

*Trying to Understand*



*Self Inflicted  
Violence*

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Cash only. All \$ will go towards providing literature to prisoners.

Dedicated to the strength of those dealing with SI.

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I hope this may help someone. Remember that not everything applies to everyone. For those who have actively read this, good luck!

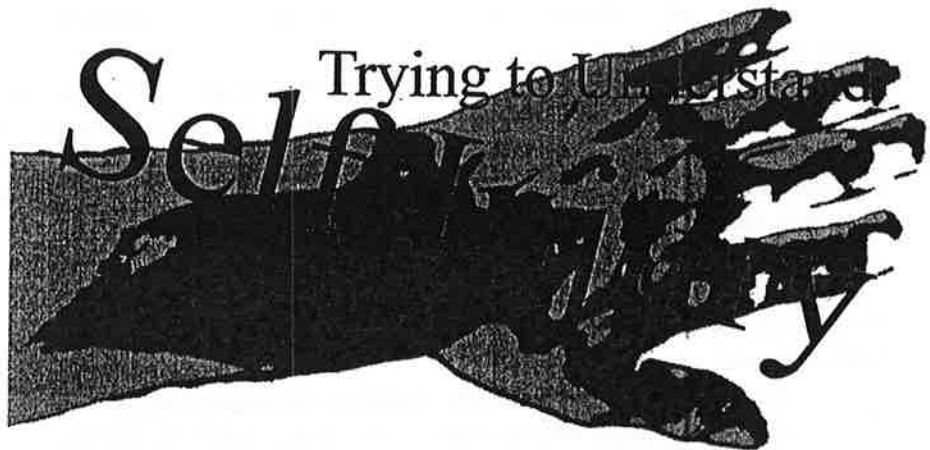
Resources (text):

The Scared Soul: Understanding and Coping with Self-inflicted Violence  
By Tracy Alderman ISBN# 1571020709

A Bright Red Scream: Self-harm and the Language of Pain  
By Marilee Strong ISBN# 0140280207

Bodies Under Siege: Self-Mutilation and Body Modification in Culture and Psychiatry  
By Armando Favazza ISBN# 02620853001

Cut  
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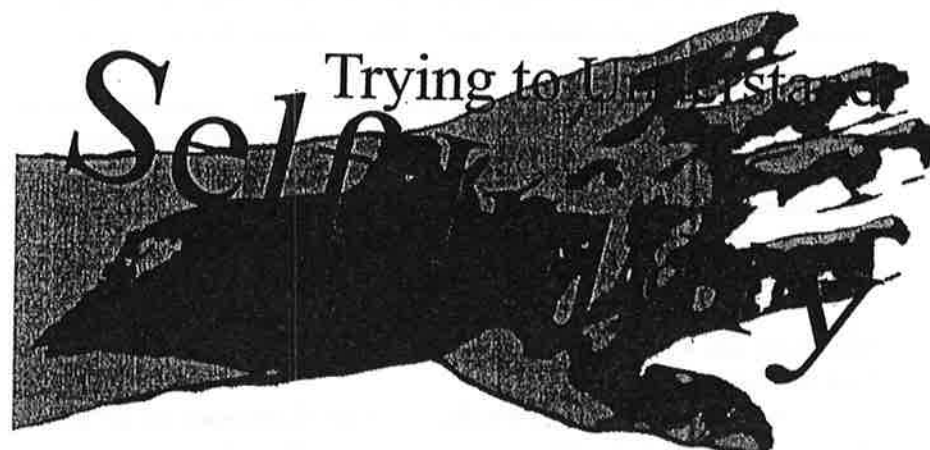
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For the purposes of this, I will refer to “self injury”, rather than “self mutilation” or “self-inflicted violence”. This writing is mostly intended for those who use SI themselves.

SI is the act of hurting one’s self, whether through cutting, burning or some other method. I am writing this because I think that I have things to say that could be helpful to share with those who do it and those who want to (try to) understand it. This is a vast subject and a very complicated one, so please bear with me.. Also, please don’t mistake any of this for glorification or an invitation.

