

CUTTING AND SELF-MUTILATION: Contributing Factors and Treatment

by J. R. Ensey

The practice of cutting one's body as an expression of emotional pain or instability is not new. The historian Herodotus (484-425 B.C.) describes King Cleomenes I of Sparta as a "cutter," eventually committing suicide in this manner.¹ In the late 19th century there were reports of incidents in Europe involving women who were purposely puncturing themselves with needles.² Today it is called Self-Injury (SI) and is spreading rapidly. It has been reported as occurring in convents, prisons, and virtually in every setting in every culture. Estimates range up to two million Americans, mostly young females, who are involved. One expert says that .75% of the general population are SI practitioners.³

SI has surfaced in our current culture as "almost epidemic in adolescents"⁴ and is causing great consternation among counselors, embarrassment for parents and quandary for educators. I have personally had calls from pastors who were dealing with "cutters" in their churches or in their families. Some who have visited our church were involved. Christian leaders are struggling with how to address the subject. This will not be a thorough or exhaustive presentation of the topic, but perhaps serve as an introduction to those who are unfamiliar with the practice, and maybe provide some hope for resolution and healing.

Those involved in SI use knives, razor blades (the usual instrument of choice) or other sharp objects to cut themselves or make marks on their bodies. Some carve words into their skin as they would carve their initials on a tree. SI should not be associated with tattooing or body piercing that so popular today. They are not the same.

Cutting is only one expression of SI; others include biting, bruising, pulling [out] the hair, plucking or cutting off eyelashes or other body parts, and even burning. Why would anyone do this? It may sound so weird to some that they tend to dismiss the matter altogether merely as behavior of "crazy people," and let it go at that. But some of our own Pentecostal kids are doing it, so it cannot be ignored forever.

A spate of books has been published on the subject. Articles have appeared in major magazines describing the practice. The Internet has

dozens of sites that describe it, show it, and some offer causes and treatment. It is so new in American culture that not many psychologists and professional counselors have a handle on either the causes or effective treatment. Here is my current perspective on the situation.

Contributing Factors

SI was quite uncommon a few years ago; it has become common. Why? In determining the causes of SI, one can find many motivations for the practice, varying with the individual. Permit me to list some contributing factors as I see them.

1) Too much interaction with a sordid, image-controlled culture. Everyone knows what everyone else is thinking and doing. The current generation is saturated with images and information flowing out of movies, magazines, the Internet (Youtube, MySpace and similar sites), and television. TV has Mtv, SciFi, and other channels that purportedly show all manner of weird behavior. The power of suggestion is strong. The copycat syndrome is capturing millions.

Movies have glorified SI and made it appear as a positive way of dealing with one's emotional pain. The Secretary shows the leading star cutting herself and engaging in sadomasochism. One line states, "Experiencing pain can lead to a more fulfilled life." A Slipping Down Life has the actress saying that SI "is the best thing I've ever done." The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan also promotes SI. I am sure there are many others. I just got sick of reading reviews of movies that have SI scenes.

Doubtless there are numerous sites on the Internet which display and promote the practice of SI. Many would probably come under the category of pornographic. With the advent of unregulated cable and satellite TV, anything goes. Porn channels are mixed in with groups of semi-legitimate channels so that young people can watch virtually any kind of activity, regardless of how prurient, far out or sordid it may be. Even some of the news channels are over the top with stuff that far surpasses our need to know. Stories are filled with feculent language, scenes of gore, and their weird ads promote and display the lowest kind of purulent behavior. Again, the power of suggestion is compelling.

Another avenue of input that suggests self-mutilation is rock music. A number of groups have targeted SI kids—and potential cutters—in their songs, encouraging and extolling the practice.

2) Self-hate is surely a factor. Making themselves feel pain, causing their bodies to bleed is one way to express that emotion. Why would anyone hate themselves this much? When one loses self-respect he opens himself to a number of behaviors. Self-respect can be lost through experiencing abuse, particularly sexual abuse in one's youth. Abuse makes one feel dirty, worthless and unclean. One-half of those involved in SI are victims of abuse.⁶

Self-hate is a product of the failure to see ourselves as God sees us. The lack of Bible teaching about the human family and its direct connection to God has grave consequences. The vacuum left by this omission will be filled by the humanists and evolutionists. The evolutionists cast all humans in the category of animals, perhaps just a little farther up the evolutionary food chain. If there is no Creator/God, then we are indeed nothing more than animals, so whatever we decide to do with or to ourselves is without eternal consequence.

