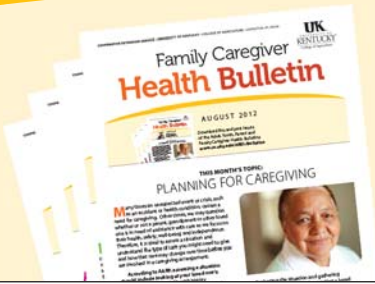


Family Caregiver Health Bulletin



JULY 2013

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

CAREGIVING TO TEENS WHO SELF-HARM



Today's teens are dealing with compound pressures as they face overscheduling, sleep deprivation, school anxiety and negative peer and societal pressure. Some teens feel so overwhelmed that they are not able to express how they are feeling, or may feel too embarrassed to admit it. These teens may be at increased risk for turning to self-harming behaviors.

While a child who engages in self-harm behavior is not generally suicidal, such action should not go ignored. The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy defines self-harm as "hurting oneself to relieve emotional pain and distress." As a result, self-harm is generally not a onetime occurrence, but a repeated behavior.

Why do children self-harm?

- To transfer emotional pain into physical pain
- To cope with stress and disappointment

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It is important to help children and teens susceptible to self-harm understand that they can get through it and that they are loved.

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- To get relief from negative emotions or pressure
- To feel numb or as if “no one cares about me”
- To fit in with peers

What should caregivers watch for?

- Wounds, cuts or burns on the arms, legs and body trunk, or other areas that are easy to hide
- Hair pulling
- Head banging on walls or doors
- Prevention of wounds from healing

Common instruments used to cause self-harm:

- Knives
- Razor blades
- Sewing needles, sewing pins or safety pins
- Scissors
- Pen tips
- Keys
- Miscellaneous items with sharp points

What can caregivers do to help?

- Provide a safe, stable, nurturing relationship
- Provide open dialogue using direct, open-ended questions about the child’s day “what happened in Miss Smith’s class today?”, instead of “how was school?”
- Ask “how can I help you?” or “what is a way that I can support you?” This might be as simple as driving the child to school to avoid stressors on a bus ride
- Tell the child “I care about you and I am worried”
- Try to find out what stressors are causing the distress (for example: teachers, friends, something at home) and ask how you can help the child deal with these anxieties or concerns
- Help the child control emotions with relaxing distractions (for example: breathing techniques, walking, chewing gum, coloring or journaling)

Whenever self-harm is suspected or discovered, caregivers should act immediately and contact the child’s doctor or seek professional mental health



You can help your child by providing a safe, stable, nurturing relationship.

services for the child. It is important for caregivers to help children and teens susceptible to self-harm understand that they can get through it and that they are loved.

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Family Caregiver
Health Bulletin

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