

When Cutting Comes to Church:

HOW YOUTH WORKERS CAN HELP TEENS WHO SELF-INJURE

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Introduction:

It happened my first week as the youth ministry intern in the summer of 2001. Clara, then 15, a girl I had known for several years, approached me and asked if she could come over to my house and chat with me. Because I had been close to her family since they moved to Allentown, I was excited about the prospect of hanging out with Clara. I babysat Clara and her sister, when they were younger and now I house sat for the teenagers when their parents went on trips. Clara knew me during those turbulent teenage years and she knew my testimony as a recovering cutter.

Clara sat on my Lazy Boy recliner. Petite in stature, she looked lost as she sat with her legs crossed Indian style. Her long hair framed her face and hung past her buttocks. She was a very attractive girl, I noticed, and she looked at me with clear, liquid brown eyes and bluntly said, "I think I'm gay." Unprepared for such a statement, I kept my composure and explored the topic. True, she had engaged in a lesbian relationship that never directly involved intercourse, but did that make her gay? "Boys just make me feel icky," she said. "I feel like girls understand me so much better. Amy, you used to be into self-mutilation? I know I can trust you with this. I'm a cutter." I looked at her pretty face, and wanted to cry. I watched her grow up. I put her to bed when her parents went out. I cared about her. I saw the melancholy torture in her eyes and I knew that she was serious. If Clara was a cutter, who else growing up right in front of me was also cutting?

Over the months and years that followed, more students let me in on their dark, little secret. During one pre-dawn conversation on the high school winter retreat, Julie, 15, told me that she had tried cutting a couple times. Then another girl, Martha, 16, who I had been counseling, showed up to youth group with mysterious bandages on her wrist. Since I was giving her a ride home that night, I asked her if she had cut. She admitted that she did. The number of students, both male and female, continues to rise dramatically. More often than not, a trusted youth worker knows about a student's cutting before her parents do.

All of a sudden, one of your students has come to you with her horrible secret, or perhaps you found out from someone else, or saw the scars on her lovely, youthful arms. There is hope. God has put this child into your life in this specific time and this place. Because you are her youth worker, entrusted with the responsibility of shepherding a teenager, you are capable of helping her. Come with me on a journey of hope, and let us enlist the help of the Holy Spirit to guide us in our journey. Remember, this is not a dark end, but a new beginning.

Note: Since cutting is still largely a female issue, this manual will focus on teenage girls and their cutting habits. There are a rapidly growing number of young males who are cutting and injuring themselves. I do hope to address the issues of young men and self-injury in the future.

When Cutting Comes to Church

The revelation that a student is cutting can be overwhelming. Questions fill your mind—am I a mandatory reporter? What is cutting? Do her parents know? What do I do next? How will the other students react? A lot of the times youth workers are left with more questions than answers.

What is cutting?

Cutting is the act of purposely injuring oneself using a sharp object such as a razor, scissors, knife, etc. In addition to cutting, self-injury also includes carving, scratching, branding, marking, picking and pulling skin and hair, burns or abrasions, biting, and head banging (AACP, 1999.)

Most self-mutilators are between the ages of 11 to 30 and 97% are female. According to Teenhelp.com many teenage cutters suffer from “lack of role models and invalidation”. Half of the girls who cut have been sexually abused, but others could also have been physically or emotionally abused (and not necessarily by the parents or family unit). Patty McAlpine, LCSW and marriage and family counselor says, “...this generation of girls is being exposed at a very young age, though media and pop culture, to sex and violence, and it is forcing them to grow up way too fast. They are simply overwhelmed with adult issues that they are not emotionally prepared to handle” (Kurowski, 2003.)

Cutting also serves as a coping mechanism, a way for girls to relieve stress. According to Elaine Lader, founder of Teen Line, “Once somebody uses that [cutting] as a tension reliever or a coping mechanism, they tend to use it again and again and it becomes kind of an addictive behavior and that is the problem with cutting” (Discovery Health, 2003.) “There is a chemical release that takes place in the brain when a person engages in this behavior. It has sort of an analgesic effect on them that allows them to calm down” (Kurowski, 2003.)

Other times she’ll cut because she hurts; the physical pain draining a sense of livelihood, but most times physical pain is dulled compared to the piercing pain in her soul. “Open wounds are a fairly distinct expression of emotional pain,” writes Dr. Tracy Alderman, “One of the reasons why individuals injure themselves is so that they transform internal pain into something more tangible, external and treatable. The wound becomes a symbol of both intense suffering and of survival” (Self-Help Magazine, 1998.) No one can see her inner turmoil, so she has transformed her emotions onto her flesh to make you and everyone else understand that she is hurting.

Cutting is not usually an act of suicide. One cutter wrote on her website, “I don’t want to die. I self-injure to stay alive, to deal with the unbearable. If I wanted to die, then I wouldn’t be here now” (Secret Shame, 2004.) However, over half of individuals who self-injure do go on to attempt suicide (Crimson Ashes, 2004.)