3) Another factor in the growth of SI is the growing number of families that are grossly dysfunctional. The institution of marriage has suffered grave setbacks in our society in recent years. Almost one fourth of couples living together now are unmarried. Divorce creates one-parent homes, and women with children instinctively want a male in the household. Thus, live-in boyfriends are extremely common. Boyfriends care little about children, particularly girls, and those who are not blood relatives in the home are fair game for them. Most of the serious abuse we read about in the news today is perpetrated by boyfriends and step-fathers.

Divorce and one-parent homes aside, many families live in an unstable environment punctuated by alcoholism, drugs and unbridled carnality. Discipline went out the back door when humanism, free-thinking, atheism, and the social revolution of the 1960s came in the front door. Corporal punishment is virtually outlawed in America. Children know that they can call the Child Protection Service and have their parents hauled into court on nothing more than a casual accusation of abuse or mistreatment. The combination of these factors creates insecurity in the child or young person. Emotional wires are crossed as confusion displaces clear thinking and promotes maladjustment. Rebellion in the form of immoral or violent acts are not uncommon in children who come from dysfunctional families.

4) SI is often seen as a cry for attention. When young people are not given the love and personal attention they need, they will do something—whatever it takes—to get it. In dysfunctional homes, they can feel unnoticed,

unwanted and unloved. Those who consider themselves as having bland personalities may be especially tempted to do something strange in order to get the notice they want or feel they deserve.

An appeal for attention by aberrant behavior is not limited to children and adolescents. Even married persons have been known to cut themselves in order to get their spouse to pay more attention to them.

5) Eating “disorders,” such as bulimia or anorexia, are often found in cutters. Our economy has thrived on the proliferation of fast food outlets, processed foods, and other foods that contribute to obesity. At the same time, we corporately disdain anyone overweight and glorify the Barbie image. Girls who crave to be desirable make bingeing common. Any fat on the body was deemed unacceptable. Hundreds of thousands of girls and women began to starve themselves, denying the body of the basic nutrients it needs for normal functioning.

SI is not uncommon among those with eating disorders. They strike out at their bodies because the mirror does not reflect the image they desire.

6) The prime suspects, although few SI cutters would allude to their influence, would be the unintended consequences of the influence of the feminist movement. Originally, the feminists were noisily demanding “women’s rights” in the marketplace of business and commerce. “Equal pay for equal work” sounded like a good idea to a lot of people. But that was not the objective. They wanted abortion without restrictions and the right to dress and conduct themselves in any way they choose. Yet they demanded that men stop seeing them as sex objects.

Underneath, however, they were promoting lesbianism, humanism, agnosticism and a host of eastern spiritualities that are still fouling the religious and cultural atmosphere of America today. The emasculation of the American male and the end of what they saw as patriarchalism was a goal. They promoted the sexual revolution as the answer to unwanted pregnancies and virtually all the ills of the nation. The destruction of the institution of marriage was a particular target. They wanted a godless nation since they viewed Christianity as the major hindrance to women’s liberation and social progress.

The unintended upshot is that we now have more unwanted pregnancies than ever, more abortions, more personality confusion, more homosexuality, more of everything that eats at the moral fabric of our country. Women are more likely to be viewed as sex objects than ever

before, adding to the problem by strutting in styles that leave nothing to the imagination. The consequences of those changes are becoming more evident. Women are more depressed than ever. Millions are confessed addicts to psychotropic drugs and alcohol. Adolescent girls feel constant pressure to have sex, else they are not “with it.” Boys expect them to because the magazines, Internet, movies and television reveal that “everybody’s doing it.” While that is not true in actuality, it seems true to the average viewer.

I firmly believe that SI is just one more negative behavior that can, in part, be laid at the feet of the feminists and the liberal promoters of the sexual revolution. As young females look in the mirror and see a person they feel doesn’t “measure up,” they are depressed, frustrated, angry, hate-filled and are ready to make the body pay. The rise of feminism and the increase in the incidents of SI are parallel through the late 80s, the 90s and into this century. They are without a doubt associated.

