Demystifying Self Harm

Welcome to today's Health eMinds presentation!

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Children's Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service pays respect to the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we have the privilege to work on.

We acknowledge and pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and emerging.

Self Injury

- A leading public health issue facing Australian adolescents
- Over the last decade normalisation of self harm behaviours through the media, music, videos, and magazines has occurred
- Increasing number of young women engaging in self-harm documented internationally

Self-Injury (non-suicidal?)

- Deliberate destruction or alteration of body tissue *without suicidal intent* (Centre for Suicide Prevention Studies, 2010)
- The deliberate direct physical harm to one's own body *in the absence of suicidal intent.* (Favassa, 2009)
- Most self-injurers will utilise multiple methods (Whitlock, 2011)

Types of Self injury:

- Cutting
- Self stabbing
- Scratching
- Burning
- Picking Scabs or wounds
- Interfering with wound healing
- Punching self or objects
- Head banging
- Infecting oneself
- Bruising or breaking bones
- Deliberate risk taking behaviour, without caring about consequences

Myths of Self Harm

Myth 1 - Self harm is attention getting behaviour

Myth 2 – Self harm means the individual is suicidal

Myth 3 – Self harm means the individual is not suicidal

Myth 4 - People who self harm are mentally unwell

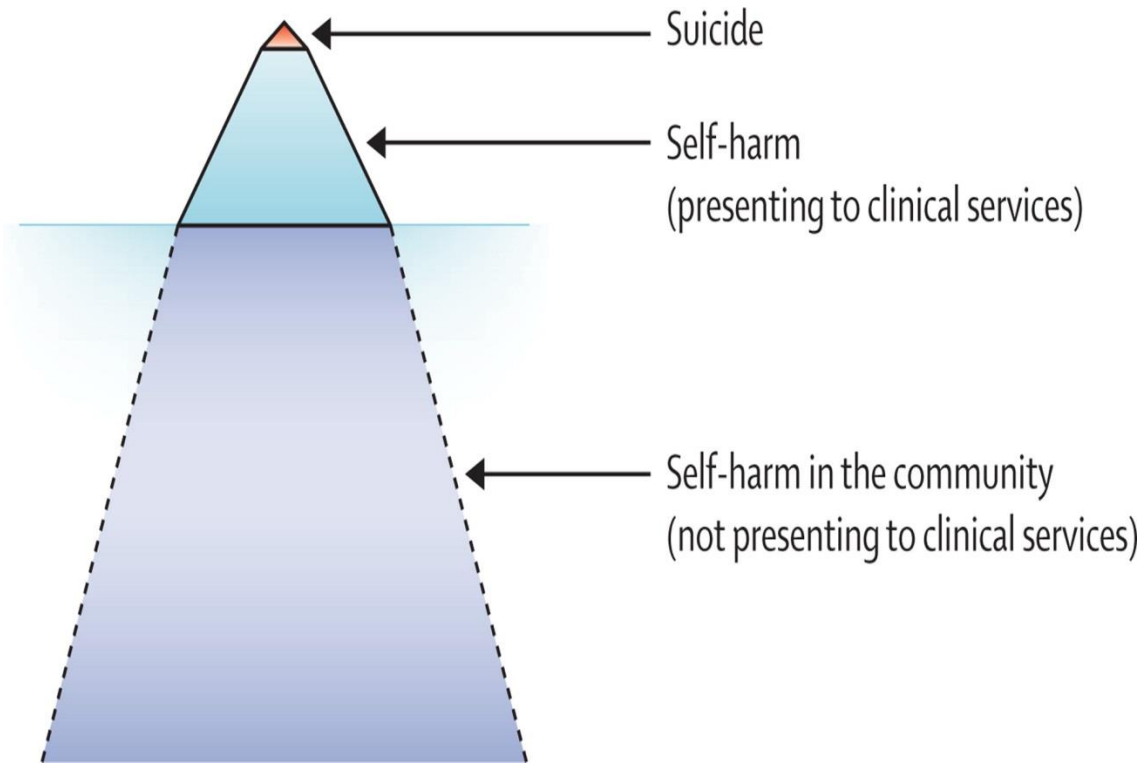
Why do young people engage in self-harm

- Most expressed notion about the role of self harm is that it helps the individual escape their situation and associated distress and manage or regulate emotions.

- Normal developmental challenges during adolescence can contribute to self-harm including peer difficulties, need to individuate etc.

Important to ascertain meaning of self harm to individual consumer

Suicide and self-harm



Self harm and Suicide risk

- Self-harm is associated with increased risk of suicide and is potentially the strongest predictor of future suicide attempts
- A young person may self-harm without suicidal intent or suicide without ever engaging in self-harming behaviours
- Unintentional death may occur as a result of self-harm.
- Young people often shift between self harming methods that place them at increased risk for suicide
  - Risk taking behaviours
  - Drugs and alcohol use
- Other behaviours may also be understood as being self- punitive
  - undereating or overeating as a form of punishment,
  - choosing unsafe relationships and situations, and so on.

Risk factors

- Family factors
  - poor parent-child relationships, hostility
  - Parental mental health, drug and alcohol misuse
  - childhood abuse and neglect
- Stressful life events
  - conflict, loss, rejection, breakup of relationships, disciplinary issues and legal issues
- Mental health issues and co-morbidities
- Social stressors in the school context
  - eg bullying, academic pressure
- Social contagion issues
  - hearing about self-harm from others, both friends and non-friends as well as through media and the internet

Questions that explore the function of self-harm

Getting an understanding of the function of their self-harm behaviour will assist in helping the young person to find other ways to cope.