Along with sexual and other types of abuse, there are several mental disorders associated with self-injurious behavior, which include borderline personality disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, clinical depression, bipolar

disorder, and multiple personality disorder. If the student's family has a history of mental illness or if you suspect your student may be suffering from one of these illnesses, please advise her family to contact their family doctor. The family doctor will discuss treatment options with the family such as therapy, medicinal treatments, and resources. (We will be talking about biblical and spiritual support later!) Remember, even if your student suffers from a mental illness along with her cutting, she is more than her diagnosis. She is a human being created in the image of God.

How can I be sure she's a cutter?

If your student has not confided in you with her self-injury yet and you only suspect she is cutting, here are some of the signs that she could be a cutter. This list is not all-inclusive. Some teenagers may exhibit some of these signs and not be cutters at all. This list is merely to serve as a guideline for assessing your students.

1. She may wear long sleeves or long pants in the summer to hide her scars. Also, her clothing may be very baggy.
2. When she changes during a retreat or other event, she always changes her clothes alone.
3. There are unusual marks on her arms, legs, or other parts of her body.
4. She has a lot of band-aids on her arms or legs a lot of the time.
5. She seems to buy a lot of bandages, vitamin E oil, and/or triple antibiotic.
6. When asked about her scars, she makes up wild stories about how she got them or seems flustered.
7. She asks to use the bathroom a lot, or excuses herself during uncomfortable situations.
8. She may have low self-confidence and is easily frustrated.
9. She may suffer from depression and/or some other mental illness.
10. She may have a history of sexual abuse and/or trauma.
11. She has a fascination with knives and other sharp objects.
12. She finds blood appealing.
13. She creates dark art and poetry using images of blood, death, etc. and the colors red, black, and gray.
14. She refuses to go swimming and/or wear a bathing suit.
15. She's very insecure about her body and dislikes being touched.
16. She may only have a few close friends.
17. She's absolutely brilliant but just doesn't seem to apply herself.
18. She may isolate herself in social situations, while other times may appear very outgoing.
19. She may bite off her nails and/or the skin around her nails.
20. She has sharp objects like razors, scissors, safety pins, etc. in her purse/backpack.
21. When in doubt, check her blog or online page. She may mention her behavior there.

(Crimson Ashes, 2004.)

Several social and psychological characteristics are common in self-injurers as well:

1. Strongly dislike/invalidate themselves.
2. Hypersensitive to rejection
3. Chronically angry (usually at themselves)
4. Tend to suppress their anger
5. High levels of aggressive feelings, which they disapprove of strongly and often suppress or direct inward
6. Impulsive and lacking impulse control
7. Tend to act in accordance to their emotions
8. Depressed and suicidal/self-destructive
9. Suffer chronic anxiety
10. Tend to be irritable
11. Do not see themselves as skilled at coping
12. Lack coping skills
13. Do not feel like they have much control over how to cope with life
14. Tend to be avoidant

15. See themselves as lacking
(Secret Shame, 2004.)

Confront the Cutting

Cutting won't go away. The longer cutting goes on in your student's life, the harder it will be to help her to stop. You must confront this situation. The first thing you must do is figure out how you are going to respond to her cutting before you confront her (Self-Injury: A Struggle, 2004.) Should you talk to her parents first or confront the student directly? Is it wise to talk to the parents if you are unsure about the teenager's behavior? Often girls will confide in their friends, teachers, youth leaders, and guidance counselors before their parents. So, more often than not, you will know before mom and dad.

If you choose to confront your student yourself, make sure that another youth leader is present. If you are a male, make sure a female youth leader is with you when you talk to your student. It is imperative that you have another adult around to witness this conversation.

According to Drs. Conterio and Lader, the authors of Bodily Harm, when confronting your student you should not do or say the following

1. You should not display anger. (Remember, she is angry, too. She may respond to your anger by getting angry herself. She deals with her anger by cutting.)
2. You should not tell your student to just stop it. (She needs help.)
3. Think of it as "just as phase" or "just for attention." (Do not ignore this! She is sending you a bright, red scream as Marilee Strong says.)
4. Punish or banish them from youth group or youth events for cutting. (This just allows your student to brood about her emotions more in her time alone, making her more liable to cut.)

(Self-Injury: A Struggle, 2004.)

If you confront your student, but she insists that she is not cutting, you could communicate your concerns to her parents. However, if she does admit that she's cutting or comes to you on her own to confess, it is imperative that you tell your student's parents what is going on. I repeat, **you must tell the student's parents about her cutting.** Even though parents aren't always on the ball with what's going on in their kids' lives, they have been entrusted with the sacred role of parenting by God. As their legal guardians, they have a right to know what is going on with their child. It is your responsibility to make sure parents know. If your student is afraid, offer to go with her to share her parents.

Court-Mandated Reporting

In some states, cutting and other types of self-injury fall into the category of court-mandated reporting. A mandated reporter is a professional or lay worker that is required to report child abuse or maltreatment to the state. The state laws are tricky on this matter because the student is being injured by herself, not an outside party. Except in the confessional, clergy and some lay workers are required to report child abuse. Make sure you know what the laws are in your state.

