

## **Self Harm Article**

<http://fervr.net/teen-life/understanding-self-harm#.VmxXc3XFBY0>

The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. (Psalm

34:18-19)

Self harm is not a topic that can be neatly packaged into a short article.

Each person has their own story, battles with their own reasons, and struggles to find their own solutions. While this article won't speak for every individual, it will give an overview of common traits. But firstly, there are some important facts to understand and some myths to break down.

### **What is self harm?**

Self harm...

- does NOT mean that someone is trying to commit suicide.
  - is NOT merely someone who is trying to seek attention.
  - is NOT some fashionable trend to follow at school or amongst friends.
  - does NOT mean that the person is crazy or abnormal.
  - does NOT only manifest itself in cutting one's wrists and legs.
  - DOES include actions such as cutting skin, burning skin, bashing limbs and head, or ingestion of toxic substances. Some professionals argue that deprivation of sleep, excessive exercise, drug/alcohol abuse, over-eating or under-eating can also be seen as self harm in certain, though not all, cases.
  - IS dangerous and addictive.
  - IS often someone's attempt at relieving unbearable stress, anxiety and/or emotional pain.
  - CAN affect any person of any age, of any gender, and regardless of what their lives look like.
- And yes, self harm does affect Christians.
- CAN be prevented and stopped.

A good definition of self harm can be summed up as *"the behaviour of deliberately attempting to harm one's own body without the intent of suicide."*

### **Why would someone self harm?**

Early last year when I was holidaying with family, we were at the beach having lunch. I finished eating early so I went out to the water before everyone else. But I skipped the main part of the beach and continued around the corner until I could find a secluded area – the more dangerous the location, the more isolated I could be. I clambered over huge rocks with all of my strength and my bare feet to find my perfect spot. The water was extremely rough and crashed heavily

onto the rocks. "There. That's exactly where I want to be" I told myself. I sat on the edge of the rocks with my legs floating out in the water and let the strength of the waves slam and bash my legs into the sharp contours of the rocks.

And I didn't want to move. Because I liked it there.

I wasn't trying to be swept away and I wasn't trying to drown myself.

I was trying to feel strong.

And I wanted the scars to prove it.

But that's just my story.

The reasons for self harm are all so varied and complex, that any ungrounded presumptions that you may have about the person and why someone might self harm should be put aside. Sadly, schools can find themselves with an epidemic of students who are self harming, purely because it's what "everyone else is doing". For some people, this may be the case. For others, it will be a far deeper and more pressing issue.

### **Physical release**

Teenagers who find themselves dealing with extreme stress and pressures in their life, whether from school, friends, family, relationships, or past hurts and traumas may resort to self harming as a form of release and relief. Self harming makes a person feel as though they have the opportunity to 'breathe' when they believe they can't express their emotions in another way. It enables a person to control their pain physically, and the physical pain can become a distraction from the rest of everything else around them. Essentially it becomes a coping mechanism, which can then lead to a dangerous addiction.

### **Symptom of illness**

Self harm can be a symptom of illnesses such as depression, anxiety or borderline personality disorder. This has been the case for me. At the same time, a person who self harms may not necessarily be clinically diagnosed with these illnesses, but may simply display similar symptoms. People who have these illnesses (like myself) are not always in their normal headspace. This is not to say that they have lost their mind, rather that patterns of thought are not as clear as they once were, which can lead to the symptomatic action of self harming. Again, it is most commonly used as a way to gain a sense of release, distraction, and control in their life.

### **Emotional cry**

At times, self harm can be a person's cry to see if anybody cares for them. If someone is self harming because their friends are, this can be an indication of their own longing to be accepted and not rejected or abandoned. It does not simply mean that the person is a loner or that they

are looking for attention. Whether we like it or not, we are built for personal relationships, but we are not always the best at communicating care or asking for what we need – in fact, sometimes the biggest issue is that we can't identify what we need! As a result, someone may self harm as a way to silently, yet passionately, cry out.

It is so important to understand that self harm is an issue that can be and should be talked about. It is even more important to know that God is not mad at the person for doing this to themselves – instead, He sees the pain and is deeply saddened by it. But for a lot of the time, it will look like God isn't there, because the person isn't "getting better". God hasn't left. God isn't mad. He is in the midst of it, and He doesn't want the person to stay where they are. God is astoundingly patient with us, and we too often forget that if we decide to turn to Him for help, His arms were already open and waiting.