive without reinforcing Behavior

Its important that your friend, lover, child, sibling know that you can separate who they are from what they do and that you love them independently of whether they self injure. Some good ways to show support are:

**Don't avoid the subject.** Let it be known you are available to talk without judgment.

**Make the initial approach.** "I know that sometimes you hurt yourself and I'd like to understand it."

**Be available.** You cant be the support for someone if you can't be reached.

**Set reasonable limits.** "I cannot handle talking to you while you are actually cutting/ burning because I care about you and it hurts too much to see you do that."

**Make it clear through your behavior that they do not need to self injure to get your attention.** Be consistent with displays of love and caring, so that caring for them after self injury is not special or out of the ordinary.

**Don't ask "Is there anything I can do?"** Instead find things you can do and ask "Can I ?" Often people can't identify anything that will make them feel better. Ask, "Can I take you to the movies?" "Can we go for a walk?" "Lets go to the library. "

**Never discount their friends.** They may reach your child more effectively than you can.



"I just wanted to say that I never had realized how much it hurts parents when their children cut themselves. Up until the last couple of months, I had been cutting myself. I guess it was a way to sort of release all my anger and frustration. My mom knew about me doing this, and she suggested counseling. But I didn't want to see a counselor. Eventually, my friends were the main people who made me face the reality of what I was doing. Now, I can see that it emotionally affects parents almost as much as kids."

"One mistake that allot of people (especially parents) make is that we are doing it for attention. We're not. For me, it was because I was unsure of myself, and I didn't really see that I was worthy of such a great family and great life. Thank you so much...talking about this can help everyone." -Sarah, 16 yrs old

<http://parents.berkeley.edu/advice/teens/cutting.html#replies>

**NAMI Maine**  
**www.NAMIMAINE.org**

1 Bangor Street  
Augusta, ME 04330

Phone: 207-622-5767

Fax: 207621-8430

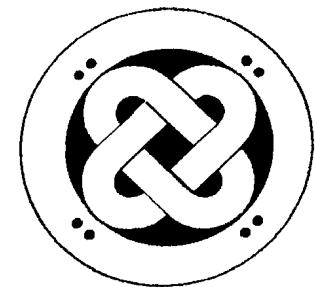
E-mail: [info@namimaine.org](mailto:info@namimaine.org)

**S**elf  
**I**njurious  
**B**ehavior

**What it is....**

**What to look for....**

**What can be done to help.....**



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[www.NAMIMAINE.org](http://www.NAMIMAINE.org)

## What Is Self Injurious Behavior (S.I.B.)?

S.I.B. is direct, deliberate and immediate self harm, such as cutting, burning and hitting.

S.I.B. is generally socially unacceptable to adults

S.I.B. is NOT suicidal or sexual in nature



S.I.B. Is usually quite controlled and, by definition, the intent is NOT suicide. Self cutting is the most common form. Research suggests that people who engage in S.I.B. are most often single and female. The first time that a person engages in this behavior is in mid to late adolescence.

Other associated diagnosis: major depression, dissociative identity disorder; obsessive compulsive disorder; alcoholism and substance abuse; eating disorders; anxiety disorders; schizophrenia and several personality disorders.

## What warning signs can parents look for in a child that is or will self-cut?

Parents can be alert to adolescents who have unexplained injuries to their arms or legs, as well as those who frequently cover their extremities, particularly in hot weather. Parents need to be alert to the warning signs of a change in their adolescent's general mood, friendships, school performance, or the onset of impulsive behaviors such as drug use.

## Why do people deliberately injure themselves?

- to release tension and anxiety, the physical pain seems better than emotional pain
- temporary relief from emotional or physiological pain
- as an expression of pain
- for the euphoria experienced at the time of self abuse
- as a form of self punishment.



## What can families do?

### Don't take it personally.

Self injurious behavior is more about the person who does it than about the people around him/her.

### Educate yourself

Get as much information as you can about S.I.B. in general.

Bodies Under Siege by Favazza and The Scarred Soul by Alderman are both good places to begin. Bodies Under Siege, is more technical, while The Scarred Soul is oriented towards self help.

### Understand Your Feelings and take care of yourself!

You can't care for and give support unless you take some time for yourself. Don't get burned out!

### Ultimatums never work!

Punishment and guilt feed the self destruction cycle.

### Acknowledge the pain of your loved one

It doesn't make the pain go away, but helps people feel you have an understanding. If they are open to it, discuss treatment options.

Don't force things. If you make attempts and they are rejected, don't give up but don't press. Step back a few days or weeks and try again.