

Helping teens that self-harm
By Christian T. Hill, MA
ALPINE CONNECTION
COUNSELING

Self-harm
Depression and Anxiety
Substance Abuse

www.alpineconnectioncounseling.com
719.233.1111 (8336)

Now offering
TEEN SUPPORT GROUPS

WELCOME

BEHIND THE SCENES OF SELF-HARM
By Christian T. Hill, MA

BIG IDEA?

What are the 2 biggest factors in recovery from self-harm?

1. Taking the time to see the world from their point of view.
2. Them be ready to change.

BIG IDEA?

Once they feel heard and understood, they give us permission to understand the "why".

Which gives us the direction we need to discover the "how" they will recover.

OBJECTIVE

To provide you with the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to **keep students safe!**



What the morning will look like

- Intensive self-harm training
- Group discussion
- Personal reflection
- Breaks
- Teen Discussion Panel



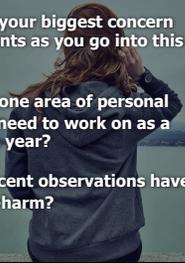
3 Part Series

- Part 1: What is self-harm?
- Part 2: Why self-harm?
- Part 3: How to help.



Group Discussion Starter

- Question 1: What is your biggest concern regarding your students as you go into this year?
- Question 2: What is one area of personal growth you feel you need to work on as a school counselor this year?
- Question 3: What recent observations have you made about self-harm?



What is Self-Harm?

Clinical definition:

Self-harm is when someone intentionally hurts themselves as a means to cope with psychological, emotional, or relational pain

Practical definition: Self-harm is an outward expression of an inward emotion

Risk factors

- Being bullied at school
- Having close friends who harm themselves
- Low self-esteem usually marked by self-loathing
- Sexual identity confusion
- Excessively controlling or rigid family dynamics

Risk factors

- Relational struggles in connecting with peer groups
- Experiencing significant loss
- Experiencing significant trauma
- Abuse or neglect
- Unrealistic expectations of themselves
- Significant need for attention

Statistics

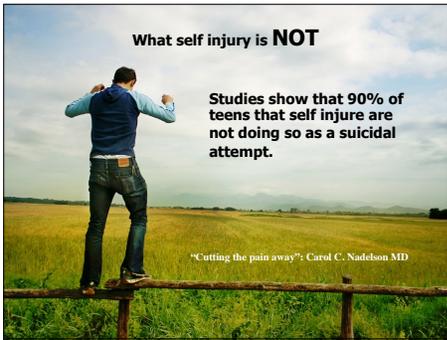
*NAADC and helpline.com

- Each year 1 and 5 females and 1 and 7 males engage in self-harm
- 1 in 4 of those who self-harm have experienced physical or sexual abuse
- Approximately 2 million cases of self-harm are reported annually in the U.S. alone
- About 50% of those who self-harm begin in early teenage years and continue into their late 20's if no treatment plan is in place

What self injury is NOT

Studies show that **90% of teens that self injure are not doing so as a suicidal attempt.**

"Cutting the pain away": Carol C. Nadelson MD



Risk Assessment

Scaling questions

1. On a scale from 1-10 how suicidal do you feel?
2. On a scale from 1-10 what is the likelihood you would follow through with these feelings?
3. Do you have a specific plan?
4. Do you feel like you are safe between now and the next time we meet?



Resiliency Indicators

1. Supportive family?
2. Has a hobby?
3. Connected socially?
4. Talks about their future?
5. Doing ok academically?
6. Plays sports or an instrument?
7. Journals, creates art, uses creativity?
8. Bright vs. Dark?
9. Is self-aware (mindfulness, triggers, etc)
10. Continues to show up for counseling?



How do they see the world differently?

