

*Patient Education Sheet***Self-Injury with Borderline Personality Disorder****What is borderline personality disorder?**

Borderline personality disorder is a serious mental illness. Symptoms shown with this illness include frequent mood changes, difficulty in dealing with others, poor self-image, and behavioral problems.

Persons with borderline personality disorder experience overwhelming bouts of emotion, which can feel like intense internal pain. Examples of these feelings may include:

- Anger
- Depression
- Distress
- Anxiety
- Embarrassment
- Low self-esteem
- Rage
- Jealousy
- Greed

**How does borderline personality disorder relate to self-injury?**

There is a high rate of self-injurious behavior, or self-harm, with varying degrees of severity in borderline personality disorder. Self-injury is the deliberate act of hurting oneself. These behaviors may include (but are not limited to):

- Excessive body piercing, including the face
- Carving or cutting
- Biting
- Scratching
- Branding
- Marking
- Excessive tattooing
- Burning
- Head banging
- Bruising
- Picking or pulling at skin or hair

**Does self-injury occur because the person wants to commit suicide?**

Self-injurious behaviors do not always occur because the person wants to commit suicide, although some behaviors may be life-threatening. People with borderline personality disorder self-injure to distract themselves from the emotional pressure, or to “let out the steam of the pressure cooker.”

Some with borderline personality disorder, particularly adolescents, self-injure to take risks, rebel, reject their parents’ values, express their individuality, escape physical discomfort, or to escape peer pressure. Others, however, may injure themselves to show hopelessness, worthlessness or suicidal thoughts. In a situation where suicide is seriously desired, immediate intervention is required to ensure that person’s safety and well-being. The suicidal person needs to immediately call a relative or friend to stay with them and call 9-1-1 and/or the treating psychiatrist/therapist to obtain immediate medical help.

**Are there other illnesses that involve self-injury?**

Borderline personality disorder is not the only mental illness with symptoms of self-injury. Other psychiatric illnesses involving self-injury include:

- ✓ Depression
- ✓ Psychosis
- ✓ Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- ✓ Mental retardation
- ✓ Autism

Some persons who have been emotionally, sexually, or physically abused may also self injure.

### **What can be done to help with this behavior?**

If someone you know has borderline personality disorder, or any other illness mentioned and is self-injurious, encourage him/her to value and respect his/her body. Some helpful ways to avoid self-injury behavior include learning to:

- ✓ Accept oneself and situation as it is and find ways to make the present moment more tolerable. Calling a trusted friend or therapist/counselor to share and discuss feelings and concerns is often helpful.
- ✓ Distract oneself from feelings of self-harm such as counting to ten, waiting 15 minutes, saying “NO” or “STOP,” practicing breathing exercises, journaling, drawing, thinking about positive images, using ice and rubber bands applied to the wrist.
- ✓ Stop, think, evaluate the pros and cons of self-injury.
- ✓ Soothe oneself in non-injurious ways.

Evaluation by a mental health professional will assist in identifying and treating underlying causes of self-injury. A psychiatrist can diagnose and treat borderline personality disorder as well as the other disorders mentioned that may accompany self-injury.

### **Crisis Hotline Number**

Danbury Hospital has a crisis intervention hotline that is available 24 hours a day. A Crisis Counselor will listen and help with any immediate psychiatric problems that are discussed. **The phone number to this hotline is (203)739-7007.**

*Sources:*

Connecticut Youth Suicide Advisory Board. Retrieved April 2009 from [www.ct.gov/DCF](http://www.ct.gov/DCF)

National Institute of Mental Health. Retrieved April 2009 from <http://nimh.nih.gov/>

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