

## **HOW TO USE THIS PROGRAM**

This program was produced for use in classrooms, libraries, community centers, social service agencies, youth organizations, camps, teen groups, and parent education centers, or for viewing by parents and teens together at home. Although its target audience is teenagers, anyone who has regular contact with and a commitment to young people can benefit from this video as well. It is meant to be used as a part of a learning experience that begins before viewing the program and extends beyond the classroom walls. The discussion questions and follow-up activities are intended to enhance this learning experience. Educators and counselors planning to show *The Hurting* to teens may want to view the video in advance so that they can adapt their program follow-up to best suit the needs of their group. It is suggested that teens view the video under adult supervision.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- \* To spotlight & better recognize warning signs/behavior of potential self-injurers and victims of domestic violence.
- \* To explore the core reasons people self-injure.
- \* To examine what peers and educators can do to reach out to a potential self-injurer and/or victim of domestic violence.

## **SYNOPSIS**

In this award-winning MAPLE AVE installment, series character, Ashley resorts to 'cutting' to cope with an abusive father, who's regularly victimized her family as far back as she can remember. Like a growing number of teens nationwide, Ashley regularly cuts her arms and legs, substituting her overwhelming inner pain and rage with an external pain that she is seemingly better able to manage. This last illusion is finally dispelled in a heart-wrenching finale that finds a desperate Ashley reaching out to a sympathetic teacher (Ms. Tanner) for help.

## **FILM'S INSPIRATION**

For an estimated 2 to 3 million Americans, self-injury, or 'cutting' as it is more commonly known, is a grave and growing problem – especially among teens. Disturbed by this alarming trend and compelled to investigate further, OutreachArts' writer-filmmaker, Richard T. Wilson went directly to the source, meeting with teen cutters who then proceeded to take him on a journey that led to the award-winning film, *The Hurting*. Wilson has commented that the research for this film was 'especially painful'. "The abusive backgrounds that a lot of these kids come from are absolutely heartbreaking. Whether it's psychological, physical or both, the abuse that's regularly inflicted upon these kids, usually by a family member, just deadens them inside. By self-injuring, they suddenly feel alive again and, more importantly, in control...it's essentially a coping mechanism, albeit a very destructive one." Wilson recalls one girl telling him that she cut herself because her parents were "too high to care." Another student told him, "The physical pain numbs the emotional pain." Another said they cut, "to prove I'm real." Upon learning of his daughter's cutting, one father's reaction was, "How can you insult me like this? You didn't get it from me." These and other heartbreaking stories found their way in to the film's final story-line.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR TEENS & PARENTS**

1. Do you know anyone who has ever practiced self-injury/cutting?
2. Would you have guessed that Ashley was a cutter? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think people cut/self-injure to begin with?
4. Recent studies suggest that self-injury is on the rise among teens. Why do you think that is?
5. Did Ashley's family background contribute to her becoming a self-injurer and, if so, why?

6. Do you think Meg was right to express some concern about Ashley to her parents?
7. Imagine you are Ashley's friend, Jim; how do you react to her revelation that she's a cutter?
8. It's been reported that more females self-injure than males; why do you think that is?
9. If you were Ashley would you have gone to Ms. Tanner (her teacher) for help?
10. What do you think happens after the film ends? Does Ashley get help? How does the rest of the story play out...?
11. What can be done to more effectively raise awareness about self-injury among teens and their parents? What would you do...?

## **FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES**

1. Invite a local mental health professional to talk to your group about self-injury and the psychological impact of domestic violence.
2. Role play a scene where a student suspects his or her friend of being a cutter and attempts to reach out to them.
3. Imagine you're Ashley and write down all the reasons why you feel cutting is the only effective option you have for dealing with your pain.