

3rd Edition

# TEENAGERS AND SELF HARM

*What every parent  
and teacher  
needs to know*

John Ashfield PhD

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# TEENAGERS AND SELF HARM

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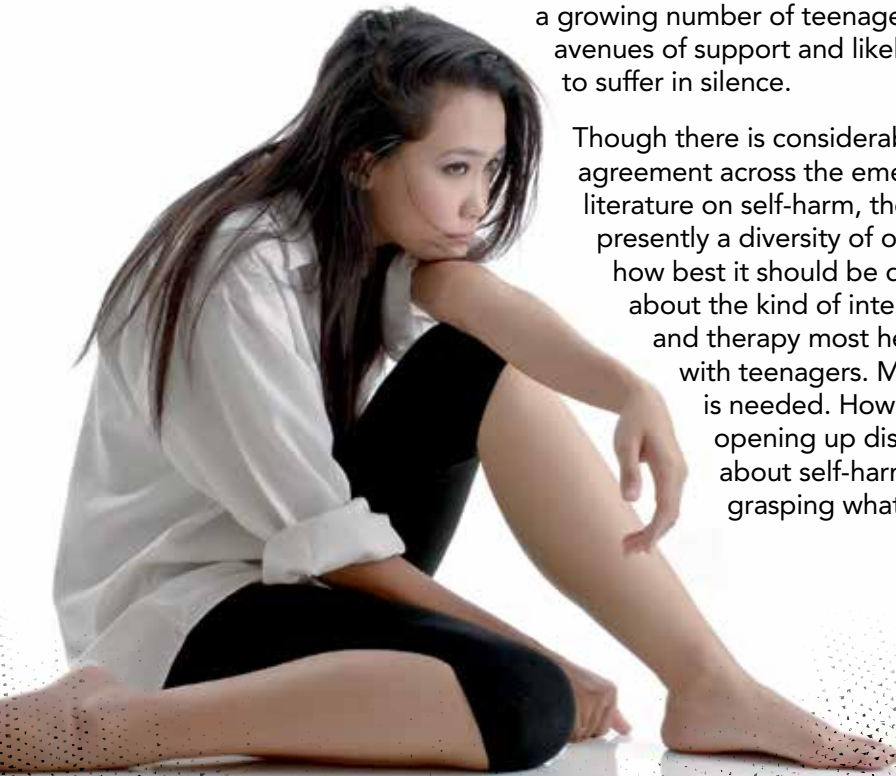
# INTRODUCTION

Written for parents, teachers and health professionals, this resource is intended to provide crucial up-to-date information for understanding and responding appropriately to teenagers who self-harm.

There are many misconceptions surrounding self-harm which can all too often affect the way concerned parents or professionals respond to teenagers using this behaviour.

It is not uncommon for teenagers to report that they had a 'bad experience' when they've tried to seek help and came away feeling judged and demeaned, instead of understood and supported, making it less likely that they will seek help again. It is needful that we begin talking openly and frankly about the issue of self-harm; neglecting to do so will only ensure it remains a taboo subject, leaving a growing number of teenagers with few avenues of support and likely to be left to suffer in silence.

Though there is considerable agreement across the emerging literature on self-harm, there is also presently a diversity of opinion about how best it should be defined and about the kind of interventions and therapy most helpful for use with teenagers. More research is needed. However, opening up discussion about self-harm and grasping what is already



known about it, are vitally important first steps in tackling this problem with sensitivity, competence and resolve.

Since teenage self-harm occurs in the context of many other factors, it may be helpful to explore just some of the common yet very difficult challenges facing teenagers, parents and teachers on the journey they all participate in, which is adolescent development and maturation towards adulthood. It is vitally important to understand self-harm in relation to all the emotion, struggle, attainment, failure, joy, grief, hormones and competition of that contested space we call adolescence.

Few of us would want to repeat the teenage phase of our development, yet we are forced to reengage with its elements – albeit as adults, since we are inextricably caught up in the great struggle of becoming which our teenagers face, simply because they cannot do it alone and need us to help them, even though they often fail to realise it.