Some states have an anonymous child abuse tip line that you can call to report incidents. They will tell you if what you report is applicable or not and refer the situation to local child protective services. In many states self-harm is not considered suicidal intent--most individuals are not voluntarily or involuntarily committed if they are not in

danger of killing themselves or someone else. If the student is deeply delusional or in a troubled state, he or she may be committed, but it is the decision of the mental health worker at the emergency room whether or not to commit an individual to an inpatient unit. Because of the rise in cutting and its severity, more cutters and self-injurers are being admitted to inpatient mental health units at area hospitals. In fact, many areas have units and programs specifically to treat cutting and self-injury.

As a volunteer youth worker, I rarely told parents about their student's cutting, but I did tell the youth pastor. At that point, it was his responsibility as a mandated reporter. Again, state tip lines are fantastic. By calling, you fulfilled your duty as a court mandated reporter and left an iffy situation up to child welfare services. You can also try calling a local mental health clinic and ask them what to do with your particular situation. Document any calls you make on this student's behalf. Keep a folder somewhere private and write down the date, the time of the call, a few notations.

Promises You Can and Cannot Make

It has already been discussed that you must tell parents and possibly report this self-injurious behavior to child protective services, but there are also other promises that youth workers should and should not make to their students.

Do not tell your student you will always be there for her. You cannot possibly be there for someone all the time. At some point between working with the other kids in your youth group, parents, church meetings, family, and all the other things on your plate, you're going to let this girl down. When you do let her down, it will make things worse for her. Only God can fulfill this role in your youth's life.

Do not tell your student she won't have to go to counseling. Biblical and/or secular counseling has tremendous value for cutters. However, if she has trusted you with her big secret, she is going to look to you for support. If you help encourage her to open up to her counselor, she will benefit greatly from counseling. Remember, she still needs you to talk to, to laugh with, and to encourage her in her walk with God. A counselor only sees her once every two weeks for an hour. You see her several times a week at youth group, church, and Bible studies. Besides, isn't it you she calls, IM's, or e-mails when her world gets ripped apart? Believe me; she needs you now more than ever.

You can tell your student that you will let her down, but God won't. Let her know right off the bat that you will fail her. But let her know how much God loves her and wants to encircle her with His love. You don't have to explain all the mysteries of the universe, just let her know that God hears her inner screams.

Tell her that you will walk beside her. Don't run ahead of her, or try to lead her where she's not ready to go. In the gospels, Jesus met people where they were at, and took them where He knew they should be. Be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Her progress may be slow, but celebrate her small victories. If she hasn't cut for a week, invite her over to see a movie. Send her a card to let her know you care. Give her a call to encourage her. Don't fill her head with pretty Christian clichés; show your love out loud.

Let her know that you accept her, but not her behavior. Let her know that your relationship is not conditional. You will not leave her if she messes up. Also, if she does slip up, assure her that you still love her and care for her. However, she may try to

manipulate you. If you feel that she is trying to manipulate you with her behavior, tell her that you cannot talk to her until the next day. Otherwise, she may use her cutting as a way to get a more intimate relationship with you.

Remember, this is in no way an extensive list, but a very basic guideline on how to begin to care for your students. She's trusted you with her very dark secret, and she's counting on you to show her how to follow God in the midst of her struggles. Let your student know that she is not alone. Tell her how precious she is and how much you care about her. She might not believe you, but she needs to be constantly reminded of your love for her.

Talking to Parents about Cutting

It's not unusual for parents to feel frustrated and helpless when learning that their child is cutting. Knowing where to go for help, what friends or church leaders to confide in, and helping their child compounded with the responsibilities of career, marriage, and other children, it seems like a battle that is lost before it starts. Be sure to ask the family how they are doing, and take stock of how you are feeling as well. You can't help her or your other students if you are not taking care of yourself. Remember to curl up with the Bible and replenish yourself with the freshness of God's word.

As you help the family deal with their emotions, below are five things you can use to comfort the family. Feel free to copy these reminders down onto an index card and remind yourself about them as well. Satan wants to destroy your student and her family. By reminding yourself of God's promises, you can keep the evil one at bay.

Just for Parents

1. God can help your child as you entrust her to Him.

In Mark 9, we are confronted with a desperate father who has brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus. The father explains that the disciples could not drive out the demon. Perhaps you've taken your daughter to counselors and therapists, maybe she's on a regimen of Prozac or some other medication, but and there has still been no change. Like the disciples you are scratching your head and wondering what to do next. Keep praying for her.

Maybe you're losing hope or you don't believe that God can really heal her. Maybe like this father you are saying to God, "She has cut her arms and her legs. We've gotten her Christian counseling and her youth worker is mentoring her. But if you can do anything, Jesus, take pity on us and help us."

Jesus' response to the man is the same as his response to you. It is, "If you can? Believe me, Child; everything is possible if you believe!"

The Bible says that, "Immediately, the boy's father exclaimed, 'I do believe! Help me overcome my unbelief!'" Just between you and me, I often find myself screaming out this simple prayer in the midst of my most troubling moments.