- *Do you ever have thoughts of harming yourself?*
- *Have you ever deliberately done something to hurt yourself?*
- *Have you ever harmed yourself as a way of coping?*
- *When do you self-harm?*
- *How do you feel before and after you self-harm?*
- *Do you feel better after you self-harm? How long does this feeling last?*

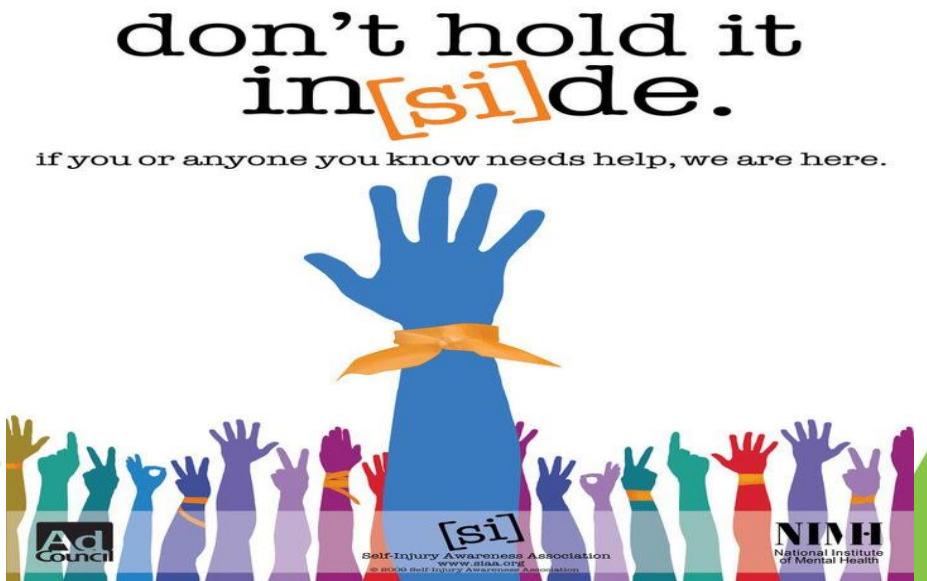
* It is important to be sensitive when asking these questions.

** Young people may feel a sense of shame related to their self harming behaviours.

*** Validate that self-harm is a common way for young people to cope in the short-term, but that it can be harmful in the long-term.

Aims of interventions

- Reduce repetition of deliberate self-harm
- Improve social functioning and quality of life
- Reduce desire to self-harm
- Prevent suicide



Interventions

- Safety planning
- Utilize treatment approaches that emphasize emotional awareness, emotional acceptance, and emotional regulation, as well as use of alternate coping skills.
- Actively involve family members in treatment and consider approaches that emphasize attachment.
- Utilize mindfulness and stress-reduction techniques.
- Harm minimization
- Teach social skills and interpersonal effectiveness.

Online considerations

- For young people today, online activity is commonplace for socialising, information seeking and entertainment.
- Online forums can be an important medium to share life and self-harm experiences anonymously for young people who engage in self-harm.
- For clinicians working with young people it is increasingly important to assess online as well as real world activity.
- If young people are already accessing online forums related to self-harm, the health information available on many of those sites is poor
- provision of ‘reliable online resources’ promoting recovery is important
- Suitable resources can be found
    - https://au.reachout.com/
    - https://headspace.org.au/
    - https://www.sane.org/get-help

SI URGES

What to do instead.....

Angry, frustrated, restless?

- Slash an empty plastic soda bottle, piece of cardboard, old shirt or sock.
- Flatten aluminum cans for recycling, seeing how fast you can go.
- Hit a punching bag.
- Use a pillow to hit a wall, pillow-fight style.
- Rip up an old newspaper or phone book.
- On a sketch or photo of yourself, mark in red ink where you want to cut.
- Make Play-Doh or Sculpey or other clay models and cut or smash them.
- Throw ice against something hard enough to shatter it.
- Break sticks.
- Crank up some music and dance.
- Go for a walk/ jog/ run.
- Play a physical sport.

Sad, depressed, unhappy?

- Do something slow and soothing, like taking a hot bath.
- Light sweet-smelling incense.
- Listen to soothing music.
- Smooth nice body lotion into the parts of yourself you want to hurt.
- Call a friend and just talk about things that you like.
- Visit a friend.

Craving sensation, feeling unreal?

- Squeeze ice cubes hard.
- Put a finger into a frozen food (like ice cream).
- Rub liniment under your nose.
- Slap a tabletop hard.
- Snap your wrist with a rubber band.
- Take a cold bath.
- Focus on how it feels to breathe. Notice how your body moves.

Wanting to see blood?

- Draw on yourself with a red felt-tip pen.
- Take a small bottle of liquid red food coloring and warm it slightly by dropping it into a cup of hot water for a few minutes. Uncap the bottle and press its tip against the place you want to cut. Draw the bottle in a cutting motion while squeezing it slightly to let the food color trickle out.
- Draw on the areas you want to cut using ice that you've made with red food colouring
- Paint on yourself with red tempera paint or a red lip-liner pen.

Wanting to see scars or pick scabs?

- Get a henna tattoo kit. You put the henna on as a paste and leave it overnight; the next day you can pick it off as you would a scab and it leaves an orange-red mark behind.

selfharm-support.tumblr.com

Question?