So, what is it? Every person’s reasons and experiences are their own. What I can say will be generalizations and there definitely are exceptions. With that said:

It’s not about suicide; it’s about release. Sometimes we get very upset and we cry. Crying helps release some of the emotions that we don’t know what to do with. Well, for some people, tears can no longer even begin to compensate for what they feel. Some deal with it the best way they know how: with self injury.

That may not make much sense to a number of people. How can

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how helpful this can be.

You can try focusing on points in your body. Start with your feet, focusing on specific things, such as the balls of your feet, your heels, your shins and so on up your body. Eventually make your way to the top of your head.

Imagery is another useful tool for calming yourself. Isolate in your mind the part of your body where you feel your emotions. For instance, you might feel a great amount of anxiety in your gut. Imagine it as an object and change that object. Play with it. Sometimes I imagine my anxiety as a mass of lead, which melts and then slowly drains out of my belly button, onto the floor.

### Replacement

Another idea is to replace the method of injury that you use for SI. Of course, this doesn’t actually help, but it can reduce the toll that SI has on your body. Instead of your usual method, try submerging your arms into ice water. Try squeezing an ice cube with your hand. Dripping candle wax on your palm could get just as destructive as anything else, but it still might be a better alternative for you. In theory, these methods can give you pain to satisfy your SI urge without any long-lasting physical damage.

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### **Snap out of Dissociation**

If you can recognize dissociation, you might be able to find ways to snap out of it.

Very hot or very cold temperatures can help. Crank up the heat. If it's winter-time, open up the windows. Very quickly get into a hot or lukewarm bath. Temperature changes like this can cause physical sensations to pull you back into yourself.

Talk to someone, if you can. It may be difficult and you may not want to, but just another person's presence (in voice, or better still, in body) can draw you back.

Run! I don't even know why (maybe it releases endorphins?), but it can help. Maybe it's the physical activity, or maybe the idea of running from harm as a means of escape. Who knows?

### **Relaxation Techniques**

Focus on your breathing. When you are upset, you take very shallow, rapid breaths. Lie down and put your hands on your stomach. Take slow, deep breaths through your nose and watch your hands rise and fall. It's amazing

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hurting your own body help you release emotions? Well, this is a question that many "cutters" (or other SI'ers) can't even answer. I know I couldn't for a long time. I'll share some things I've learned.

### **Dissociation**

Dissociation starts before the actual. I had never realized it was there, myself, until I read about it and thought back on my experiences. Personally, when I get very, very upset, there tends to be a point where I know SI is going to happen. Whether I am holding off or saying "no", I can feel when it's coming. For me, this is when dissociation starts.

Dissociation is a state where you don't feel quite yourself. You might even feel that you are watching yourself do things (like insomnia), though it's not always like that. In this state you are distant. Your thoughts can often become illogical or absurd. It also makes pain feel very far away.

After SI I feel like I come back into myself. I don't know how long it takes. I feel like part of it stays with me, though. The best way that I can describe it is that I feel very "cold". This has often been a reason to withhold from SI, as I don't want to be "cold" to the people I care about.

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## Euphoric Feelings

Your body prepares and responds to pain with dissociation. To minimize pain, it releases endorphins into your system.

Endorphins are very similar to morphine. Actually, it's the other way around. Opiates (codeine, morphine, heroin, etc) mimic the effect of endorphins. Aside from direct effects, the two share other traits, such as building a tolerance. Because of this, using SI often can dull the desired result.

What do endorphins do, exactly? Well, they fight pain. Their effect (along with dissociation) can actually make the initial pain feel nonexistent when self-inflicting injury. They can also make you feel good, which is an incredible contrast from all the emotions leading up to SI. This could also be a reason why some people hurt themselves when they aren't necessarily upset.

