



Preacher's Pen *by Eric Dwyer, Youth Minister*

In my last article, I laid out a few broad problems facing the youth of today. This article aims to use cultural and medical references to get more specific and talk about a disturbing trend among the youth of today. In fact, I had never heard of this issue until I reached high school myself. More and more young people are self mutilating, or “cutting” than ever before. This act of punishing oneself is found mostly among teenage girls. Dr. Charles Goodstein of Discovery Health estimates that one out of every two hundred girls between the ages of 13 and 19 regularly cuts herself. This number does not include the minority of males who cut, those who are outside the age range listed, and those who try it only a few times and stop. It is not restricted to any age, gender, or even religion. A fellow student in one of my counseling classes at OCC gave his personal testimony about cutting in high school. Some of you may be thinking, “Why on EARTH would anyone do that!?” Here are some reasons why someone may choose to self mutilate.



Someone may resort to cutting to release tension. There is a chemical reaction that takes place when the body is injured. The body responds to pain by sending a rush of adrenaline as a coping mechanism. A cutter may feel so much pressure to achieve good grades, look pretty, or be the best athlete that he resorts to the rush associated with physical pain as a way to escape.

Some say they cut themselves to see if they have any feeling at all. This may seem strange. But in this world there are some who are so lost they go day to day believing they have no feelings at all. The band, Linkin' Park, came out

with a song in 2003 entitled “Numb.” The song topped the Billboard charts for twelve weeks. It became so popular because the lyrics are from the perspective of someone suffering from an inability to process feelings, which is an ever-growing trend.

**“I've become so numb I can't feel you there
Become so tired so much more aware
I'm becoming this all I want to do
Is be more like me and be less like you”**

Johnny Cash released a new CD shortly before his death in 2003. One of the songs on the new CD which became widely popular was a cover song by the name of “Hurt.” It is a fairly haunting song in which the writer seems to focus on the emotional pain he causes others and the physical pain he causes himself. The following words are taken from the first verse:

**“I hurt myself today to see if I still feel.
I focus on the pain the only thing that's real.
The needle tears a hole, the old familiar sting.
Try to kill it all away but I remember everything.
What have I become my sweetest friend?
Everyone I know goes away in the end.”**

Notice how the writers describe their lives and how pain affects them. “I've become so numb” and “so tired.” They cut to see if they “still feel” because the pain is “the only thing that's real.”

There are a few things we must remember about dealing with someone who self mutilates. Cutting is a symptom of a much larger psychological problem that needs professional attention immediately. Most cutters hide the areas of self mutilation. They wear long sleeves — even when it is warm — to cover the scars on their arms. They may choose not to go swimming because they are hiding the scars on their shoulders or thighs.

Provide, no, produce an atmosphere where they feel they can open up and work through their feelings instead of hiding and dealing with them in this way. Also, these people desperately need to know how much Jesus loves them. If they are looking for a real life with feeling, He promises to give life to the full (John 10:10).

God uses people to provide the direction. So here are a few practical suggestions to help you point troubled young people to Christ.

- Resist the urge to criticize a young person's clothing. Look beyond the covering to see the person.

- Initiate contact with young people. Learn their names. Engage them in conversation.

- Participate with young people in activities they enjoy (e.g., Wii, board games, etc.)

- Pray for our young people.