DeVol 1

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**A Cut Above**

A whopping one in every twelve people self harm during their teenage years (“Doctors Warn Parents”). The concept of self harm has become widespread among American youth within the past decade. Self harm is when people intentionally harm themselves in order to instigate or escape certain emotions. Self harm can include cutting, burning, pulling out body hairs, and many other methods. Typically, self harm gradually worsens over time, and it can have very negative effects on the person harming themselves. Some cases even eventually lead to suicide. Because of poor self image, low self esteem, and negative influence, self harm has become a major threat not only to American teens, but teens worldwide as well. Understanding self harm and trying to get help for this problem by contacting experts can lead to positive results and help make the future a brighter place for the world’s youth.

Teens intentionally harm themselves for a variety of reasons including negative influence, peer pressure, poor self image, and low self esteem. Certain teens can also be manipulated into harming themselves by their friends or other teens via the internet. For example, “Teens are using Instagram and Tumblr, amongst other social media platforms, to build entire communities based around dangerous behaviors like cutting and self-harm” (Monroe). This quote shows that teens are using the internet to exchange and cultivate ideas of self harm to make it seem like something that is “hip” or “cool”. When it seems like a lot of people that a teen knows or interacts with engage in such behaviors, they feel compelled to take part in order to “fit in” or even avoid ridicule among peers. However, this is not the only reason that certain teens self harm. Sometimes teens suffer from extreme depression and they want

DeVol 2

to feel physical pain because it is too hard to tolerate the emotional pain. This is seen in the excerpt, “It can be hard to understand why people cut themselves on purpose. Cutting is a way some people try to cope with the pain of strong emotions, intense pressure, or upsetting relationship problems. They may be dealing with feelings that seem too difficult to bear or bad situations they think can’t change” (“Cutting”). This quote shows that sometimes teens cut themselves in order to feel physical pain in one place so they will stop feeling constant or overwhelming emotional pain. When faced with the harsh reality of life, when they feel that all is lost, or when they have pressure or problems from personal life like family, friends, or school, teens can turn to cutting to ease this emotional suffering and fearful uncertainty. While there are many reasons for teens self harming, emotional pain and negative influence are some of the biggest causes.

Teen self harm can have very negative effects on the individual harming themselves and on the family of the individual. Sometimes teens accidentally harm themselves more than they intend to. For example, “It’s possible to misjudge the depth of a cut, making it so deep that it requires stitches (or, in extreme cases, hospitalization). Cuts can become infected if a person uses non sterile or dirty cutting instruments-razors, scissors, pins, or even the sharp edge of the tab on a can of soda” (“Cutting”). This proves that self harm can lead to even more deadly results on top of the risks that self harm is already posing on teens who rely on it as a coping mechanism. Not only does this cause more problems for the individual, but it also has negative effects on the family of the individual. The family has to pay for any medical expenses, but more importantly the individual’s self harming behaviors can cause a great amount of stress for their family as they are constantly worried about their child’s mental and physical health. Sadly, this is not the only effect that teen self harming can result in. If a teen harms themselves, even

DeVol 3

once, it can become a habit. For instance, “Cutting can be habit forming. It can become a compulsive behavior-meaning that the more a person does it, the more he or she feels the need to do it. The brain starts to connect the false sense of relief from bad feelings to the act of cutting, and it craves this relief the next time tension builds. When cutting becomes a compulsive behavior, it can seem impossible to stop. So cutting can seem almost like an addiction, where the urge to cut can seem too hard to resist. A behavior that starts as an attempt to feel more in control can end up controlling you” (“Cutting”). This research shows that people can develop an addiction to hurting themselves, similar to being addicted to drugs. The common misconception is that self harming once will not have long term effects like finding it difficult to go throughout life without it. Once a teen has developed the habit, it can be nearly impossible to get them to stop because it can be hard for them to imagine living without self harm. The effects of teen self harm can be extremely negative for both the individual and their family, and can even lead to addiction.

There are many solutions that can help to stop teens from turning to self harm. One of the most common solutions is for the teen to tell a friend or adult about their problem. For example, “People who have stopped cutting often say the first step is the hardest-admitting to or talking about cutting. But they also say that after they open up about it, they often feel a great sense of relief. Choose someone you trust to talk to at first (a parent, school counselor, teacher, coach, doctor, or nurse). If it’s too difficult to bring up the topic in person, write a note” (“Cutting”). This shows that telling someone else about self harming can be one of the most helpful solutions. Even though it can be hard to open up about it because of fear that society will shun them, it will lift a great weight off of the person who is self harming and/or cutting. There are other solutions to this problem as well. Another great solution is to try and

DeVol 4

identify the source of the problem and deal with it directly. For instance, “Cutting is a way of reacting to emotional tension or pain. Try to figure out what feelings or situations are causing you to cut. Is it anger? Pressure to be perfect? Relationship trouble? A painful loss or trauma? Mean criticism or mistreatment? Identify the trouble you’re having, then tell someone about it. Many people have trouble figuring this part out on their own. This is where a mental health professional can be helpful” (“Cutting.”). This shows that if someone discovered the source of the pain they might be able to purge it with the help of a doctor, friend, or family member. It can be hard for a teen to do this on their own, so relying on the first solution of telling someone would definitely help the teen in pursuing professional help. There are lots of ways to deal with teen self harm. Telling an adult can be a helpful start, and making helpful health choices from there like seeking professional help could greatly reduce self harm in teens.

Society needs to understand the severity of teen self harm in order to make the world a safer place for teens. Emotional pain and negative influence from peers can lead to self harm, resulting in very negative effects including hospitalization, addiction, and family stress. If teens are able to tell someone about how they feel and then work to identify the cause of the pain, they are more likely to overcome the issue. If society is more willing to understand the prevalence of self harm in teens then there can be hope of stopping this tragedy once and for all.

DeVol 5

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