

Thanks so much for your note and for your involvement in this issue. I'm really grateful that you're on the case because I know how energetic and passionate - and knowledgeable you are.

By the way, before I opened your note, I saw one from my publisher and responded directly to the teacher (assuming it's the same one.) I've attached that email.

I hope my comments are helpful. I also hope ALAN or ALA or People for the American Way or some neutral third party organization can help her with how to battle such a challenge. It's one thing for me to give my views. But they could be misconstrued to be seen as self-serving. More helpful, perhaps would be for an umbrella organization that fights censorship all the time to weigh in and to give her a tested strategy. ALA and ALAN have a strong reputation; maybe the backing of a respected organization is needed.

The book gets challenged all the time; this is the first time, though, that a teacher has reached out to me directly. I'll do whatever I can.

let me know what you think.

thanks,  
Patty  
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Sent 12/3/05

Dear Kathy,

Stephen Roxburgh at Front St sent me your email about Cut being challenged.

I'll be happy to help in any way I can.

Just quickly, I'll give you a few thoughts/comments that may be helpful.

I am the parent of two children and I take my responsibility of writing for children very, very seriously. That is why I went to great lengths to make certain that CUT doesn't glorify cutting; if anything, the book makes it clear that cutting is a very destructive behavior, something that seems like it gives you control over a stressful situation, but that is something that very quickly gets out of control and comes to control *you*.

Readers - hundreds and hundreds - have written to me tell me that the book helped them understand how harmful cutting is and prompted them to get help. They often say reading CUT broke the shame and isolation they were experiencing and caused them to tell their parents or guidance counselors what they were doing. I also get dozens of emails from parents, guidance counselors, therapists and librarians saying it helped them understand the phenomenon and that the book has prompted lots of kids to come forward and tell an adult they were cutting and to get help. Other kids say reading the book prevented them from trying something they were considering.

I am not an expert on cutting; but I have been on a number of panels with experts. They say fears of copycatting are not justified. A well-adjusted kid is not going to pick up a razor and cut herself because of something in a book; certain underlying conditions -often sexual abuse- must exist first. For expert info, I'd suggest you contact SAFE Alternatives, an Illinois based center that treats cutters. I believe their web site is [www.selfinjury.com](http://www.selfinjury.com). The therapists there specialize in self injury; they have read and endorsed the book. As did the American Library Assn and a variety of other state librarians' groups who awarded prizes to the book after very careful consideration.

I understand the fears of parents whose kids are reading CUT. Seeing your child carrying a book about such a frightening topic can be unsettling. And I think the key to a productive conversation with those parents is to acknowledge that fear and to show understanding and compassion. All the rational explanations in the world won't help if the parent doesn't feel that his/her concerns are being treated with respect and understanding.

I'll close with one anecdote that is representative of experiences I have all the time when I meet with teachers and librarians. I was in New Hampshire to receive a students' choice award. One of the librarians said a gym teacher had recently stormed into the library and demanded that she take CUT off the shelf. She said, "we have girls cutting themselves and it's because of that book." The librarian stood firm. "No," she said. "We have girls cutting themselves and now they're able to talk about it because of that book."

One last thing: I do a number of school visits each year. It never fails. At the end of every visit, one girl will come up to me, often waiting until no one else is nearby, and whisper thank you. She will say point to the book and say "I thought I was the only one, until I read this book. This is my story." if there's just one kid in your library who has that reaction to the book, I think that's reason enough for it to be in your collection.

I hope this helps.

please contact me if you need more.

and thanks for contacting me and my publisher.

Patty McCormick

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