Why do they do it?
Clinical psychologists and psychiatrists, state
that endorphins that has the same effects as
drugs are released when cutting occurs, ma-
king the adolescent feeling better. Self-muti-
lation is a way to get his / her control on life
back, because he / she feels overwhelmed by
life. Cutting is a way to handle some of the
following mental states / issues:

- Depression.
- Anxiety.
- Stress.
- Humiliation.
- Anger.
- Sorrow.
- Abuse.
- Family conflict.

The risk of becoming a cutter is quite high in
competitive and perfectionistic young people.
Most of them have a low self esteem and
even for younger children the frantic rushed
life between school, homework and extra-
mural activities can be exhausting. They feel
swamped and there is no or very little family
time. The family time, however, is essential
for children to acquire mechanisms to deal
with abovementioned issues.

And then, as we all know, there is the
media. The way in which aggression and
violence are explicitly displayed also leads to
self-mutilation.

A child can also be influenced by a friend
that cuts him- / herself. Because a friend is
doing it, it seems like acceptable behaviour.
Cutting often appears when children suffers
from so-called “borderline personality disor-
der” (BPD), schizophrenia or bipolar disorder.

Children with autism can be extremely
violent, because of their unique needs in life,
and can mutilate themselves out of frustra-
tion. They usually use this to escape from the
environment stimuli that they experience as
pain.

Finally, cutting can occur merely out of
exploratory behaviour by any normal young
person without any vast problems.

More about cutting

Young people cut themselves to deal with
emotional problems. As parent, you have to
recognise the cry for help before it is too late.

It is however not their aim to kill themselves.
After all, it keeps people alive when they
experience unbearable mental pain. Often
this deviation is confused with suicidal at-
tempts. It serves as an emotional pain control
mechanism.

This behaviour occurs in people of all levels
of society and is usually misdiagnosed and
misunderstood. It is also a secret activity and
the person feels ashamed.

According to Sadag (the South African De-
pression- and Anxiety Group) self-mutilation
is not only a teenager trend and, as believed,
a thing that only young girls do. A person who
does this is not attention-hungry and his /
her aim is not to manipulate others. It is also
not depicted as an automatic sign of mental
illness or child abuse. Sufferers usually find
it difficult to change, and it is not specifically
something that they really want to do - they
feel so-to-say “obliged” to do it.

Most people think about “cutting” when
they think of self-mutilation. In reality there
are quite a few behavioural patterns that can
be classified under self-mutilation. Sadag
confirms that a person can use a knife or any other sharp object to cut him- / herself with, they can burn themselves, hit themselves with their fists or any other objects, scratch their skins or pull their hair, misuse alcohol or have eating disorders.

Eight methods to help your child
1. Firstly parents must first try to deal with their own shock. To invade your child's personal space, to get angry with him / her or to suddenly make demands, can raise his / her anxiety levels which can increase self-mutilation. You have to remain calm and give him / her sufficient time to speak with you about it.
2. Should your child find it difficult to talk to you, propose that they send you an sms or write a letter to you which will include ways to make their world a better place. If your child doesn’t want to communicate with you at all, you have to get help. Cutting is not a way to get attention, it is a serious cry for help!
3. Take care of your child’s wounds. By doing this they will realise that his / her body is worth caring about. Get proper medical attention when serious damage was done. Don’t just do wound care, focus on your child’s emotional state. Show empathy and show your child that you would really like to understand what he / she is feeling. Should your child explain his / her feelings, summarise it, and repeat it in your own words. They must realise that any emotions and feelings are acceptable, self-mutilation however, is not acceptable. Try to find out who or what makes your child sad. It may be exam stress, bullying or they can suffer to deal with the death of someone close. Sometimes they can be disappointed in themselves by something they have done wrong. Build their self-confidence by giving them positive feedback on every little positive thing that they are doing or have accomplished.
5. Younger children don’t always have the sufficient vocabulary to explain what they are feeling. This frustrates them. Through play therapy they use the natural language of play to communicate stress, frustration, anxiety or any other needs to the therapist. This is seen as a safe place. The therapist will then give parents practical advice on how to support the child at home.
6. Get educated about this behaviour. Try to find out what is causing your child's stress and help him / her to discover problem solving skills to use in difficult circumstances. Avoid judgement and don’t criticise.
7. Children with this deviation feel lonely and isolated. Make sure that they come into contact with children who is not hurting themselves.
8. Never keep this behaviour a secret. Encourage your child to speak to a therapist. Therapists have the ability to teach children how to recognise their feelings, how to express it, how to regulate it in meaningful ways and how to live socially acceptable.

Sadag’s tips if you are hurting yourself

- Remove yourself from the situation.
- Try to focus on something else in stead of the pain.
- Make a list of supportive friends which you can talk to. If your friends can't help you, make an appointment to see a professional.
- Try to do relaxing- and / or breathing exercises.
- Keep a diary of how you are feeling and what the exact reason is for self-mutilation.
- Learn the ability to confront others and make sure everybody knows how you are feeling.
- Make a list of reasons why you are going to stop and set realistic goals.
- Look ahead! When things feel too huge and difficult to handle, it can be very difficult to change the future. When you feel like this, think of the following: “The problems that seems undissolvable on this stage, will change. Life changes continuously and you are in control of yourself and your own environment!”

[End of text]