

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: My 13-year-old daughter talked to me about “cutters”. I was shocked to learn that there are teens at her school that purposely cut their arms with razor blades. My daughter seemed to have a somewhat cavalier attitude. It worries me. How should I handle this situation?

ANSWER: First, stop and thank God that the lines of communication between you and your daughter are still open! Next, make certain your mood is one of **calmness and concern**. 13-year-olds need to know that their mothers are not overwhelmed by occurrences in their lives. Your daughter needs not only your calmness and concern, but your **strength** as well--strength that comes from your dependence on God.

Sadly, a small but significant group of young people (about 1%), mostly female, usually beginning around puberty, handle the emotional hurts of life by **redirecting** them. **Heart pain is shifted to physical pain**. It is not hard to understand that physical pain (which is controlled and administered by the person) is easier to cope with than the often overwhelming emotional pain of adolescence. Physiologically, during this behavior, the brain actually releases chemicals that produce a calming effect. Thus, the behavior, which seems so hard to understand to the outsider, becomes both attractive and addictive to the “cutter”.

You should handle this situation by incorporating the following: (1) Pray often for wisdom, calmness, and strength. (2) Have some heart-to-heart talks with your daughter with a mood of loving-care, calmness and strength. (3) Show her the strength of **your** personal trust-relationship with Jesus Christ. (4) Educate yourself about the psychology and treatment of self-injury. (5) Seize this situation as an opportunity from God to deepen your relationship with your daughter as well as deepen your relationship with Christ. (6) Affirm her willingness to talk with you. (7) Ask her if she has ever felt the desire or need to injure herself.

If you discover your daughter has or is currently engaging in this deleterious behavior, **take immediate action**. Warning signs include: low self-esteem, declining and poor performance in academics and other activities, wearing clothing that hides arms and legs even in hot weather, struggles in relationships, and injuries that are inadequately explained. Most treatment options involve substituting relaxation behaviors for the self-injury behaviors, psychotherapy, teaching coping skills, family therapy or group sessions, and possibly medications for anxiety and depression.

Talk with your teen's doctor and actively pursue your therapeutic and medical options.

For the Christian, self-injury overflows into the person's relationship with God. God is not perceived as good enough or strong enough to handle the wounds and pains of life. Doubt and guilt often weaken and warp a person's faith walk. Seek out an experienced, Christian psychotherapist who can delve deep into the spiritual component of this behavior.

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