It was only after the father made this proclamation of faith that the boy was healed. The father had to learn to entrust himself not to the healing process, but in the God who heals.

2. Your child may keep cutting despite your prayers, love, and Godly counsel.

Most likely, your daughter is not demon-possessed like the son in the aforementioned Bible passage, but she is tormented by something. Keep in mind that despite your best efforts she can still make a conscious decision to cut no matter how much you pray for her. There is no one who is exempt from the effects of sin, not even your daughter. Remember, only she can choose to end her cycle of self-harm.

3. God cares more about your child than you do.

Because He created her beautiful frame while she was in her mother's womb and because sent His Son to die for her sins, God loves your daughter more than you ever could. Isaiah 49: 15-16 says, "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the baby she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands."

4. God can redeem your daughter's actions and use them for good.

After being horribly mistreated by his family, Egyptian officials, and friends, Joseph rises to become a ruling power in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. After his ordeal, he exclaims, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good," when he forgives his brothers. Believe me, we worship the same God today who loves to take our "ashes" and trade them in for "crowns of beauty" (Isaiah 61:3.)

5. God is with you in this.

God is still your Father even as your minister to your Child in the role of parent. Let his arms envelop you right now and find rest in him. Take some time to read Psalm 46, and close your eyes and talk to God. You're exhausted—emotionally, physically, spiritually, and mentally. Don't feel bad if you fall asleep. Francis of Sales once said, "I'd rather be asleep at the breast of God than awake at any other place." Spend some time with your Daddy, and ask Him to give you the strength to minister to His child entrusted to you.

Picking Up the Pieces

Even with counseling and prayer, cutting is not going to simply disappear. Her parents are responsible to make sure that she receives she needs—medically, emotionally, and spiritually. She may be seeing a therapist, a counselor, a family doctor, and being supported by her family, but she needs you, too! You are her trusted youth worker! Your student may be on the road to recovery, but she is still struggling with the urge to cut. As you pick up the pieces, here are some things you want to keep in mind.

1. Commit her to stop cutting.

Some counselors and doctors do not feel it is beneficial to tell cutters to end their self-injury immediately because it is their only coping mechanism. (Alderman, 1998.) You must encourage your child to end this mutilating behavior because it is sinful and harmful. Some counselors, parents and youth workers like to have a teenager sign a paper, such as the *Nazarite Vow* (see Appendix A). Your daughter may not want to be accountable to you in this. Help her find a trusted adult like a female mentor or youth pastor to sign the covenant with her. However, it is not mandatory that the any covenant is signed. Sometimes the guilt over cutting is compounded when a covenant is violated. What is important is that your student is being encouraged not to cut and that she is accountable for her actions.

Forever seems like a long time not to cut for your student. Encourage her not to cut for an hour, then five hours, then a whole day. Congratulate her on her small successes. If she does cut, remember that she can be forgiven. Pray with her and let her know that you still love her.

2. Be aware of triggers.

Triggers are various stimuli that prompt a chemical or emotional response that causes a former cutter or cutter to be more likely to cut. For example, a girl's hormones are haywire at the time of her menstrual cycle. If she cuts, she is more likely to cut at this time. By keeping track of her monthly periods, you can help remind her that her emotions may be the result of PMS.

Triggers can also include music she listened to before or after cutting, certain colors, movies, and sounds. Use the *Your Trigger Profile* (Appendix B) in the back of the manual to help her to discover her triggers. You can also use the *Replay Sheet* (Appendix C) to help her rethink past cutting incidents.

3. Have sharp objects removed from her room. Do not allow her to bring them on retreats. You may want to ban razors, scissors, lighters and other common self-injury objects from youth group and retreats.

It may be annoying for your student not to have scissors, staplers, or razors to shave her legs readily accessible, but it is helpful. Everything your student has ever used to cut should be banned from her room. If she wants to use scissors, then she must ask a family member for a pair. The family may even have to put some of these items in a locked cabinet. If she really wants to cut herself, she will find something to use. However, the longer she has to search for an object to hurt herself with, the less likely she is to cut. If she is not coming to family members to get an item used in hygiene, then she may have acquired these items elsewhere. If she has secretly purchased her own razors, then she might also be using them to cut.

As annoying as these restrictions are on youth trips and retreats, the alarming rise of self-injury among teenagers makes them almost necessary. If you know you have some cutters in your group, you may want to implement a new policy to keep your students safe. If you are going on a long trip in which shaving may be necessary, allow an adult to keep the student's razors and accompany the students to the restroom when they shave. All the girls can have a shaving party together. Girls like to go to the bathroom in groups anyway.

4. Be vigilant without following her around constantly. If she wants to cut, she will find a way to do it.

"Most individuals who injure themselves will not do so in the presence of others" (Alderman, 1998.) While you should not let her slip away at youth events, you also cannot follow her all the time, especially because you have other students to care for. Plus it might look a little odd if you coincidentally show up in the church bathroom each time she's in there (especially if you're a male youth worker!)