7) Stress on the job, in the home and school is an underlying factor in many cases of SI. Working and living in a chaotic environment creates stress, anxiety and anger. As the women’s liberation movement advanced so did the feelings of anxiety and inadequacy. Movies and TV programs began to express these emotions and demonstrate ways that they could be managed. “If it worked for the beautiful person in the movie or TV program, it should work for me.”

After cutting themselves during an emotional moment, some said they felt relief from stress; a feeling of calm or peace came over them when they saw the blood. Some said they were able to better focus after cutting themselves. Was this a “dissociation” experience, where a person sort of floats out there, removed from reality? Yes, say some experts. The cutter reconnects the body and mind through pain. A few claim that they actually feel no pain during the cutting. The connection to pain and how it does or does not affect the cutter suggests that there is no standard emotion motivating those involved in SI.

Treatment

Let me say up front that the practice is so new to most counselors that there is no form of treatment with enough history to evoke a high recommendation. Marsha M. Linehan developed what is called Dialectic Behavior Therapy (DBT), a psychosocial treatment containing some standard behaviorist theories coupled with Zen techniques.⁷ A track record

of success is not readily available. And it would certainly not merit my recommendation to secure a therapist to enroll in such a treatment program.

Also, psychotropic drugs are not recommended by most therapists since a person with SI tendencies would be at a higher risk of suicide (FDA, 10/03 Advisory). And we all know that chemicals can cause severe, irreversible brain dysfunction. We are not opposed to medicine for biological, physical disease, but we do not promote drugs to correct behavior. There is seldom any permanent change wrought by psychopharmaceuticals.

Allow me to suggest some approaches keyed to the numbered factors above. My suggestions are primarily aimed at parents, pastors, and counselors who are challenged to deal with this problem.

1) Behaviors such as SI that are displayed on the media tell me that every effort needs to be made to remove their influence from Christian homes. No one can watch this tripe day in and day out without being negatively affected by it. A family with a member who is a “cutter” needs to sit down with that person and explain in kindness and love why the changes will be made. Discuss it calmly but deliberately and firmly. Stand behind your decision. Back it up with action. Sell the TV or take it to the dump. Put the computer to which the cutter has access in an open area of the house where there would be no privacy. The parent(s) may need to establish a code or password access to the Internet or stop access altogether. If e-mail is a necessity, find a way to access that without getting on an Internet browser. If Internet research is required, make a trip to the library.

If for some reason the parent or householder who owns the TV feels that removing it from the home is not a viable option, then he should reduce the number of available channels the TV can receive. Certain channels can be blocked or dispensed with altogether.

If the cutter is a minor in the home, all movies should be made off limits. Virtually all current Hollywood movies today have anti-Christian content, violence, sex, usage of drugs and alcohol, and other behaviors that should make it easy to say, “No more movies.”

The media flagrantly and shamelessly promote agnosticism. It is job security for them. The loss of faith creates a tremendous void in one’s life. This could provide a clue to why one would abuse himself. Hopelessness encourages strange behavior. A feeling of desperation evokes desperate activity. Find ways to provide faith-building input. Make relevant books and materials available. Ensure that the cutter has access to people and resources that will encourage his faith in the Bible and in God.

2) Self-hate is a symptom, not a cause. It reveals a skewed perspective and worldview, which lack a clear understanding of God's Word. For a person to find healing and deliverance, acknowledgment of the problem is essential. He must realize he is manifesting those thoughts and that they are incorrect and a hindrance to his happiness.

Counselors must remember that self-love is not the antidote for self-hate. We must not encourage the swinging pendulum. There is a balance that can be struck.

Self-hate often develops out of negative self-talk. If one regularly tells himself that he is a worthless clod, and he wishes he was someone else and somewhere else, his emotional life will deteriorate into confusion. David kept up a litany of positive self-input. He didn't brag on himself but he tried to put God and himself in a positive relationship that kept him from despondency. "Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy" (Psalm 61:1-3).

One may criticize and scold themselves at times but it should not be a habit. Tell it to the Lord in a way to make it a prayer: "Lord, I have goofed up. I made a stupid mistake. Help me to rectify it so that no one is harmed by it. Don't let my intellectual lameness be a hindrance to anyone today." Too much self-criticism causes a loss of self-respect. If one does not respect himself, he may not respect his family members, his colleagues in school or on the job.

