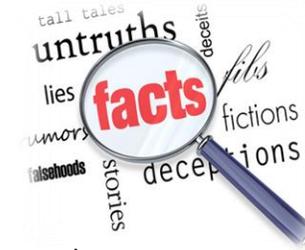


Self-Injurious Behaviors or Self-Harm



Fact or Fiction?



- People who self-injure want to die.
 - FACT: Those who self-injure *do not* want to die. When they self-harm, they are *NOT* trying to kill themselves, but instead are trying to cope with their pain and/or strong emotions associated to trauma.
 - Trauma informed perspective would tell us self injury may in fact be a way of helping the individual to go on living. However, in the long-term, people who self-injure have a much higher risk of suicide, which is why it's important to seek help.
- People who self-injure only cut their skin on their wrists.
 - FACT: The most common form of self-injurious behavior is cutting one's skin. However there are many creative ways students self-injure and many different areas of the body that can be affected.
 - Trauma informed perspective would remind us to look at the whole person, not just their self-injury i.e. we wouldn't call a student a "cutter" or expect "cutting" to be the only form of self-injury they could be participating in.

Fact or Fiction?



- Self-injury is just a fad. Ignore it and kids will grow out of it.
 - **FICTION:** Self-injury should not be minimized or referred to as a “fad”; there is no evidence that individuals spontaneously “grow out of it.” Self-injury can involve real tissue damage and potential scarring as well as other potentially serious injuries.
 - **Trauma informed perspective** would say self-injury is indicative of serious distress that requires assessment and treatment by a mental health professional.
- People who self-injure are trying to get attention.
 - **FICTION:** People who self-harm generally do so in secret. They are struggling with powerful emotions that are difficult to regulate. Self-injury is a way for the individual to cope with these feelings and should ALWAYS be viewed as a cry for help.
 - **Trauma informed perspective** would say, even if the self-injury is for attention, we should ask ourselves “what NEED is not being met?” What is making an individual go to SUCH an extreme that they feel this is the only way to get support from a trusted adult?

What is Self-Injurious Behavior?

- Self-injury refers to the intentional self-infliction of wounds, without the intent to die (Walsh, 2006).
 - Self-injury can include behaviors such as cutting, burning, hitting, picking, hair pulling, head banging, punching self/object, etc.
- Oftentimes individuals who self-harm will frequently engage in the behavior repeatedly and in a secretive manner.

Why does this happen?

Teens self-injure for many different reasons: Most are struggling with powerful emotions. Self-injury might seem like the only way to express or interrupt feelings that seem too intense to endure.

Disconnection

Numb

Physical Pain

Control

Distraction

Feeling Addicted

Peer Pressure

Other Mental Health Conditions

Any of these factors may help to explain why a particular teen will self-injure. However, each teen has unique feelings and experiences that play a role. Some who self harm might not be able to explain why they do it.

Warning Signs

- A sense of shame and secrecy often goes along with self-injury. Most teens who self-harm hide the marks and if they're noticed, make up excuses about them.
 - Unexplained wounds, cuts, scars, burns, and/or bruises.
 - “The cat scratched me”, “I burned myself on the oven.”
 - Youth refusing to show their arms or wrists.
 - Covering of the arms or wrists with bracelets and long sleeves.
- General signs of depression, including sadness, isolation and irritability.

Note: Some teens don't try to hide cuts and might even call attention to them. This is cry for HELP!

What can Staff do to help?

- Ask questions - avoid becoming angry or being judgmental.
 - *Great opportunity to use your trauma informed perspective.*
- Seek additional support from mental health contacts or school administration.
- Harm Reduction: this behavior has become the student's coping mechanism so we must understand what a powerful role it plays in the student's life and how to help them replace this with a new one.
 - *We cannot take a coping mechanism away without replacing it with a healthy one.*
- Help your student identify their triggers and or pain associated with the urge to harm themselves.
 - *Student must be aware of situations that are likely to trigger their urge to self-injure.*
- Help them make a plan for what they will do instead of self harming when they are faced with their triggers.

