



# When Your Child is Cutting: A Parent's Guide to Helping Children Overcome Self-Injury

By Sony Khemlani-Patel PhD, Merry McVey-Noble PhD, Fugen Neziroglu PhD ABPP ABPP

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A Compassionate Guide for Parents

As a parent, what's harder to deal with than seeing your child in pain? It's especially frustrating when you feel like you've exhausted the resources you could use to help him or her stop hurting. And if your child is cutting or engaging in another form of self-injury, a behavior that you simply can't make any sense of in the first place, this feeling of helplessness can be unbearable.

This book offers you information and advice for dealing with a child who is hurting him or herself. Learn why self-injury happens, how to identify it, and how to address this sensitive topic with calm and confidence. Follow the book's clear and simple plan for communicating with your child about this problem. Connect with the best kinds of professional help to get him or her through this painful time. Above all, rely on this compassionate and clinically sound book to give you the one thing you really need when your child is in pain—hope.

- Learn about the causes and effects of self-injury
- Identify the signs of self-harm
- Communicate effectively with a child who is hurting him or herself
- Choose the best professional help
- Support your child's recovery

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## **Editorial Review**

### Review

*“When Your Child Is Cutting* is an excellent resource for both parents and professionals. It presents the facts about cutting and how to manage this problem. It is written in an accessible and readable format. The book takes a good deal of the fear out of dealing with cutting behaviors and provides a needed appendix of frequently asked questions. This text is pragmatic and to the point and can be of real help to many concerned parents and health service providers.

—Robert W. Motta, Ph.D., ABPP, director of the Doctoral Program in School-Community Psychology at Hofstra University

“I remember the first time I had to say “self-mutilation.” I was so naïve. I quickly learned all that this diagnosis entailed. It meant that my daughter and I would be at odds through her early and mid-teens. It meant late night emergency rooms and psychiatric wards. And, for me, it meant anger, guilt, sadness, failure, hopelessness, loneliness—but mostly it meant fear.

“But slowly, ever so slowly, the rain stopped, the clouds lifted, and the sun was visible. It has been four and a half years now. The sun shines; my daughter and I walk hand in hand. Don’t get me wrong. There are cloudy days. But when it rains, my daughter has an umbrella and knows how to use it. The umbrella is the key—not the weather.

“First, I had to accept my daughter’s emotional problems. Then I had to accept and believe that they were real. Then I had to make a commitment to give whatever it took, at whatever cost. But I believed in Dr. McVey. I still have a piece of her notepaper hanging on my refrigerator with the words, “This will not last forever.”

“I believed in her, in my daughter, and in myself. Every month now, without fail, we celebrate the day my daughter stopped cutting. It has been fifty-five months now. And every month is as important as the last.”  
—S.S., client of author McVey-Noble

“My divorce hit both of my daughters hard. They were two and five at the time. My older daughter later reacted by being afraid of going to school and by expressing other anxiety behaviors. My younger daughter, Naomi, reacted by being the “good little girl.” When I had to travel, or when I would come home late after a nighttime presentation for my job, I’d find a paper plate pressed with lipstick-kisses on my pillow. Naomi was five then. During the summer when she was fourteen she began cutting herself.

“We tried to get help from a couple of therapists with limited success. Then, as luck—or God—would have

it (I truly do believe in divine intervention), I was talking to a colleague who needed to find an alternative school for her daughter. I told her about the school my older daughter went to. She told me her daughter cut herself and gave me Dr. McVey's phone number. That's how I found help.

“Naomi saw Dr. McVey twice a week. This gave her the support and insights she needed to control the cutting. Dr. McVey encouraged Naomi to call her, even beyond office hours, when she needed her. Naomi learned how to release the pressure valve of her own feelings when they threatened to boil over. She learned to understand her feelings so that she could manage and live with them.”

—J.D., client of author McVey-Noble

#### From the Publisher

This much-needed book acquaints parents of children and adolescents who cut themselves with the signs and causes of self-injury and offers strategies for communicating about the issue and getting kids the help they need to overcome this dangerous behavior.

#### About the Author

**Merry E. McVey-Noble, Ph.D.**, is a psychologist at the Bio-Behavioral Institute in Great Neck, NY, where she treats a number of adolescents and adults who engage in self-injurious behaviors. She is adjunct professor of psychology at Hofstra University, where she has taught for ten years.

**Sony Khemlani-Patel, Ph.D.**, is a licensed clinical psychologist at the Bio-Behavioral Institute in Great Neck, NY, where she specializes in the treatment and research of obsessive-compulsive spectrum, anxiety, and mood disorders as well as self-injury. She received her doctorate from Hofstra University in Hempstead, NY.

**Fugen Neziroglu, Ph.D., ABBP**, is a board-certified cognitive and behavior psychologist, involved in the research and treatment of anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive spectrum disorders, trichotillomania, hoarding, body dysmorphic disorder and hypochondriasis at the Bio-Behavioral Institute in Great Neck, NY. She is coauthor of *Overcoming Compulsive Hoarding*.

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##### **Donna Antonucci:**

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