## You and your teen
# Coping with cutting

**By STEVE DEBENEDETTI-EMANUEL**
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Not long ago, "Dave," a 15-year-old boy, came into my office for his regularly scheduled appointment. Almost immediately, I noticed that he had about a two inch, vertical cut on his left wrist, and I asked him about it. At first he told me that he'd brushed up against something and accidentally scratched himself, but when I challenged his story he eventually told me that he'd cut himself with a knife.

When I asked what was happening in his life, he told me that the academic pressure from both his teachers and parents was really getting to him. He felt horrible and hadn't known where to turn. Without giving it much thought, he'd cut himself, and the bad feelings went away for a little while. But before long, the feelings returned.

When I asked Dave if his parents noticed his cut, he told me that he wasn't sure because they hadn't said anything. As the cut was hard to miss, this left me feeling more concerned. After talking it through, Dave decided that it was be a good idea to have his parents join him for his next appointment.

At the family meeting, I helped Dave talk about his feelings and what led him to cut. I also asked his parents if they'd noticed the cut. They admitted that they had and wanted to help, but didn't know what to do or say, so they kept silent. This admission helped open up the conversation, and Dave got the support he needed. He hasn't cut since.

### Talking about it

I know there are times in which it's tempting not to talk about difficult issues like cutting with our teens. Rather than having what could be a heated, emotional conversation, parents choose to stay silent. That way they don't have to deal with difficult feelings that might surface because of their teen's struggles. It's easier to hope the problem goes away on its own. And sometimes it does.

Unfortunately, cutting is often a sign of something more serious and doesn't just stop on its own. Sometimes, talking about what hurts deeply is too overwhelming, so teens use cutting as a way of getting out these feelings and showing others just how much pain they're in. Other times, teens feel numb on the inside, so they cut as a way to feel something on the outside, even if it's pain.

Either way, teens are communicating that something isn't right and they want someone to pay attention. They're shouting and waving their arms in hopes that you'll notice and do something before the avalanche hits and problems get worse.

This doesn't mean that you'll have any easy conversation. Your teen is probably going to get defensive and deny that there's a big problem. At the same time, he or she is also going to be relieved because you've noticed that things aren't OK and you want to help.

It's important that you let your teen know that he or she isn't in trouble. Tell them that you're worried, not angry. Tell them that you want to hear how they're feeling, and try to be open to what they say. Do your best to remain calm throughout the conversation. If you get defensive and angry and threaten to do things like taking their door off its hinges and grounding them indefinitely, you'll probably leave your teen feeling that he or she never should have said anything. Help your teen seek the support of trusted adults, including a counselor, when necessary.

In the end, it's scary for parents to learn that their teens are injuring themselves by cutting. Fortunately, I've found that if parents provide necessary support when they notice that their teen has started cutting, rather than ignoring it or getting angry, teens often are able to cope with their strong feelings without hurting themselves further.

*Steve DeBenedetti-Emanuel is a licensed marriage and family therapist based in the Sacramento area.*

## Ask Officer Michelle
# Answering questions from the community

**By OFFICER MICHELLE LAZARK**
Sacramento Police Department
Special to The Land Park News

*Editor's Note: Ask Officer Michelle your question by emailing her at mlazark@pd.cityofsacramento.org or visit her online blog at http://blog.sacpd.org.*

### Bikes on sidewalks

I ride my bicycle around downtown a lot. I just heard from a friend of mine that while he was riding his bike downtown, an officer stopped him and told him to get off of the sidewalk and ride in the street. Are bicyclists not allowed to ride on the sidewalk? I am not very comfortable riding in the street without a bike lane.

*Posted by chriso*

### Dear chriso,

The truth of the matter is that the sidewalk is meant for pedestrians. In other words, it is illegal to ride on the sidewalks. Bicyclists must follow the same rules of the road as other "vehicles" and must ride as close as "practicable" to the right. Sacramento strives to be a bicycle friendly city with many bicycle routes, so people are encouraged to ride their bikes, however bicyclists are always encouraged to exercise caution.

California Vehicle Code Sections 21200-21212 cover the rules of the road and what bicyclists can and can't do. There is also a City Code section pertaining to riding bicycles on the sidewalk. City Code 10.76.010 states: Except as authorized under subsection B of this section, no person shall ride a bicycle on a sidewalk except within a residence district or where a sidewalk is designated as part of an established bicycle route. Pedestrians shall have the right-of-way on sidewalks.

Sacramento Transportation Management Association has an excellent segment on bicycle commuting including insight on other biking tips as well. Be safe.

*Officer Michelle*