What some see as bizarre...we see as beautiful

What some see as painful...we see as pleasurable

What some see as crazy...we see as coping

What some see as suicidal...we see as survival

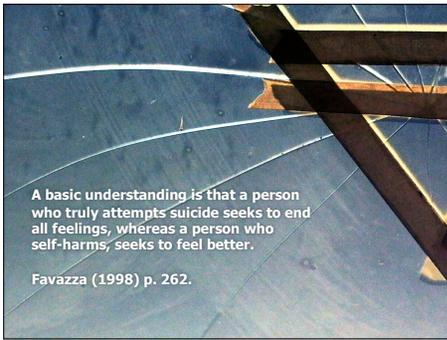
What some see as self destructive...we see as self expressive

What some see as scary...we see as story

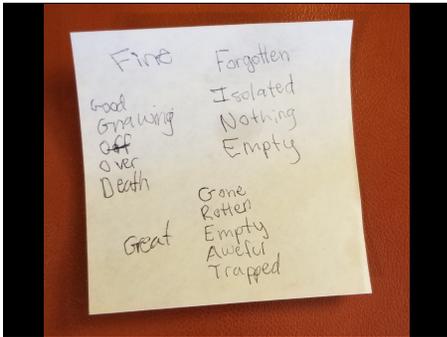
What some see as pity...we see as power

What some see as deviant...we see as deserving











Signs of self-harm

- Wearing long sleeves, pants, or hoodies in warm weather
- Finding misc. tools and instruments like razors, broken glass, paper clips in unusual places
- Bracelets, arm bands, or arm socks used to cover scars



Signs of self-harm

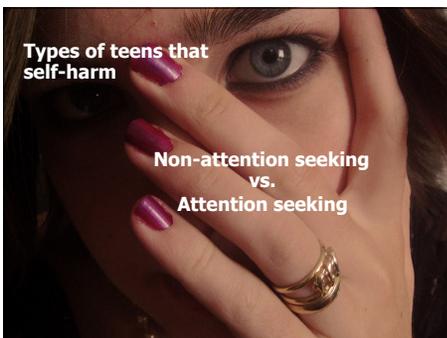
- Playing with sleeves or pulling down them
- Rubbing or scratching arms or legs
- Observing scars on arms or legs usually only about an inch long clustered together and somewhat superficial
- Easily gets defensive when confronted on scars....Guess who usually gets blamed?





Types of teens that self-harm

Non-attention seeking vs. Attention seeking



Non-Attention Seeking

- Please don't notice me
- Withdrawn and usually quiet
- Secretive or mysterious
- Wants to be left alone
- Methodical and premeditated in their cutting
- Scars well hidden
- Usually high frequency and quantity



Attention Seeking

- "Please notice me"
- More inclined to creating drama which involves others
- Often will use cutting as manipulation to get their way
- Much more verbal, social, and visible to others
- Still dangerous if they don't get what they are seeking.
- "Can't anyone see how much I am hurting????"



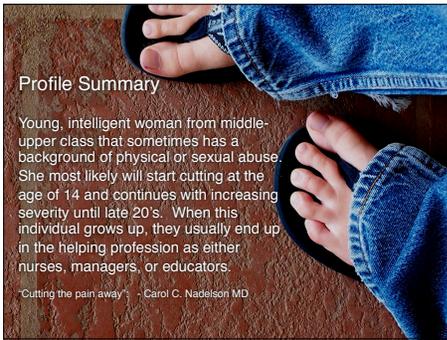
New medication specific to self-harm

www.dont-u-wish.com



How about some good news??

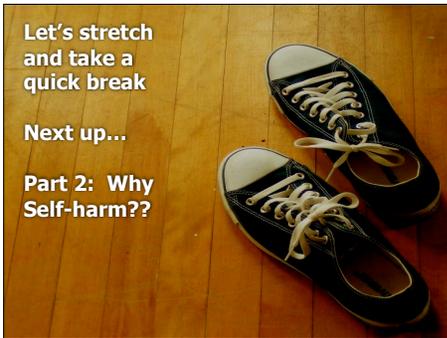




Profile Summary

Young, intelligent woman from middle-upper class that sometimes has a background of physical or sexual abuse. She most likely will start cutting at the age of 14 and continues with increasing severity until late 20's. When this individual grows up, they usually end up in the helping profession as either nurses, managers, or educators.