How does one build self-respect? He chooses to do things that he admires in others, mimicking their virtues, avoiding their faults. But take one step at a time. I recommend this: Focus on a single attribute until something bad has been eliminated and something good has replaced it. For instance, focus on fulfilling a promise, keeping your word, such as being punctual. To keep one's word is indeed a virtue. Build that one virtue into a habit. Then tackle another trait that you see in someone you admire.

For a list of virtues, go to II Peter 1:5-10 where the apostle admonishes us to add to our faith virtue (Gr. areten - goodness; moral excellence). Then to excellence add knowledge. Everyone appreciates a person who understands, who knows things, who is a reader, a searcher for truth and wisdom. Then add temperance to knowledge. That suggests moderation, a trait touted by Paul in Philippians 4:5. Then Peter says to work on patience, literally, steadfastness while enduring opposition. This might include patience with one's self as he works through these positive attributes

one at a time, adding each to his character. To patience the apostle implores us to add godliness, the opposite of worldliness and carnality. To that virtue, Peter tells us to connect brotherly kindness, or love of the brethren. What a positive step it is when one can love others in spite of their shortcomings and weaknesses. Finally, add love to the mix. If one can find it in his heart to actively love and respect someone else, he is capable of coming to respect himself.

Adding these character traits automatically eliminates their opposites. Then one can look in the mirror and see a new person, someone who would not want or need mistreatment, such as cutting. The reflection is of someone who is worthy of respect.

3) A troubled home, a broken home, a home filled with abuse and dysfunctional lives, where drugs and alcohol and fighting are common, is a perfect environment for one to adopt a sense of hopelessness. To try something that others are doing in similar circumstances is so convenient—whether right or wrong is not an issue. To escape the pressure of lawlessness and disorder dominates the thoughts.

A “cutter” may have in his mind the concept that he needs to be hurt, or punished; lacking that action from authorities, he punishes himself. Loving discipline has been largely absent from many homes for the last three decades. Children were once disciplined by grandparents when parents were not present. No longer. Parents generally forbid it. Quite often, especially in some segments of society, grandparents virtually raise children while both parents work. If not grandparents, then daycare workers or other baby sitters. But in these settings, corporal punishment is almost non-existent. The child adopts the concept that doing wrong has little or no consequence. A lack of discipline leaves them without the ability to consistently distinguish right from wrong. It inhibits a sense of security and comfort. David said, “Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4). To know that if he drifted into a wrong path, God’s rod of correction was there to move him back. If he falls and cannot get up by himself, the staff of God was there to pull him to safety. Likewise, a shepherd/pastor has the authority to apply discipline and correction in the context of church life. Rather than a negative application, making sure one does not participate in the choir or hold a position unless his life demonstrates merit is a positive move that may help one to see that there are consequences and rewards based on his behavior.

Here are some scriptural guidelines for disciplining children with love: Proverbs 13:34; 19:18; 29:15,17; Colossians 3:21.

We need to do all in our power to help those who practice SI toward a stable home life. If home can be made a refuge, a place of safety, and a place of love, then there would be few persons from that home feeling the need to self-inflict pain. If we focus on correcting one's environment by eliminating the negative factors one by one, we will be addressing one of the prime contributing factors to SI, not just dealing with the symptoms. Timothy came to faith and to active Christians service in large part because of home influence: "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also" (II Timothy 1:5).

If the pastor or counselor has no opportunity to improve the home life of a cutter, he will have to focus on other treatments while continuing to watch for a way to alleviate the psychological dangers of a chaotic family environment. Self-abuse may not stop until there are definite steps toward a restoration of a biblical pattern of family life surrounding the cutter.

4) When the abuse seems to constitute a cry for attention, determine who it is that he feels is neglecting him. It may be parents, or peers, or secret "loves." Work with them to restore an appropriate amount of attention—not too much at first, which might signal a big change that could appear hypocritical.

The parent(s), pastor or counselor can find creative ways to distract the cutter from those times when it would be convenient for him to be tempted to SI. Take him somewhere like the zoo, the library, a museum, or an ice cream shop. Make it an enjoyable time. How about getting them involved in Bible quizzing?

The Bible says, "A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame" (Proverbs 29:15). Neglect evokes a sense of "I'm not loved, therefore something must be wrong with me." One of the teenage shooters in the Columbine school massacre spent the night lost out on the mountain behind his home when he was about ten years old. It got dark and he was fearful to come down before the light of the next day. He was never missed by his family. Later, the family was totally unaware that he was making bombs in the basement. The scripture was soon fulfilled—he brought his parents to shame.

