

SCHOLARLY PAPER REVIEW

EPSY 5191 Education Of The Gifted And Talented

Spring 2015

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ARTICLE

Wood, Susannah M., & Craigen, Laurie M. (2011). Self-Injurious Behavior in Gifted and Talented Youth: What Every Educator Should Know. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 34(6), 839-859.

SUMMARY

- Self-injury includes a wide variety of behaviors where one causes harm to him- or herself; no universal definition
- Deliberate harm without suicidal intent
- Self-injury coincides with a great deal of shame
- Gifted students do not seek help because they feel guidance is for academically challenged
- Variety of reasons and factors influence self-injury decisions

SUMMARY

- **Reasons**
 - Increase feelings of “being real”
 - Create tangible physical pain when psychological pain is overwhelming
 - Prevent conscious traumatic memories
 - Effect support and concern from others
 - Self-control
 - Punish self for “bad” feelings and beliefs
 - Release of negative emotions

SUMMARY

- **Factors**
 - **Environmental:** family, peers
 - **Psychological:** grounding, sense of control, adaptive to failure, release tension of psychological pain, coping, prevent suicidal ideation
 - **Biological:** neurotransmitters suppress and regulate emotions, induce pleasure, coping to regulate emotions
 - **Life Factors:** stressors, bereavement, illness, gifted characteristics, academic pressures

SUMMARY

- Self-injure rarely isolated
- May indicate psychological/emotional problems
- SIB and suicide are distinct phenomena
 - Intent for each is different
 - **SIB:** release tension
 - **Suicide:** escape overwhelming feelings; end life
 - Can coexist; SIB students 18 times more likely than general population to complete suicide
- New thinking: SIB and suicide exist on opposite extremes of same spectrum of self-harm

SUMMARY

- **Best Practices:**
 - Educator awareness
 - Do not categorize SIB individuals
 - Students are unique individuals
- **Mental Health Issue or “School Issue”**
 - Affects school and environment
 - School facilitates SIB contagion
 - SIB not done in isolation (substance abuse, aggression)

SUMMARY

- **Assessment & Intervention**
 - Establish protocols
 - Confidentiality with minors who self-injure
 - Establishes agreement among staff
 - Recognize warnings
 - Distinguish SIB from suicide
 - Reporting requirements while protecting privacy
 - Treatment referrals
 - Critical response when immediate attention required

SUMMARY

- **Identify SIB student**
 - Teacher may be first point of contact
 - Be prepared for student reveal
 - Recognize warning signs:
 - Unexplained cuts or injuries
 - Excuses for cuts
 - Changes in mood
 - Concealing clothing in warm weather
 - Unusual possession of sharp objects or razors
 - Defensive about SIB topic
 - Isolation or detached
 - Substance use or abuse

SUMMARY

- **Communication with SIB student**
 - Nonjudgmental, empathic
 - Willing to learn about student (hobbies, family, life events, accomplishments)
 - Identify wounds and pain
 - Express assistance and concern
 - **LISTEN** without judgment
 - Teacher needs to be aware of their own reaction
 - Focus on *the student*

SUMMARY

- **Ethical Considerations**
 - Legal responsibilities (mandated reporters)
 - Discuss responsibility to take action and warn
 - Uncertain guidelines about SIB reporting
 - Be transparent with student
 - Accompany student to school counselor
 - Consult with professional
 - Professional assumes role to assess and refer to mental health community

SUMMARY

- **Support**
 - If appropriate, school professionals obtain release of information with community mental health treatment
 - Family and student should advocate for teacher involvement in intervention
 - Implement classroom strategies

SUMMARY

- **Intervention**
 - Safety plan, safe people
 - Activities to identify and express feelings
 - A 504 plan for counseling, care, and private time
 - Teach healthy problem solving
 - Maintain impulse-control log; theorize meaning of impulse
 - Education plan that includes support, internships, college
 - Art or visual representation to describe SIB feelings
 - Group counseling with other gifted students

SUMMARY

- **Professional development**
 - SIB is emerging in gifted population
 - Specific training for gifted students who self-injure
 - Cooperative comprehensive training with school counselor or psychologist
 - Collaborate with parents and community resources

SUMMARY

- **Educator self-care**
 - Be aware of own feelings and emotions in response
 - Plan for student disclosure
 - Consult with trusted professional
 - Personal counseling
 - Journaling
 - Time away from building to process experience
- **Conclusion**
 - SIB in gifted students will occur
 - Both a mental health issue and a school issue

IMPLICATIONS

As a Master of Education student in Youth Development Leadership, this paper encourages me to...

- Recognize youth as unique individuals
- Provide appropriate and timely disclosure of reporting requirements
- Be a resource for colleagues with less training
- Expect the unexpected
- **LISTEN**
- Focus on the student

STRENGTHS

- This paper addresses self-injurious behavior from both teacher and student perspectives
- Thorough assessment of student needs and teacher responsibilities
- Focuses on the student
- Encourages team approach in the best interest of the student
- Provides guidance for professional development

WEAKNESSES

- Portrays a sense of “handing off” the student to others for treatment
 - However, does encourage on-going teacher involvement
- Does not clarify how SIB in gifted students differs from other students
- Does not identify potential influence of gifted characteristics on SIB
- Does not address prevention

EVALUATION

This paper is very relevant. A growing number of students are encountering SIB and suicidal ideation. The authors provide details that all teachers should embrace for the safety and well-being of all students, gifted or otherwise. I found the article to be very straightforward. It defines SIB, explains theories as to why students self-injure, identifies reasons and influential factors, and outlines the needs of the student. Teachers are provided with helpful strategies to identify, intervene, and work with students. Through a cooperative approach with school professional counselors and psychologists, a referral to an appropriate community mental health resource can be made to provide the student with the best treatment options. The paper also prepares teachers for an encounter they may otherwise not expect. It encourages collaborative professional development to formulate school policies.

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