



Court Appointed Special Advocates of the River Region

Serving Jefferson, Henry, Oldham, Trimble, Shelby and Spencer Counties

CASA news

Self-Injury in Children

by Leah Davies, M.Ed.



Catherine's elementary school teacher noticed cuts on Catherine's arm and asked what had happened. Catherine responded that she had fallen off her bike into some thorns. The teacher did not think any more about it. But later, she noted that Catherine always wore long-sleeved shirts and long pants even when it was hot outside. When Catherine's sleeve was pulled up accidentally, her arm revealed severe scars. Her teacher sought help by conferring with the school counselor, who then met with Catherine.

In a calm manner, the counselor communicated understanding, empathy and caring for Catherine, thus establishing trust. The counselor asked questions to determine that the cuts were not physical child abuse by an older person, but self-inflicted. She avoided shaming Catherine by stating that she was not a bad person for hurting herself. When Catherine was unable to describe her behavior, the counselor asked if she could write down or draw what she does to herself when she is upset. The counselor's goal was to not criticize or coerce her into stopping because intimidation usually leads to increased self-hurting behavior, but to find the help she needed.

August 2011 Issue

CASA STATS*

118 VOLUNTEERS

261 CHILDREN SERVED

* As of July 31, 2011

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every child deserves someone to trust.

Self-injury means deliberately hurting yourself without the intent to commit suicide. Other names for self-injury are cutting, self-harm, and self-mutilation. Most self-injurers feel ashamed of what they're doing and try to hide it from adults and friends. Since self-harm is done in private, it often goes undetected or is explained as being accidental.

Though uncommon, children as young as preschool age have intentionally hurt themselves. Self-injurers come from a broad spectrum of social, economic and racial groups. They can range from being perfectionists to school dropouts. However, as young children, they usually have experienced abuse, neglect, violence, or trauma such as the death of a loved one or involvement in a car accident. They can be males or females, although most are females in their teens or older. A reason for this may be that males tend to display their aggression towards others or inanimate objects. Girls, on the other hand, tend to turn that hurt and pain inward toward themselves.

Self-injurers often lack social skills and may be victims of teasing or bullying. In order to distract themselves from painful emotions, they inflict physical harm upon themselves. Self-injurers may begin with only scratching an insect bite or accidentally cutting their skin, but due to the sense of relief it brings, they continue to injure themselves. Some researchers theorize that the release of endorphins, the body's natural painkillers, can contribute to continued self-injury. What young children have in common with older children and adolescents who hurt themselves is an inability to verbally express their feelings and needs.

Individuals inflict pain upon themselves to:

- Rapidly reduce the tension in their body and mind
- Relieve their emotional pain caused by feeling worthless, angry, fearful, abandoned, depressed, anxious, or trapped
- Feel pain that tells them they are "alive" to ward off emotional detachment
- Regain control since turning mental and emotional pain into physical pain is easier for them to handle
- Punish themselves for real or perceived offenses like being bad, fat, ugly, stupid, or guilty (for example, a boy who feels guilty over the death of his brother may challenge a bigger boy to fight because he knows he will get hurt)
- Express anger/rage when words or outward actions are unacceptable or when the pain is too severe to put into words (for example, children may have been told that expressing an emotion is wrong, or they may have been severely punished for expressing certain thoughts or feelings)...continued on next page

Self-Injury in Children continued...



The most common methods of self-injury are cutting with a razor blade or broken glass, scratching, picking a wound, burning skin, and pulling hair. Self-hitting and head-banging are usually associated with mentally delayed or autistic children. Excessive piercing or tattooing is not self-injury if the primary purpose is

body decoration or to fit in with peers.

Some adults dismiss self-injurers as manipulators and attention seekers, but self-abuse is most often a hidden, secret problem. A myth is that self-abusers want to commit suicide. In fact, the opposite is true. The cutting helps them relieve emotions that might lead to suicide. However, a serious concern is that cutters risk danger each time they injure themselves. They may misjudge the depth of a cut or the wound may become infected.

If individuals who self-harm do not receive professional help, they may develop an addiction. Cutting or other self-injuries can be stopped, but the process usually takes a long time. A referral to a therapist who has expertise in this area typically needs to be made. Through therapy the self-injurers learn that it is okay to feel a variety of emotions and how to express them openly. A therapist teaches them alternative behaviors so that they can release their tension in harmless ways. Methods a therapist might share include relaxation and breathing techniques, meditation, exercise, art, writing, or singing. Support groups may also be beneficial. The self-injurer needs to understand the underlying motives for their behavior and take responsibility for, and control over, their actions.