Parents must listen to their children, paying attention to their behavior. Provide loving discipline. Give them quality time. By so doing, the sense of neglect can be diminished along with the need for SI.

Sometimes cutters feel that even God, if there is a God, does not love them. It is not always so easy to convince such a person of God's love, but we must attempt to build their faith with passages like John 3:16; 16:27; Jeremiah 31:3; Romans 5:8; Ephesians 2:4,5; I John 3:1.

5) Those involved with problems like bulimia or anorexia need reassurance from significant persons in their life to help them overcome a severe negative self-image. We must recognize that these are not "diseases" that need medical attention or drugs. Those persons involved in these aversions to food are probably already abusing prescription or over the counter drugs. They certainly don't need antipsychotic medication. Studies have shown that drugs like Prozac work no better than dummy pills for treatment of obsessive anxiety over body image.⁸

Cutting will never alleviate one's problems, only compound them. Inwardly, they know this, but they dislike the way they look. They must stay thin and avoid becoming fat. Thin is beautiful, they think, so food is their enemy. These extreme views are irrational and must be countered by love, acceptance and the reassurance that proper body image should not be governed by Hollywood or the TV personalities. Acceptance by celebrities and people seen on TV or the writers of books on the horrors of obesity is not to be valued over the opinions of family and special friends who sincerely care. Again, these persons need to limit their media input, including magazines, television and Internet activity.

Persons involved in eating disorders are plagued by comparison of themselves with others whose lot seemed more appealing. This nearly always results in a wrong self-image. Paul reminds us that we shouldn't compare ourselves with others, whether it be in the matter of body size and shape, in possessions, or in our benefits provided by diligent work and God's blessings (II Corinthians 10:12). Psalm 73 describes Asaph, a believer in God, who fell into this trap. He became discouraged when he compared his lot in life with others. His doubts and questions persisted until he went to the house of the Lord, and there he found the answers he needed: "Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I, and ignorant" (vv. 17-22). The last statement should be emphasized.

It is in the sanctuary of God, where the Word of the Lord is declared, that we find the biblical alternative to destructive self-abuse. When Asaph again looked through the eyes of true faith, he understood that “they that are far from thee shall perish: thou has destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works” (vs. 27,28). Slip into the Word, not onto the [psychiatrist’s] couch!

God’s Word says we are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14). Respect for our bodies as the creation of God is elemental to our existence in a Christian environment.

6) The legacy of the feminist movement is just now coming into full view in America. Millions of couples are divorced and/or living together, drugging of children has replaced parenting in countless homes, discipline has virtually vanished, the emasculation of the American male has been largely achieved, gay marriage is becoming the law of the land, abortion can be had on demand, women fill the workplace rather than the home, and blended families are reaping the consequences of a planned departure from American traditions. We have sown the wind and now we are reaping the whirlwind.

Sometimes uninformed persons will view soteric counselors as too idealistic. Here is a principle that we must never forget: The farther we move away from God’s ideal as revealed in the Scriptures, the more problems we invite to ourselves. So, there should be little wonder that we are producing a crop of young people who have nothing better to do than perform self-injury?

The founding principles of our society are gradually being dismantled before our eyes. This departure from moral and ethical principles, which were based on the Word of God and undergirded our governmental and political systems in the past, is generating a sense of drift into the unknown. It tears at the emotional fiber of every one of us who sit by and watch. There are no institutions that American youth can trust in and hang onto. Even Christianity seems to be retreating from the cultural onslaught of the worldchangers. Some go into depression, and others become emotionally disturbed and search for an escape through alcohol, drugs or behaviors such as cutting.

It is time the true, Bible-believing Christians stood up and said, “Enough is enough!” Our parishioners need to hear us declare, “Thus saith the Word of God!” on a regular basis. We need to teach our children the principles of the Word regarding marriage, that it is a covenant between one man and one woman for life. We need to continue to maintain the Bible

position that the practice of homosexuality is a sin. If our children and youth see us courageously holding up the authority of Scripture rather than the philosophies of men, perhaps they will take heart. If they see we are still standing for the inerrancy of the Bible rather than popular pseudo science, maybe it will generate some hope. If they see us loving our wives, honoring our husbands, guiding our households in a biblical fashion, praying for our nation and its leaders, and being faithful to church, they will have something to believe in.

