

*5 Keys to Help Teens
Break the
Self-Harm Cycle*

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Introduction

Welcome and thank you for taking this important step towards helping your teen find new coping strategies and feel a greater sense of confidence and self-acceptance. I know you have been searching for answers to help your teen. Please know you are not alone. Many parents, teachers, counselors and friends of “cutters” are struggling to understand why so many young people have turned to self-injurious behaviors. It is my hope that this information helps you find what you have been looking for.

Before we jump into the five keys, I want to share a little bit about why I am so passionate about helping those who self-harm. From a very young age, I struggled with mental illness, which led to self-injury and eventually medication and hospitalization. Throughout this experience, I felt there was something wrong with me and I was somehow broken.

These thoughts and the beliefs I held onto so tight only made me feel worse. I knew there had to be more to it than that. I knew there was more to me than that. And so I took matters into my own hands. I changed the way I ate, the way I thought, but most importantly what I believed about myself. I decided I didn't need to live up to an impossible ideal. I could just be me. *That's* what helped me stop cutting.

I was fortunate to have amazing mentors along the way, but what I appreciated most about each one was they didn't want me to *depend* on them. They taught me how to *depend on myself*, to listen to my own guidance and make the best decisions for me. I'm now committed to teaching and coaching in that same way – **because it works**.

A lot of parents, therapists, counselors, etc. have asked me, “But why? Why did you do that to yourself?” I will tell you. I'm sensitive, overly emotional, I think way too much and at the time I had way too much to deal with. Between my brother's death, parent's divorce and step-fathers suicide, I reached a breaking point where I felt there was no other way to express my pain. I felt alone and didn't know how to speak, let alone process all the things I was feeling. The hormonal changes didn't help either.

The same is true for so many of the young women I have worked with and even the young men I've talked to about it. They **feel so much**, but don't know how to express it all in a healthy way.

The following five keys have worked for me personally and have helped my clients either stop or significantly reduce the frequency of self-harm.

#1 Identify Triggers

Discover the thoughts and feelings that lead to cutting and self-injury. Some of the most common triggers are:

- feeling overwhelmed
- feeling angry
- feeling sad and alone
- extreme anxiety (and specifically panic attacks)
- negative self image
- being bullied or feeling otherwise inadequate
- the feeling of letting people down

Once your child (or the child you are working with) is able to start recognizing what's going on *before* they make the decision to cut they can begin to consciously choose a different coping technique. For many self-injurers, this becomes an addiction and their natural response to stressful situations. You can help by encouraging him or her to write down at least 5 reassuring statements they would like to hear when they are going through it and tell them these things.

You can read my most popular article [here](http://carrieleighsandoval.com/journal/how-to-really-help-someone-who-struggles-with-self-harm/) (http://carrieleighsandoval.com/journal/how-to-really-help-someone-who-struggles-with-self-harm/), which talks about this and provides worksheets for teens to print out and write on.

#2 Feel, Express and Release Feelings

Many times the reason a young person self-injures is because they are looking for a way to release what they don't know how to express. They need to find a place or person they can vent to. This gets tricky when you (if you are the parent) try to be that person which is why I highly recommend bringing in a neutral adult such as a therapist, counselor or coach who is trained to help in this area.

Bottom line: Your teen needs to get their feelings out. Help your child come up with the best way to do so and encourage him or her to give their pain a voice and a picture so he or she knows they are not their pain, but rather the person experiencing the pain.

#3 Get Back into Body

Most cutters are extremely sensitive and tend to overanalyze things. They retreat into their head because it feels safer. They stuff their feelings until they can't take it any more. Teens – and especially those who self-injure - must learn how to experience their feelings without being overtaken by them. **It's never about not feeling.** It's about *knowing what to do when the feelings come up*. This is a huge part of what I teach the teens I work with. Why? Because when you are in your body you are aware of what's going on. You feel a greater sense of control which in turn allows you to feel more confident in your ability to handle whatever situation arises.

#4 Communication and Negotiation

It is critical for teens and parents to open the lines of communication so both parties feel **respected** and **heard**. It's equally important for you, as a parent, to stand your ground. Your fear for your child can cloud your judgment and make you overly protective which actually pushes your son or daughter further away. Teens need rules and boundaries. They don't have to like them. But, they also need

room to figure things out on their own. Be willing to explore differences in opinion to gain better insight into how your teen thinks and feels. Your teen wants and needs to feel like his or her opinion matters. Most importantly, your child wants to feel like *you* honor and respect his or her choices.

#5 Find something to look forward to

Part of the reason many young people are anxious and/or depressed is because they feel like it's "never going to end." A better future seems so far away. But there is hope. There is always hope. There is always something to look forward to. Encourage your teen to share his or her plans for the future often and without judgment. Really allow him or her to explore the possibilities and get excited about what lies ahead. The painful moments are only temporary and within them could lie a powerful opportunity for growth and understanding.

For more information and articles on self-harm go to
<http://carrieleighsandoval.com/category/journal/self-harm-articles/>

NEW: Free online facebook group for girls ages 14-17

Worried about where teens are spending their time online?

With all the social media sites out there, it's easy for teens to spend hours getting lost in other people's lives, but what if you knew there was a place where girls could be supported and encouraged to be more of who they are?

My new free online "club" for girls ages 14-17 is designed to help teen girls connect with other girls their age and explore and express who they are in a safe online community.

No more bullying or being ridiculed for being different. I'll carefully monitor the group to make sure none of that is happening. Promise.

Each girl must request to join the group. To do so:

1. Make sure she has a facebook account.
2. Tell her to log in.
3. Have her go to [this link](http://tinyurl.com/wnbwb) (tinyurl.com/wnbwb) to join.

Teens are looking for someone who **gets what they are going through**. It's often the piece that's missing for them to make lasting changes in their life. I'm here to provide this understanding and support for young people and those who care about them.

Please note: As a coach, I do not supply professional medical advice or clinical treatment information. Any suggestions given are not substitute for professional medical advice.