A Few Alternative Behaviors

See your list for more

- **Angry, frustrated, restless**
 - Throw ice cubes at the bathtub wall, at a tree, etc.
 - Drawing a picture depicting a self-injury of a body area
 - Tear up paper (old phonebooks, newspapers, etc.)
 - Remember it is ok to be mad
 - Give myself permission to.... (Keep it safe)
 - Write a letter, NOT mailed, to the person or problem upsetting me
 - Learn my HALT signals (hungry, angry, lonely, tired)
- **Sad, depressed, unhappy, melancholy**
 - Take a bath or a shower
 - Listen to music/relaxation tapes
 - Create and use mental safe places (beach, cabin in the woods, peaceful mountain)
 - Listen or watch favorite comedian
 - Journal
 - Draw/Color in coloring books
 - Ground myself by putting feet firmly on the floor
 - Do something FUN!!! What makes me smile?
- **Feeling, wanting to feel, wanting sensation**
 - Wear a rubber band around wrist and snap it against my skin
 - Rub an ice cube on skin instead of cutting it
 - Hold onto ice cubes until they melt
 - Pay attention to the rhythmic motions of my body (walking, stretching, etc.)
 - Gently stroking a body area with a cosmetics brush
 - Place Icy/Hot gel on hands, then wash off with cold water
- **Wanting focus**
 - Acknowledge the emotion I am feeling, sit with it, ask what I can do to help myself
 - Lose the "should-could-have to" words. Try... "What if"
 - Carry tokens to remind myself of peaceful, comforting things/people
 - Repetitive reality checking (It's April 2017, and I'm going to be ok)

Self-Injurious Behaviors: Questions to Ask

- Have you ever used self-harm as a coping skill?
 - Additional ways to ask:
 - Have you ever hurt yourself on purpose because you were mad or upset?
 - Have you ever used an un-safe coping skill?
- If yes,
 - How did you harm yourself and where on your body (if applicable) did it occur?
 - What did you use?
 - When was the last time you self-injured?
 - How long/often have you been in self-injuring?
 - Are any adults aware?

Self-Injury: Low Risk vs. High Risk Assessment

- **Language being used by student:** “I want to have control”, “I wanted to be numb”, “I wanted to feel”, “takes focus away from everything else”, etc.
- **Low Risk Assessment** – Student categorized as low risk if:
 - Student has no history self injury
 - Has thoughts about self injuring but has not identified a specific plan to harm self
 - Does not have the means and intent to harm self
 - Student has tried self-injury and has not found it to be helpful
- **High Risk Assessment** – Student categorized as high risk if:
 - They have a history of self-injury
 - Extreme forms of self-injury or scarring
 - Indifferent about the intent (coping skill versus ending their life)
 - They have a history of related hospitalizations/ suicidal ideation/ attempts