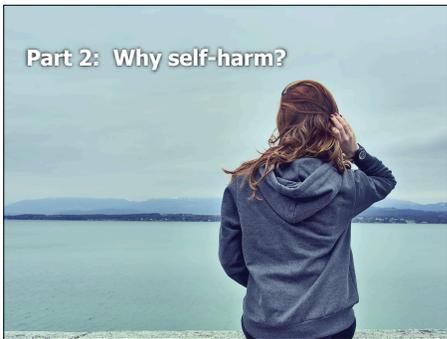
"Cutting the pain away" - Carol C. Nadelson MD



Let's stretch and take a quick break

Next up...

Part 2: Why Self-harm??



Part 2: Why self-harm?



Why self harm?

Self expression
Control
Attention
Relief
Self punishment

Common Themes



Why self-harm?

Self expression

QUOTES FROM TEENS:

"I don't know why I cut, but my scars represent how I feel on the inside."

"MY scars are a symbol that I can't measure up"

"I don't know what I feel"



Self expression

ALEXITHYMIA

A = "without"
Lexi = "language"
Thymia = "condition"

Alexithymia the inability to identify or communicate one's own condition or pain



Try to remember what it was like being a teenager and the intensity of emotion and pressures to fit it

Control

Quotes from teens:

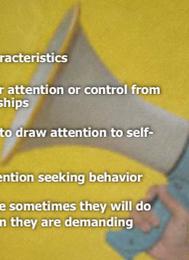
- "When everything in my life feels out of control, cutting is the one thing I can control"
- "Cutting gives me a sense of power"
- "Cutting is the most reliable friend I have"
- "Cutting is the one thing I have control over that parent's don't"



Why self-harm?

Attention

- *Borderline personality disorder characteristics
- *Using self-harm as manipulation for attention or control from parents, friends, and dating relationships
- *Using social media and technology to draw attention to self-harm or scars
- *Usually in denial or unaware of attention seeking behavior
- *REMINDER: Still dangerous because sometimes they will do whatever it takes to get the attention they are demanding



Why self-harm?

Relief

Relief from...

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Painful emotions
- Depersonalization
- Psychosis

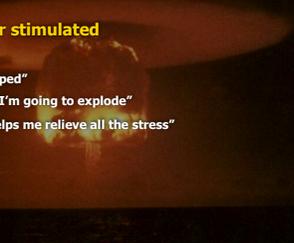
*Usually appropriate for med evaluation or mood disorder dx



Relief

Anxiety - Over stimulated

- "I feel trapped"
- "I feel like I'm going to explode"
- "Cutting helps me relieve all the stress"

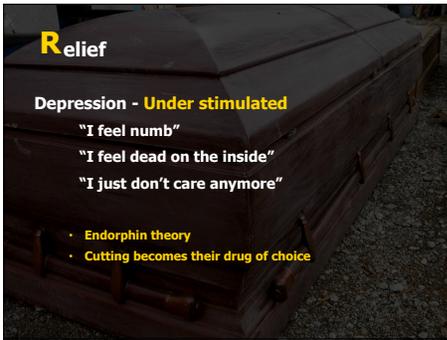


Relief

Depression - Under stimulated

"I feel numb"
"I feel dead on the inside"
"I just don't care anymore"

- Endorphin theory
- Cutting becomes their drug of choice

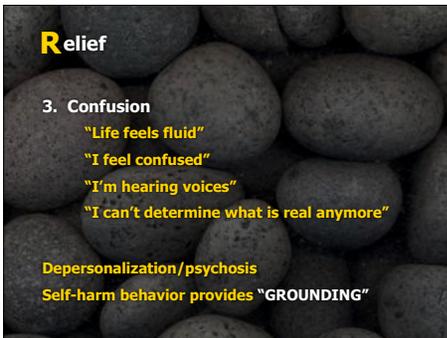


Relief

3. Confusion

"Life feels fluid"
"I feel confused"
"I'm hearing voices"
"I can't determine what is real anymore"

Depersonalization/psychosis
Self-harm behavior provides "GROUNDING"



Why self-harm?

Self punishment

"I feel guilty"
"I feel like a failure"
"I don't deserve to be loved"
"I'm unworthy"



Why are these important?