7) The treatments suggested for stress can fill a book, but some are tied to other factors in this article. Drifting out of God's plan for the home is a primary stress producer. Girls and women are paying a big price emotionally to follow the culture that is being guided by a lesbian and homosexual agenda. Over three-fourths of those seeking professional counseling are females. The pressure on them to get out of the home and into the traditional workplaces of men is ever-increasing. Their minds are divided, their loyalties are splintered. Should they compete for jobs with men or stay in the home for their husband and children? Should they listen to their pastor who holds up the Bible as the pattern for our lives or heed the college professors, magazine editors and female politicians who promote the feminist agenda?

The stress trickles down to our children. Small children miss the nurturing they need, middle school children are forced to fend for themselves, and older teens feel detached from home and church but connected to peers, school counselors and teachers who are guiding them away from biblical principles.

The antidote is to provide inspiration and direction out of the morass of philosophy and humanistic practices that the world is cramming into our youth. Our children need to get out of the government schools and into a Christian school if at all possible. The live-in boyfriends/girlfriends need to go. Help those old enough to work find a minimally stressful job. Too many of our youth want to have without earning, to be without becoming, and arrive without making the trip. Toss out the rock music albums—or any kind of debilitating music—especially those with lyrics extolling self-mutilation. Parents need to inform themselves about what their children are hearing and watching. Our homes must become a refuge from the world, not an extension of it.

Youth must constantly be warned of the world's agenda: "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:2). The world's systems are pressuring our youth

to conform to their concept of culture, government, and lifestyle. John warned us in this way: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (I John 2:15-17). This is a life or death struggle with eternity at stake.

Every Christian has a struggle with the flesh pulling him toward the world. As long as a person remains uncommitted to God, there will be great stress in his life. The stress lessens as one submits to the Lord. That does not mean that there is no stress in the Christian’s life, but that the automatic stress in our lives as a result of living in rebellion to God will not be a factor as we walk in the liberty of the Spirit.

One proven stress reducer is meditation on the Word of God. (See Isaiah 26:3,4.) Anxiety can be displaced by peace (Psalm 119:165). Avoid Yoga or other forms of Eastern spirituality thinly veiled as “breathing exercises” or “stress relief.” Other physical exercises such as walking, jogging, etc., are better alternatives. An I-Pod or similar item with an audio Bible on it is a great companion. Input of the Word of God is a healing potion for the soul.

Some General Admonitions

As you counsel someone concerning SI, consider the following:

- Go to the root of the problem, realizing that cutting is only an expression of a much deeper condition. Something is going on beneath the surface in that person’s life that desperately needs attention.
- Identify their true motivation for cutting if possible. That may not surface in the first conversation/confrontation about the problem. Displace the lies that they have heard, or that they are telling themselves, with biblical truth.
- Suggest alternative coping skills to deal with their temptation to perform SI, such as journaling, exercising, or other activities that take them out of their immediate environment.
- Help the person reduce the opportunities for SI. In other words, discover when this usually occurs and suggest other places to be during

those times. Help them make plans that will get them away from their blades and paraphernalia. Don't give them as much opportunity for their emotions to take over and control them.

- Find more ways to channel love to the person. Encourage those nearest to them to do so. Suggest ways this can be done.

- Pray for them daily, and by all means, show compassion. You never know what surprises your son, daughter or grandchild will introduce into your own family circle.

Notes:

1. Herodotus, Book VI, chap. 75.

2. Alise Speigl, "The History and Mentality of Self-Mutilation," Health and Science, NPR Morning Edition 6/10/05 3. Dr. Rebecca J. Frey, <http://www.answers.com/topic/self-mutilation>

4. Pediatric News 36,10/02, p. 29

5. Movie reviews obtained at: <http://www.spout.com/members/0/tags/self-mutilation/MemberTagFilms.aspx>

6. Dr. Rebecca J. Frey, <http://www.answers.com/topic/self-mutilation>

7. http://www.mentalhelp.net/poc/view_doc.php?type=doc&id=8140&cn=91

8. Benedict Cary, NYTimes, 6/14/06

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/14/health14prozac.html?partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>