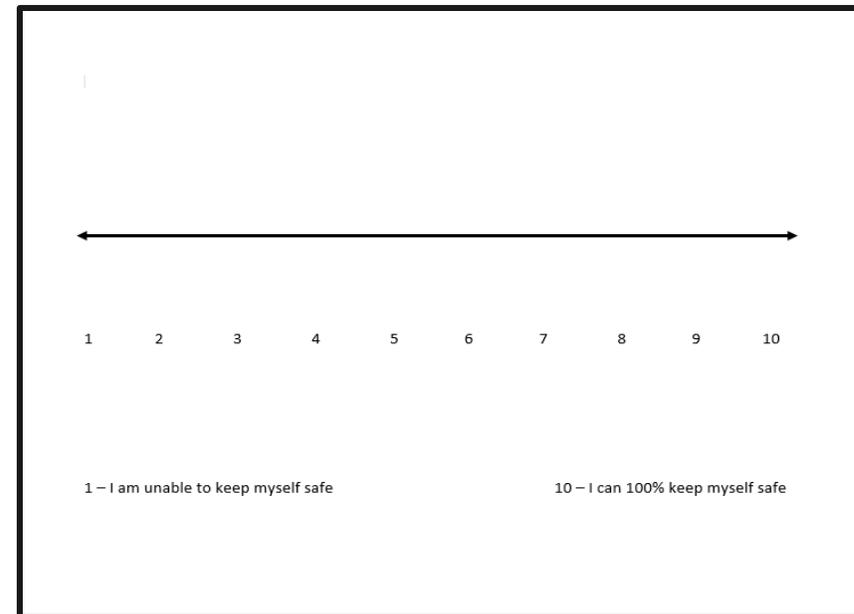
Self-Injury: Intervention

- Safety planning
 - Collaborate with student by making a plan for what they will do instead of self-harming when faced with their triggers.
 - Help your student identify their triggers and/or pain associated with the urge to harm themselves.
 - *Student must be aware of situations that are likely to trigger their urge to self-injure.*
- Harm Reduction: Strategies and beliefs aimed at reducing and/or preventing negative consequences to unsafe behaviors or coping skills
 - This behavior plays a powerful role in the student's life, demonstrating just how important it is to help them find those replacements.
 - *We cannot take a coping mechanism away without replacing it with a healthy and safe one.*

Note: If you are unclear about the intent behind the self-injury it maybe necessary to assess for suicidal ideation.

Scaling Questions: Rating Risk of Youth

- **1 – 10 Safety Scale**
 - 10 = I can keep myself 100% safe
 - 1 = I am unable to keep myself safe
 - *Can also be utilized to scale student's mood (i.e. 10 = High mood, 1 = Low mood).*
- Allow student to rate themselves on scale and describe what that number represents.
 - Note: Student's can have their own interpretations of this scale, making it important to ask follow-up questions
 - Ex. "I am a 5 today but my scale would never go higher than a 7."



Self-Injurious Behaviors Mood Based Alternatives Worksheet

ALTERNATIVES TO SELF-INJURIOUS BEHAVIORS

Disclaimer: Listed below is a list of things to do instead of cutting, burning, bruising, or other forms of self-inflicted violence. Please remember, that not everything on this list will work for everyone, feel free to pick and choose. The more options we have, the better our choices of finding healthy alternatives are. Some of these choices are complicated, and you might want to utilize the help of your therapist or trusted friend/adult in undertaking them. Recovery is not a process that can be walked through alone. Please don't be afraid to reach out for help. You can call the San Diego Access & Crisis Line 24 hours a day (888) 724-7240.

Angry, frustrated, restless

- Throw ice cubes at the bathtub wall, at a tree, etc.
- Drawing a picture depicting a self-injury of a body area
- Tear up paper (old phonebooks, newspapers, etc.)
- Remember it is ok to be mad
- Give myself permission to... (Keep it safe)
- Write a letter, NOT mailed, to the person or problem upsetting me
- Learn my HALT signals (hungry, angry, lonely, tired)
- Plan regular activities for the most difficult time of day
- Clean the house
- Pull weeds in a garden/ plant flowers
- Play music loud
- Plant flowers
- Take 3 deep breaths (breathe slowly, in through my nose and out through my mouth)

Sad, depressed, unhappy, melancholy

- Take a bath or a shower
- Listen to music/relaxation tapes
- Create and use mental safe places (beach, cabin in the woods, peaceful mountain)
- Listen or watch favorite comedian
- Journal
- Draw/Color in coloring books
- Ground myself by putting feet firmly on the floor
- Do something FUN!!! What makes me smile?
- Make myself as comfortable as possible
- Hold a stuffed animal
- Write a poem
- Ask myself - what do I need?
- Take time to stretch
- Make affirmation tapes that are good, kind, gentle (I can do this by writing down the negative thoughts and then physically re-writing them into positive messages)

Feeling, wanting to feel, wanting sensation

- Wear a rubber band around wrist and snap it against my skin
- Rub an ice cube on skin instead of cutting it
- Hold onto ice cubes until they melt
- Pay attention to the rhythmic motions of my body (walking, stretching, etc.)
- Gently stroking a body area with a cosmetics brush
- Place Icy/Hot gel on hands then wash off with cold water
- Move to music
- Touch Something familiar/safe
- Make something (craft, paint, draw, etc.)
- Meditate - being aware of my body and breathing (breathe slowly, in through my nose and out through my mouth)