Self expression

Control

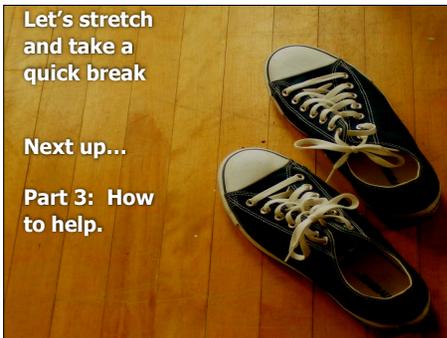
Attention

Relief

Self punishment













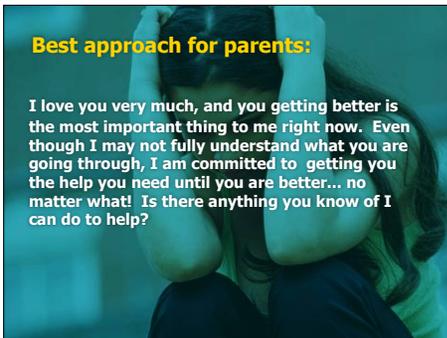
What NOT to say...

- "Why can't you just stop"
- "I know exactly how you feel"
- "You think your life is bad..."
- "I think you are just doing this for attention"
- "Maybe you need medication"
- "Can't you see what you're doing to me?"
- "This is just a phase you'll get over it"
- "Can I see your scars?"



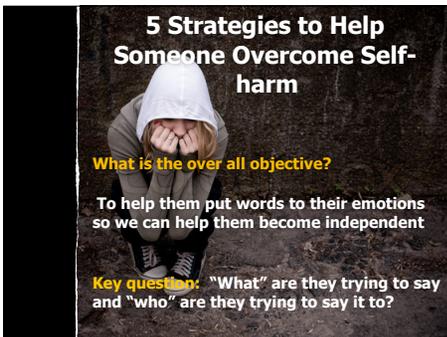
What "to" do

- Build a trusting, non-threatening relationship with student as time allows
- Communicate school policies
- Discuss communication with parents
- Educate, equip, empower parents to be helpful! (see brochure)
- Know who, how, and when to refer parents to ongoing professional therapy for self-harm.



Best approach for parents:

I love you very much, and you getting better is the most important thing to me right now. Even though I may not fully understand what you are going through, I am committed to getting you the help you need until you are better... no matter what! Is there anything you know of I can do to help?



5 Strategies to Help Someone Overcome Self-harm

What is the over all objective?

To help them put words to their emotions so we can help them become independent

Key question: "What" are they trying to say and "who" are they trying to say it to?

How to help cutters put words to emotions



Music Images Writing a goodbye letter

"I wish...I feel" Art

Poetry Journal entries Good questions

Asking really good questions

- How does cutting help you?
- If your scars could communicate, what would they say?
- Can you name a time when you felt like cutting but didn't?
- What was different and how can you do more of that?
- If your parents could make one small change to help you overcome cutting, what would it be?
- If you could make one small change to overcome cutting what would it be?
- If you continue to cut will life improve, stay the same, or get worse?

What lie has cutting caused you to believe about yourself?

Some people use cutting as a way to control...do you control cutting or is cutting controlling you and how do you know?

If you could give yourself one piece of advice regarding cutting what would it be?

What one person in your life have you struggled the most to forgive?

If you could write a letter to your cutting as if it were a person, what would you say? ex. "Dear Cutting"

5 Strategies to Help Someone Overcome Self-harm

1. Hear the story
2. Identify the why
3. Expose any lies (CBT)
4. Discover alternatives to self-harm
5. Help them reengage back into their lives





5 Strategies to Help Someone Overcome Self-harm

1. Hear the story

The story is not just for you, but for the client as well.

Telling their story allows them to contextualize their choices and behaviors as well as releasing some of the negative energy from the past.



5 Strategies to Help Someone Overcome Self-harm

2. Identify the "why"

*What are they trying to say and who are they trying to say it to?