Encouraging your student to open up to you or another youth worker allows her to let you know how she's feeling. If you can understand that she feels bad enough or emotional enough to cut, then she has communicated her pain to you and may refrain from cutting. If you start to notice band-aids on her arms or legs, or if she is exhibiting the same behaviors now as when she used to cut, chances are that she probably is. Confront her gently. However, do not ask her if she cuts all the time. Your paranoia will have a bad effect on her. Do ask her questions about her cutting such as, "What's it like for you when you cut?" Allow her to talk openly about her self-injury. (Secret Shame, 2004.)

5. Do not give ultimatums ever.

They just don't work. If you said, "The next time you cut, I'm taking you to the mental hospital," she's not going to tell you about the next time she cuts. Keep your relationship with her open. (Lysamena, 2004.)

6. Set emotional limits.

An emotional limit is how much you can afford to give emotionally to your student before you feel overwhelmed. While it may sound cruel, your student may take all you have to offer, leaving you emotionally dry when it comes to your other students and your family. For example, if students start getting kicked out of the youth group

every Wednesday at 9:00 p.m., having your student come to talk to you about her problems at 9:15 p.m. every Wednesday is inappropriate (except in the case of crisis.) Unless this is a scheduled appointment, you must set limits.

Be concrete with the limits you are setting with your daughter, otherwise she will take advantage of you. You may need to refer to a counselor about how to set appropriate emotional limits with this student.(Secret Shame, 2004.)

7. Help her make a list of things she can do besides cutting.

Provided in the appendix of this manual is a list of over 150 things your student (Appendix D) can do besides cutting. Also included is a *Strategies Sheet* (Appendix E) that you and your student can fill out together to make a plan of action. Or she can fill out the sheet with her family

8. Encourage your student to get professional therapy and/or Christian counseling. Recommend family counseling if you think it's necessary

Don't forget that if your student signs a release, you can also talk to her counselor. Also, because you observe so much of your student's social behavior, you can help contribute to a counselor's understanding of your student. A student must be 14 or over to sign a confidentiality release. If your student is under 14, her parents must sign the release allowing you and her counselor to talk.

9. Be a support to your student and her family.

Don't let a family be ashamed of their daughter. Encourage the family to enlist the help of your spiritual support system. Their friends and the church may not understand right away. Give the family time and let them know that you are praying for them.

Youth pastors and leaders should be able to mentor and disciple their students who are cutting. She looks up to you and you. You may even be able to connect with other youth workers who have or are dealing with the same situations. Maybe you could even start a support group or small group Bible study with other youth workers struggling with teens who self-injure.

10. Educate yourself.

Become an expert in the subject of cutting. Check out the list of resources in the back of the manual (Appendix F.)

11. Take care of her scars and her cuts.

The reason she wears long sleeves in summer is to hide her scars. Because of their natural curiosity, her peers will probably ask her about her scars if they are in visible locations. Role-play with her so she can practice how to respond. She may not be ready to divulge her cutting to strangers, so teach her to say, "I would rather not talk about it," or come up with some clever responses of your own. When your student is ready, she may want to use her experience with cutting as part of her personal testimony.

If your student slips up and cuts, remember to make sure that she is taking proper care of her injury. Using triple antibiotic and band-aids greatly decreases the risk of infection. As long as she keeps the wound clean and medicated, scars will be less visible. As her injury heals, buy her some skin moisturizer to apply to the area. Often the healing cuts become dry and itchy, inviting your student to scratch the discomfort away, which, in turn, reopens the cuts. Also, applying vitamin E to scars can significantly reduce the

appearance of scars. For more hints on what to do with scars, check out www.scarcare.com. (My Friend, My Enemy, 2004.)

Part 4: Vitamin E for the Soul

Just like she might need Vitamin E for her scars, she may need a little Vitamin E to help heal the scathing burns on her soul as well. Point her to the Master Healer, and let Him do His Work.

Shannon, a 15 year-old girl, recently e-mailed me writing,

“About three weeks ago, when things got really, really rough at home I didn’t know what to do. I started thinking about my friend who had cut herself, and how she did it to take the pain away. So I took a knife and I cut my wrist. I still can’t believe I did it.

I talked to my youth pastor, and he made me promise not to do it again. I did promise, but I still feel the urge to do it again, even though I am finally beginning to pick myself up and get close to God again. I still have this urge when things get tough to do it again.

I have so much emotion I want to let out. And I can’t. I don’t know what to do. I mean, I promise I would never cut myself again and I want to be close to God. I know I can’t cut myself and be close to God. Why do I still want to cut myself in the same sense I want to get close to God?”

Shannon comes from a broken home. Both her parents are unbelievers who are alcoholics that discourage Shannon from attending church. Because of this, Shannon has had to make the effort of getting herself to church since the age of three. She is also responsible for the care of her younger siblings. Like me, I am sure your heart is breaking for Shannon. Yet despite all her pain, Shannon is making an effort to stop cutting and live wholeheartedly for God.