### Making Wounds Real

By harming yourself and leaving marks, you are turning your emotional wounds into physical wounds. This makes them more (perceivably) real. As a mark on yourself, it is something you can pin down, something you can verify, something you can prove. No one can tell you that your problems are

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## Change Patterns

Whether you realize it or not, you most likely have patterns you go through before, during and after SI. The psychologists call them "rituals." Some things could be obvious, such as the preparation of bandages, sterilizing of tools or the place you do it. They will all be personal things. For example, one person may only be able to harm themselves in their bathroom, but location may not matter at all for someone else. There will probably be other things, too. "Smaller" things that may be impossible to put down into text; you need to discover these on your own.

Once you find them, make a point to experiment with them. By removing rearranging, adding or changing them, you might greatly delay or even prevent your SI. With myself, for example, I find it nearly impossible to do anything if I don't sterilize the blade I use or if there is nothing to absorb the blood near by.

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burden, such as isolation and guilt. This makes things harder to manage, and once the weight of them is too much, it's back to SI.

For myself, there were many other negative cycles going on. Collectively, all the cycles made me feel as though I was digging deeper and deeper into a hole that I would not be able to get out of. It's all very personal and specific, which means you must identify your own.

You've got these negative cycles and they just build up on each other. To fight SI, you won't be able to put much heart into any attempt until you have some kind of love for yourself. You need positive cycles to break the negative ones.

It's important that you create these on your own. To follow someone else's would defeat the purpose, as you need to begin the cycle on your own. I will vaguely describe my own, though.

It started with an idea. I wanted to start a project. I did, and as I began to put time and effort into it, it became a cycle. I was putting myself into something, and that something was my own creation. It may not sound like much, but this really changed my self-image, which led to other positive things.

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unimportant or significant.

Some people who use SI take a lot of care into treating their wounds. By giving emotional wounds a physical manifestation, tending to and healing the physical wound also helps treat the emotional wound. This is called self-nurturing. SI can also make it so that you can't pretend your problems aren't there, and by physically manifesting them, you are getting yourself to deal with them.

SI can also make it so you can't pretend your problems aren't there. If you cope by 'forgetting' things until they become too overwhelming to push away, physically manifesting your problems can be a way of encouraging yourself to confront them, and even ask others for support. SI can be an attempt to break the cycle of only acknowledging things when they are at their worst, because later, after you are no longer completely overwhelmed, you still have a physical, undeniable reminder of what you were feeling.

Okay, so if you aren't already familiar with SI, you might be squirming at these thoughts. I remember (and am not proud of) the reaction I had when a friend told me about her use of SI. I didn't know what to think.

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Having been on the other end, I think that people need to realize that SI is not the problem, but only a way of dealing with other problems. SI is not done for its own sake, but rather to lessen the intensity of anxiety, anger, sadness, fear, extreme boredom, etc.. It can also be a "punishment" used against one's self for mistakes that have been made.

Another thing that would be helpful for people to know is that not everyone who engages in SI *wants* to stop. Some people actually *do* need it to help them through what they may feel.

So how can you be supportive, if you know that someone hurts themselves? Be open. Listen to them. Don't judge them, as it is the last thing that they need (guilt and shame will only make it worse). Let them know when they can talk to you. If they know they can call, a 4am phone conversation can be quite a help. Asking them to call before they hurt themselves isn't likely to work, but just giving them someone to talk to any time (especially afterwards) can help. *a lot*.

Make sure that you can follow through before you offer support. Saying that you can do something and backing out can be worse for the other person than being upfront and staying that you can't to begin with. If you've

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already said you would do something, or someone asks something of you and you don't feel it's something that you can do, don't, and let them know that you can't. It's good to know your own limits, and if you are overburdened, you won't be able to deliver the quality of support you could otherwise, since you'll need to work yourself out as well.

Do not tell, demand, coerce or even *ask* someone to rely on you, or to do something specific (such as call you before they use SI). No one is going to be the hero in this situation aside from them, and anyone trying to be (even with the best intentions), will do more harm than good.

If you do want to stop, that is a decision that is up to you and only you. It is also something that only you can do, though support from friends is awesome. Here are some ideas that may, at the least, help you get some control over SI.

### Positive and Negative Cycles

SI is a negative cycle. Negative feelings draw you into SI and while they are relieved in the short term, it only adds more negative feelings to the

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