

# National Self-Injury Awareness Day

Self-Injury: HOPE  
315 Maynard Ave S. Ste. 12  
Seattle, WA 98104  
(206) 223-9657  
<http://selfinjury.org>

## National Self-Injury Awareness Day March 1, 2000

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Seattle** -- Self-Injury: Help, Outreach, and Public Education has designated March 1, 2000 as National Self-Injury Awareness Day for the second year in a row. On March 1, people nationwide whose lives have been affected by self-injury will participate in an awareness campaign targeting medical, mental health, and social services personnel. They will distribute information, including a fact sheet and bill of rights, to hospitals, clinics, schools, doctors, therapists and other medical and mental health professionals in an effort to raise awareness and dispel common misconceptions about self-injury.

Self-injury, also called self-harm, self-inflicted violence, or self-mutilation, is a coping mechanism used by an estimated 1% of the US population to deal with a variety of stressors. Self-injury is usually defined as self-inflicted physical harm severe enough to cause tissue damage or visible marks. Self-injury is not done with suicidal intent, and does not include piercing, tattooing, or scarification used for ritual, sexual, or ornamentation purposes. Common forms of self-injury are cutting, burning and hitting the self with objects (or objects with the self)

Because self-injury is seldom talked about and often misunderstood, self-injurers are often treated unfairly and insensitively by police, doctors, therapists, and emergency personnel. Consequently, self-injurers may be reluctant to seek necessary medical attention. For this reason, among others, it is important that medical and emergency personnel have accurate information on how to appropriately deal with clients who self-injure. In response to the lack of this information, Self-Injury: HOPE, a grassroots organization dedicated to providing educational materials and promoting awareness, has formed. It is the organization's hope that National Self-Injury Awareness Day will heighten public and professional awareness of the issues surrounding self-injury and spark further efforts toward resolving those issues.

For Details,  
Contact:  
Deb Martinson  
Self-Injury: HOPE  
(206) 223-9657

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"Self-injury is perceived as something unspeakable," said Self-Injury: HOPE founder Deb Martinson. "As a result, many people who self-harm believe that they are sick, evil, or crazy. They often don't realize that other people who self-injure live in their communities, that they are not alone."

Armando Favazza, MD, an internationally recognized expert on self-injury and the author of **Bodies Under Siege: Self-Mutilation in Culture and Psychiatry**, said, "Self-injury is a public health problem that has been neglected too long. [Self-Injury: HOPE's] Bill of Rights for self-injurers is a significant and important first step in bringing this problem into public consciousness and in addressing therapeutic considerations. The Bill of Rights is a unique document that deserves widespread attention. I wholeheartedly support it." An online version of this document, at <http://www.service4you.net/brandon/brights.shtml>, has been signed by nearly 300 people.

Self-Injury: HOPE members met through an Internet e-mail support group Martinson started in 1996 and named for Favazza's seminal book. "Because of the stigma surrounding self-injury, many people find it easier to talk about in the relative anonymity of online space," Martinson explained. "NSIAD is a way of confronting public perceptions about what self-injury is, who does it, and what can be done about it." She added that the Internet has proved a useful tool for the group, providing an easy way to distribute materials to its far-flung membership.

More than 100 people nationwide will be distributing fact sheets, brochures, and press kits on March 1 as well as giving talks and other events in an attempt to raise awareness.