I share Shannon with you because your student may also be facing the same struggle. She may desperately want to give herself to God, and yet fights her urges to cut daily. How can she want to cut and still live for God?

Your student who cuts can still be a Christian. There is so much shame surrounding an incident of cutting that the last thing she wants to do is turn to God. How could He even want to look at her when she marred my body? She should turn to God immediately. He covers her shame. I love what God says in Ezekiel 16:8 "Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you,' declares the Sovereign LORD, 'and you became mine.'"

I'm sure you're familiar with the story of Ruth and Boaz. If you remember, Ruth lies on Boaz threshing room floor as a way of telling Boaz that she would like to marry him. In order to show his favor to Ruth, he covers her with the corner of his garment. This passage is referring to God as our kinsman redeemer, that He takes care of us, and tenderly covers our nakedness. And what is more shameful than being naked?

As soon as Adam and Eve blow it in the Garden of Eden, they say, "Whoa, we're naked!" Now, I chuckle to myself, because they were naked all along. Genesis 2:25 says that Adam and Eve were both naked but "they felt no shame." It was a curse of the Fall of Man that shame would enter into the equation, that shame would keep us from God.

Adam and Eve hide out in the Garden until God calls them to himself. Why are they hiding? Because they are naked and shamed! That's what it's like for your student. She is naked and ashamed in her mutilation, but the thing she needs most is to come

before God because He will cloth her in forgiveness. The thing about God's clothing is that it is completely free, no matter how many times she screws up, but all she has to do is ask for it.

The question, "Can I be a Christian every day and still struggle with self-injury?" is intriguing. Youth worker, let me ask you a question, can you still be a Christian every day and struggle with sin? No matter what sin it is, you are going to wrestle with it.

Think about Jesus in the Garden praying to God asking for the cup to pass from Him.

Paul in 2 Corinthians writes about a "thorn in his flesh." In 12:8 writes, "Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness.'" It's hard for your student to see all that right now, but remind her that every Christian has struggled with something--cutting, gossiping, alcoholism, adultery, lying, coveting, and denying God.

David even committed adultery with a married woman and then killed her husband and yet he was a "man after God's own heart." How could that be? People like David truly repented of their sin and sought God. Encourage her to do that, too. Besides all the practical things you can do to help her, always point her back to her loving Father. Let her not be disgraced but clothed in God's mercy and grace. Be strong in the Lord now, dear youth worker, and remember as you fight the battle it is already won in Christ.

In Bible times, putting on sackcloth and ashes was a sign of intense grieving in the community of faith. Self-injury, though inappropriate, is also an expression of the intense grief in teenager's life. Help her to seek God so she can trade these "crimson ashes" of blood for a "crown of beauty" that can only come from God (Crimson Ashes, 2004.)

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Appendix A

Nazarite Vow

I, _____, on this day of _____ will call _____ whenever I feel like injuring myself. I have removed all of the objects I have used to injure myself in the past from my room. When I feel like cutting, I will look at my Strategies worksheet and find a better means of expressing myself. I am committed to overcoming cutting because God has given me the power to do all things through him.

Self-injury is bad for me because:

I want to overcome self-injury because:

Mentoree: _____ Date: _____

Mentor: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

Your Trigger Profile

Fill out this profile with your daughter to make you and her aware of what may trigger an episode of cutting. .

Cutting Situations/Times:

- Living Room
 - Bedroom
 - Bathroom
 - Car
 - Den
 - Public Place (If so, where?)
 - Evening after school/work
 - Morning before going to school/work
 - During school/work
 - Others _____
-

Things I Commonly Do Before I Cut:

- Read
 - Watch television
 - Talk on the phone
 - Take a nap
 - Use the computer
 - Do homework
 - Do paperwork/bills
 - Take a test
 - Eat
 - Look in the mirror
 - Get ready to go somewhere
 - Make decisions
 - Use the toilet
 - Others _____
-

Your Trigger Profile continued...

How I Feel When I Cut:

- Sick
 - Worried
 - Bored
 - Shameful
 - Fatigued
 - Restless
 - Irritable
 - Fascinated
 - Excited
 - Guilty
 - Angry
 - Others _____
-

When I Cut I Do It To:

- Relieve comfort myself
 - Relieve tension
 - Escape
 - Fix or make perfect
 - Express anger
 - Express self-hatred
 - Keep me from doing something else
 - Others _____
-

Cutting Sensations:

- Tingly
 - Itchy
 - Sensitive
 - Cold
 - Wet
 - Painful
 - Pressure
 - Others _____
-

Your Trigger Profile continued...

Cutting Thoughts:

- What does one little scratch matter?
 - I can't deal with this situation if I don't cut first.
 - I can't concentrate without cutting.
 - I'll stop cutting after this time.
 - I deserve to cut.
 - If I don't cut, it will bother me until I do it.
 - I need to cut my arm/leg/etc. so it matches the scars on the other one.
 - Others _____
-

I'm More Likely to Cut After:

- An upsetting phone call
 - Visits with relatives
 - Public speaking engagements
 - Talking or reading about cutting
 - Physical illness
 - Increased workload
 - An argument with a family member or friend
 - Premenstrual symptoms
 - A bad day at school
 - Others _____
-

Adapted from *Help for Hair Pullers: Understanding and Coping with Trichotillomania* (2001: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.) by Keuthen, Stein, and Christensen.

