

# Cutting Pain

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## **Teens self-abuse speaks volumes about their hurting.**

Chava was 15 when she pierced the flesh of her hands and arms with a sewing needle. “I was desperate to get my mind off all the sadness and confusion I was feeling.” She says. “Part of me was thinking, *I can’t believe I’m doing this*. But the other part of me was grateful I was able to numb the pain on the inside because I was now focusing on a different pain – a physical pain on the outside.”

The deep emotional pain started when Chava was raped at 11 years old. “I didn’t know what to do with all that hurt,” she continues. “It just wouldn’t go away. It kept growing and gnawing at my insides.”

As Chava matured, she gained a little weight, which added to her worries. “I began to obsess about my weight and started throwing up three times a day. I actually got to the point where eating anything made me physically sick.” Unfortunately, Chava learned to juggle an eating disorder and an obsession with cutting herself.

## **Self-destructive behavior**

Millions of teens are involved in self-destructive behavior. The majority are females, but the percentage among males is rising. And it’s not simply a North American tragedy. Self-destructive teens live in every part of the world.

Perhaps you’re aware of a student who’s involved in self-mutilation. He or she may be known as a “cutter.” No one simply begins cutting for the fun of it. Someone who cuts herself – or commits any self-destructive behavior – is trying to cover up a painful experience or is crying for help.

“I have a friend who’s bulimic,” 17-year-old Amy says. “We were involved in gymnastics together for several years. Her parents own the gym and she feels a lot of pressure from them to be athletic and look (a certain way). She’s been raised in a Christian home and is involved in church, but she’s under so much pressure to be thin and have everything in control. She throws up at least once a day.”

Amy is mentoring her friend, and together they are studying the lies that some young women believe: God doesn’t love us; we have no value; God isn’t good. “She’s learning to speak and believe the truth against the lies of Satan,” Amy says. “I’m trying to help her realize that her battle is deeper than just not throwing up anymore or getting thin. There are deeper issues – spiritual issues. Until she believes the fact that she was made in the image of God, she’s living a lie.”

## **Sources of pain**

People who hurt them-selves are denying the truth that they are God’s handiwork. They believe they’re useless; they feel they have no significance because someone has used or disregarded them. They’re unaware of the greater purpose God has for them.

Accompanying this line of unhealthy thinking is the world’s unrealistic expectation that we should be able to perfect ourselves. When we can’t, we assume something must be wrong with us.

Therefore, cutting eating disorders, drugs and alcohol become methods of self-abuse for not being “perfect” or good enough.

Gretchen attends a Christian school in New Smyrna Beach, FLA. “I have a friend who’s a Christian,” she says, “but she’s been involved in cutting. For years she was convinced she was ugly and that no one cared about her. She doesn’t have much money, so some girls from our youth group decided to do something nice for her. We got her a bunch of girly stuff – makeup, nail care, body spray, lotions – and gave it to her, just because we were trying to reach out to her. That’s when she opened up and told us that she’d been cutting herself.”

That small act of kindness motivated the girl to get involved with the youth group and church. “She’s growing spiritually now,” Gretchen says. “She feels loved and cared for, and she’s learning that God has a purpose and plan for her life.”

No Christian teen is exempt from self-destructive behavior. The world’s lies are powerful. Watch for the following warning signs in teens:

- \* Wearing long shirts when it’s not cold (to cover scars from cutting or burning) and extreme modesty (doesn’t change clothes in front of people or wear clothing that covers every area of skin.)
- \* Disappearing quickly after meals (to throw up or take laxatives)
- \* A sudden withdrawal from friends and family to drink or take drugs.

It’s up to us – parents, teachers and ministers who are experiencing a genuine relationship with Christ – to take the hand of a hurting teen and walk her into a true understanding of God’s love and forgiveness.