What can parents and teachers do?

- Respond to the child without judgment.
- Get him or her professional help.
- Model appropriate coping skills when stressed.
- Be a positive role model, avoiding violent and unhealthy behaviors.

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Upcoming Events

2011 St. James Court Art Show Preview Party Benefitting CASA, September 29th

The party Louisville has loved for years is back. This annual benefit for CASA features 40 notable artists from the St. James Court Art Show who will display and sell their work in a festive and comfortable environment. Party guests can browse the art while enjoying gourmet hors d'oeuvres, desserts, cocktails, wine, beer and beverages. This is the ninth annual edition of this important CASA fundraising event. The Preview Party is from 6:00 to 9:00 pm. Ticket sales are limited to 500 guests, and the event has typically sold out. Proceeds from sponsorships and the sale of \$100 tickets help CASA. For ticket information, visit CASARiverRegion.org or like us on Facebook.

Upcoming In-Services

Reminder... Volunteer support meetings are held on the 1st Monday and 3rd Thursday of every month. The meetings will be held at CASA's new office*. Volunteers from all counties are encouraged to attend in order to talk about issues they may be facing in their service.

Tuesday, August 23... "How Children Grieve" will be presented by Amy Sloboda, Children's Grief Counselor from Hosparous of Louisville. She will address not only grief experienced from the death of a loved one, but additionally, grief from other losses that children endure. Amy is experienced also in art therapy, which she often utilizes in her work. The in-service will be held at CASA* from 5:30 to 6:30 pm.

Tuesday, September 13... We will have a special guest speaker from Seven Counties talking about Kentucky IMPACT Plus, a behavioral health program for Medicaid-eligible children who have complex behavioral healthcare needs. The in-service starts at 5:30 pm and will be held at CASA*.

**The new CASA building is located at 982 Eastern Pkwy, which is located behind the main Kosair Centre building. Option: From Eastern Pkwy, turn onto E. Burnett Ave to enter the driveway that intersects with the CASA parking area. The (orange brick) building will be to your right.*

CASA Car Raffle

CASA's Luxury Car Raffle is in full swing. We are raffling off a 2011 Land Rover LR2 courtesy of Bluegrass Motorsport. Kosair Charities is a participating sponsor.



While we are sure the raffle will be a big success, thanks to the hard work of the CASA board and staff, we need all the help we can get. Please tell your friends about the raffle and the special website www.CASARaffle.com. We have posters for breakrooms, bulletin boards and any shops that will agree to post them. Send an email to Lauren at lauren@casarr.org for the poster. She will send you a PDF to print or forward to friends. We have a billboard on I-65 near the UofL campus. Also, watch for our TV commercial starring Terry Meiners on WAVE 3 and Insight Cable. You can see the commercial and hilarious outtakes from the shoot at CASARiverRegion.org. *Thanks for your help.*

Volunteer Voices

We've decided to add a new section to our monthly volunteer newsletter called *Volunteer Voices*. If you're looking for a job, selling a house, looking for a dog sitter, etc., contact us and we will put your request in our monthly newsletter. *This is a way to network and possibly help each other.*

We've Finally Moved



It finally happened! CASA of the River Region now has its own beautiful home! If you haven't seen our new office on Eastern Parkway, please come and see us. You'll be amazed! We are located behind the old Kosair's Children's Hospital. Our mailing address is **982 Eastern Parkway, Box 9, Louisville, KY 40217**. *We are so grateful to all who have helped us achieve this milestone, especially board member Carol Lomicka who did an extraordinary job of getting us here!*

Goodbye VISTAs

We have been exceptionally lucky to have three absolutely wonderful VISTAS (Volunteers In Service To America) work with us since last August. Lauren Curry, Barbara Stallard and Andrew Talbot have been just wonderful in helping us carry out our mission of advocacy. They have done all kinds of things; Lauren is a graphic artist who puts this newsletter together. Barbara is our trainer and has interviewed many of our new volunteers, and Andrew, who passed the Bar Exam last year, has helped out in many different capacities. They will be leaving us at the end of the month and we ask that you join us in giving them a gigantic THANK YOU! We'll miss all of you and hope you won't go too far!



**Court Appointed Special Advocates
of the River Region**

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