ALTERNATIVES TO SELF-INJURIOUS BEHAVIORS

Wanting focus

- Acknowledge the emotion I am feeling, sit with it, ask what I can do to help myself
- Lose the "should-could-have to" words. Try... "What if?"
- Carry tokens to remind myself of peaceful comforting things/people
- Repetitive reality checking (It's April 2014, and I'm going to be ok)
- "I'm aware" Repeat 5 things I can see, smell, touch, taste in my present surroundings to help ground myself in the present
- Play a musical instrument

Wanting to pick or leave a mark

- Use washable red markers/pen to mark my skin
- Apply a temporary henna tattoo and scratch it off
- Apply Elmer's glue to plastic surface, allow to dry and peel off

Feeling alone

- ASK FOR HELP!
- MY3 App
- Get to know others
- Make a phone list of people I can call for support. Allow myself to use it
- Check in with myself and others frequently (try not to isolate)
- Connect with others around me. Call a therapist or friend.
- Help someone around me
- Keep in touch with others who are fighting the same fight
- Accept a gift from a friend
- Get out on my own, get away from the stress

Delay tactics

- Count myself down (10...9...8...7...)
- Leave the room
- Leave the situation
- Take a break from mental processing (word search)
- Offer options
- Read old messages (Those I say and those I hear from others)
- Accept where I am at in the process. Beating myself up only makes it worse.
- Notice black and white thinking "always, never" and replace with positive thoughts
- Notice "choices" versus "dilemmas"
- Negotiate with myself
- Recognize and acknowledge the choices I have NOW
- Pay attention to the changes needed to make me feel safe
- Take a different perspective (different vantage point)
- Identify what is causing me pain
- Choose a new way of thinking, try to resist following old thinking patterns

Strengths and Coping Skills Worksheet

WHAT ARE SOME STRENGTHS AND THINGS GOING WELL IN YOUR LIFE?

STRONG SUPPORT SYSTEM

FLEXIBILITY

COMMUNICATES WELL

ADVENTUROUS

AMBITIOUS

SENSE OF HUMOR

RESPONSIBLE

CALM

DRUG FREE

POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS, SIBLINGS, AND FRIENDS

OPEN TO CHANGE

INTELLIGENT

ARTISTIC

ATHLETIC

INSIGHT / CRITICAL THINKING

HARD WORKING

KIND

AFFECTIONATE

SELF-AWARENESS (LISTENING TO YOUR MIND AND BODY AND RESPONDING TO ITS NEEDS)

EASY-GOING PERSONALITY

TURN OVER THE PAPER AND PUT YOUR STRENGTHS INTO ACTION

SAFE COPING SKILLS
THERE IS SPACE TO ADD YOUR OWN

Adapted from "Seeking Safety: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for PTSD and Substance Abuse" by Lisa M. Najavits

SET BOUNDARIES AND SAY NO TO PROTECT YOURSELF

REWARD YOURSELF. FIND A HEALTHY WAY TO CELEBRATE ANYTHING YOU DO RIGHT! (HIGH FIVES ARE FREE)

ASK FOR HELP LIST TWO TRUSTED ADULTS YOU CAN TALK TO:

- _____
- _____

LIST OPTIONS. IN ANY SITUATION YOU HAVE CHOICES. IF ONE WAY DOESN'T WORK TRY ANOTHER.

USE YOUR RESOURCES: SAN DIEGO ACCESS AND CRISIS LINE: 1-888-724-7240

LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW WHEN YOU FACE A PROBLEM

DON'T GIVE UP

SING

CALL A FRIEND

REPEAT A HELPFUL QUOTE OR SAYING

LISTEN TO MUSIC

DRAW

EXERCISE SUCH AS GOING FOR A WALK, SURFING, PLAYING SPORTS, OR PUTTING ON SOME MUSIC AND DANCING!

PRAYSE YOURSELF

RELAX: TAKE A BATH, READ A BOOK, NAP...

TAKE DEEP BREATHS

WATCH A FUNNY MOVIE AND LAUGH!

WRITE A GRATITUDE LIST!

HHSA
LIVE WELL SAN DIEGO
SAN DIEGO YOUTH SERVICES
Building futures for at-risk youth

Adapted From: Najavits, L.M. Seeking Safety: A Treatment Manual for PTSD and Substance Abuse. (2002).