Appendix C

Replay

1. If you could rewind the tape on your last cutting incident, what would it have looked like? **Rewind the tape in your mind and replay the incident.**
2. Write down the steps that got you to the point where you cut and review what happened.
3. Think about what you could do differently next time.
4. Write down a new plan.

When I replay the incident, this is what happened...

1. _____

I _____ felt _____ like:

2. _____

I _____ felt _____ like:

3. _____

I _____ felt _____ like:

If I could do it again, I would do it differently. Here is a new plan.

Next time I find myself in a similar situation, I will use my new plan.

Signed _____ Date _____

Appendix D

152 Things You Can Do Instead of Cutting

1. Exercise
2. Putting on fake tattoos.
3. Draw on yourself in red marker (make sure it's washable!)
4. Scribble on sheets of paper.
5. Write (poetry, stories, journal, etc.)
6. Cuddle with a stuffed toy.
7. Spend time with other people.
8. Watch a favorite TV show (preferably a comedy.)
9. Post on web boards, and answer others' posts.
10. Think about how you don't want scars for the summer.
11. Paint your nails.
12. Go see a movie.
13. Eat something ridiculously sweet (or any favorite food.)
14. Do schoolwork.
15. Surf the net.
16. Go into chat rooms to talk.
17. Call a friend and ask for company.
18. Play a musical instrument.
19. Sing.
20. Look up at the sky (night is especially beautiful.)
21. Make your own list of things to do instead of SI.
22. Punch a punching bag (with gloves on.)
23. Put your hair into a ton of little braids.
24. Cover yourself with band-aids where you want to cut.
25. Mix warm water and red food coloring, and put in on your skin (feels and looks like blood.)
26. Let yourself cry (can be very difficult for some.)
27. Sleep (only if you are tired.)
28. Take a hot shower or relaxing bath (no razors in the tub, though.)
29. Play with a pet.
30. Detangle yarn or necklaces.
31. Re-organize your room.

32. Clean
33. Have a pillow fight with the wall (Yes, your neighbors may think you are crazy, but that's okay.)
34. Knitting or sewing.
35. Reading a good book.
36. Dress up very glamorous (make sure no one can walk in on you, though)
37. Color your hair.
38. Listen to music (not angry music though, that can trigger.)
39. Watch a candle burn (no playing with the flames!)
40. Find someone else you can help out.
41. Meditate.
42. Watch a movie.
43. Work on a website.
44. Have a fantasy love affair with a celebrity.
45. Go somewhere very public.
46. Bake cookies.
47. Alphabetize your CD's.
48. Chew leather (especially if you SI by biting).
49. Buy a home Henna tattoo kit (peels off the next day-similar to skin picking.)
50. Paint or draw.
51. Rip paper into itty-bitty pieces.
52. Hug
53. Write letters or email.
54. Talk to yourself (or if that feels weird, buy a small tape recorder, then it feels like someone is listening.)
55. Stroke nice fabrics.
56. Hug a pillow.
57. Focus on something like a rock, hand, etc.
58. Finger-paint.
59. Scream really loud (just make sure no one is home.)
60. Dance.
61. Make hot chocolate.
62. Pop bubble wrap.
63. Play with modeling clay or Play-Dough.
64. See how high you can count.
65. Build a pillow fort.
66. Pop balloons.
67. Hug yourself.
68. Chase mailmen.
69. Read things in a different language.
70. Going for a nice, long drive.
71. Complete something you've been putting off.
72. Drink absurd amounts of tea.
73. Break plastic plates.
74. Tear up socks.
75. Throw socks against the wall.

76. Archery.
77. Rock climbing.
78. Take up a new hobby.
79. Organize bills and such.
80. Cook a meal.
81. Go out for ice cream.
82. Buy a stuffed animal.
83. Look at pretty things-like flowers or artwork.
84. Create something.
85. Pray.
86. Play video games.
87. Make a list of blessings in your life.
88. Read the Bible.
89. Go to a friend's house.
90. Take up fencing.
91. Watch an old, happy movie.
92. Call a help hotline or your therapist.
93. Talk to someone close to you..
94. Throw a temper-tantrum.
95. Hit things-other than yourself.
96. Ride a bicycle.
97. Polish silver or jewelry.
98. Garden or water houseplants.
99. Memorize German poetry or the dictionary (silly, but works!)
100. CHOCOLATE!!!!!!
101. Feed the ducks or birds or squirrels, etc.
102. Draw on the walls.
103. Play with face paint.
104. Go to a pet store.
105. Color with crayons.
106. Memorize a novel or play or song.
107. Put on boots and STAMP.
108. Stretch (try Pilates.)
109. Find butterflies.
110. Watch fish.
111. Come up with baby names (even if you're not pregnant.)
112. Make mashed potatoes.
113. Make a tape or burn a CD of your favorite songs.
114. Name all of your stuffed animals.
115. Go SHOPPING!!!!
116. Get those pajamas with slippery feet and slide on the floor.
117. Buy cheap teddy bears and take out anger on them instead of yourself.
118. Clean out your garage.
119. Go to a loud concert.
120. Play the 15 minute game (say you can't cut for 15 minutes, and when the time is up, start again.)

