

Excerpts from:

Self Abuse on the rise among college students and adolescents

By Amber Dutton 27 Jun 2006

Brie Urie couldn't believe what she was seeing. "She walked into class in jeans and a T-shirt with a bandana around her bleach-blonde hair," said Brie Urie, a BYU freshman studying art, speaking of a close friend. "I didn't think too much about it until I saw her arm - carved into it, with what I later found out to be a kitchen knife, were the letters H.A.T.E. She must have been deeply troubled to do something like that to herself."



Disturbingly, Urie's story about her friend is all too common in American. A recent study concluded college students and young adults are increasingly participating in self-abusive behaviors such as cutting and burning, among other methods. Janice Whitlock, director of the Cornell Research Program on Self Injurious Behavior in Adolescents and Young Adults, initiated the study because self-injury occurs much more than what the public generally recognizes. "Every person interviewed said that if someone were to find out about it and if that person went to an adult, who they believed could help, they were always unhappy about it, but every single one of them said that they were ultimately glad they were betrayed that way," Whitlock said. "They realized that people truly cared and they finally had a connection with other people."

Karen Conterio, administrative director of S.A.F.E. Alternatives, said it is especially important for parents to make that connection. She pointed out children aren't as isolated as parents want to believe them to be. Parents need to realize the influences on their children and be aware of who they are hanging out with, and the best way to find out is to talk with them.

"If parents can do that, it will go so far," she said. "Don't be shy about sharing your own thoughts and feelings with your kids."

Conterio recommended talking about current events and issues that affect youth today. She said to bring it up at dinner, family nights or even in the car and ask if they know people who injure themselves or are involved in other harmful practices. She recommended talking about why it is harmful and how they could be a positive influence for that person.

Wendy Schneider, producer for "Cut," a self-harm documentary to be released this fall, said she hopes to bring attention to this underground epidemic. "What I am learning in this film is how little others know about it," Schneider said. "Teens know a lot about it, but parents, teachers and most counselors don't."

Because few resources regarding this subject exist, she said she felt it was important to do a film that introduced self-injury in a way that showed a teen's perspective. Friends, parents and adults can use it as an educational tool to better understand what is driving this behavior and thus know how to help the individual. She said she has found that teens really want to be heard.

"I am not the clinical counselor. I am just the filmmaker that is really trying to bring the stories of teens out into the open a little bit," she said. "I am trying to help validate a teen's experience. I am trying to show a wide perspective with respect to self injury and why certain teens do it."