5 Strategies to Help Someone Overcome Self-harm

3. Expose any lies (CBT)

More often than not, the lies are from 5 sources:

1. Bullies from the past
2. Parents
3. Self-hatred/loathing
4. Past trauma
5. Religion



7 most common lies with self-harm

I'm unworthy

I'm just a burden to everyone

I'll never measure up

I'm a failure

I'm unlovable

I'm better off alone

What do these lies look like??



The Core Issue More often than not?

Combating THE LIES

Key questions

How would you know if what you believe about yourself was **NOT TRUE?**

Does the pressure you put on yourself about the lies apply to the people closest to you as well?

If you discovered your beliefs are based on something not true, would you be willing to change?

New coping strategies

The Goal:

To create a coping strategy based off past success, hobbies or interests, and social connectedness.

Key Questions:

Can you think of a time you wanted to self-harm but didn't?

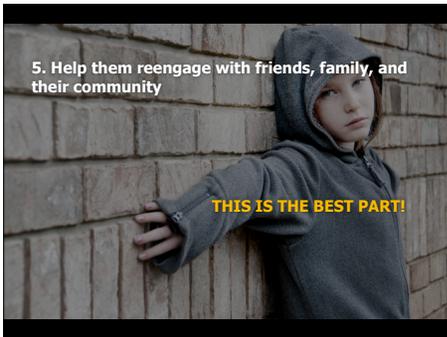
What did you do instead and can you try focusing on that more this next week?



4. Alternatives to self-harm

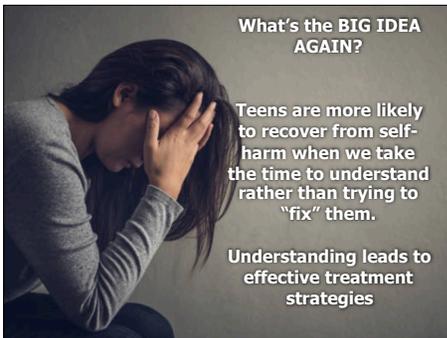
Help them **DISCOVER** coping skills that ...

- 1) Distract
- 2) Relax
- 3) Entertain
- 4) Express
- 5) Connect socially
- 6) Physical activity
- 7) Change environment



5. Help them reengage with friends, family, and their community

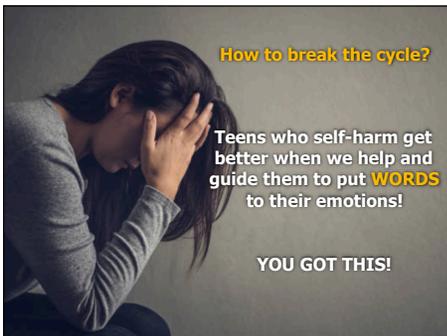
THIS IS THE BEST PART!



What's the **BIG IDEA** AGAIN?

Teens are more likely to recover from self-harm when we take the time to understand rather than trying to "fix" them.

Understanding leads to effective treatment strategies



How to break the cycle?

Teens who self-harm get better when we help and guide them to put **WORDS** to their emotions!

YOU GOT THIS!

THE GOOD NEWS?



Teens that self-harm get better all the time!

Dear Cutting,
"You helped me tremendously over the past two years. In the beginning, the very first time, I used you for attention. As much as I don't like to admit it, that's what I did. It was negative attention and I found that I was uncomfortable by that attention. I felt like I deserved your darkness. When I was angry I used you to calm me down and felt that it was the only real way to express the rage. I cut when I was sad and broken, which was behind my anger. You became my addiction after two or three months. I couldn't change my family nor could I change the past. I never could and never will. But I could cut. I cut a lot. I had my own ritual and every time I followed my ritual I felt stronger at first, then ashamed. When I tried to cry, no tears came. So I cried bloody tears. I won't forget the sad, disgusted, angry looks of hospital staff, parents, and therapists. I haven't used you in a long time, but I never thought of writing you a letter. Now I am saying goodbye, Cutting. Goodbye to the security, the false control, the shame...and thank you for keeping me alive at my most difficult times."



Your questions matter...



Teen panel discussion

THANK YOU

YOU BELONG WITH THE ONES
THAT HAVE SEEN YOUR
SCARS
AND CHOSEN TO
STAY.
F.E. MARIE