121. Plan your wedding / prom.
122. Hunt for stuff on Ebay (you can find ANYTHING there.)
123. Alphabetize your books.
124. Hunt for your perfect home in the paper.
125. Take up Tai Chi.
126. Try to make as many words out of your full name as possible, then do your friends' names.
127. Count ceiling tiles/lights.
128. Throw ice.
129. Search for ridiculous things on the web.
130. Color coordinate your wardrobe.
131. Do a home tan on yourself.
132. Sort all your photographs.
133. Color (or scribble) over the pretty women in magazines.
134. Plan a dinner party.
135. Play with a slinky.
136. Buy yourself some toys and play.
137. Start collecting something.
138. Get a tattoo / piercing.
139. Play video/computer games.
140. Pick up trash at your local park.
141. Play on a swing set.
142. Go out and perform a random act of kindness for someone.
143. Call up an old friend.
144. Write yourself an "I love you because" letter.
145. Put on fake nails.
145. Try to build something.
146. Re-arrange your house.
147. Go to a public place and people watch.
148. Go through all your old stuff.
149. Go bargain hunting.
150. Smile at five people (you usually end up smiling genuinely yourself.)
151. Go to the zoo and rename all the animals.
152. Draw on the pavement with sidewalk chalk.

*This list was compiled by teenagers who cut.

Appendix E

Strategies Worksheet

Instead of cutting I could:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
4. Take a walk around the block.
5. Watch T.V. with someone in the house
6. Write in my journal.
7. Color.
8. Feel out a *Replay worksheet*.

Here is a list of people I could call:

Name _____

Phone Number _____

Name _____

Phone Number _____

Name _____

Phone Number _____

Name _____

Phone Number _____

Name _____

Phone Number _____

Here are the verses I could look up:

Appendix F

RESOURCES

Links to Cutting Resources

Youth Ministry Exchange

<http://www.youthministryexchange.com>

Youth Specialties

<http://www.youthspecialties.com>

Crimson Ashes

<http://hometown.aol.com/crimsonashes7>

Teen Hopeline

<http://www.teenhopeline.com>

Lyasema Project for Self-Injury

<http://www.self-injury.org>

To Write Love on Her Arms

<http://www.twloha.com>

S.A.F.E Alternatives: Self-Abuse Finally Ends

<http://www.selfinjury.com>

Books on Cutting

Note: All these books are written by secular authors.

A Bright Red Scream

by Marilee Strong

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: Penguin USA (Paper); (October 1999)

ISBN: 0140280537

Cutting: Understanding and Overcoming Self-Mutilation

by Steven Levenkron

Paperback: 269 pages

Publisher: W.W. Norton & Company; (May 1, 1999)

ISBN: 0393319385

Skin Game : A Memoir

by Caroline Kettlewell (Author)

Paperback: 192 pages

Publisher: Griffin Trade Paperback; (June 7, 2000)

ISBN: 0312263937

Treating Self-Injury: A Practical Guide

By Barent W. Walsh

Hardcover: 317 pages

Publisher: The Guilford Press (October 24, 2005)

ISBN-10: 1593852169

ISBN-13: 978-1593852160

See My Pain! Creative Strategies and Activities for Helping Young People Who Self-

Injure

By Susan Bowman & Kaye Randall

Paperback: 128 pages

Publisher: YouthLight, Inc. (March 2004)

ISBN-10: 1889636622

ISBN-13: 978-1889636627

The Scarred Soul: Understanding & Ending Self-Inflicted Violence

by Tracy Alderman

Paperback: 216 pages

Publisher: New Harbinger Pubs; (September 1997)

ISBN: 1572240792

Bodies Under Siege: Self Mutilation and Body Modification in Culture and Psychiatry

by Armando R. Favazza

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: Johns Hopkins Univ Pr; 2nd edition (May 1996)

ISBN: 0801853001

Interesting Articles/Websites on Cutting

**Note: These articles may not reflect a Christian worldview and may not reflect the views of Crimson Ashes. They do, however, provide valuable information.*

Cutting: Understanding the Self-Mutilation of Teenagers

by Kelli Woodard

<http://www.youthspecialties.com/articles/topics/counseling/cutting.php>

The Razor's Edge: Why even Christian teens aren't immune from the epidemic of self-mutilation—and what you can do.

By T. Suzanne Eller

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/cpt/2004/004/9.34.html>

The Sirius Project

<http://www.siriusproject.org>

I Can't Stop Crying

<http://www.teens4jesus.org/growth/counseling/articles/cutting.htm>

Secret Shame

<http://www.palace.net/~llama/psych/injury.html>

Psyke

<http://www.psyke.org>