



CATHERINE FRASER-ANDREWS

DARWIN CENTRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



HOW TO DEAL WITH ~~SELF-HARM~~



What is self-harm?

- cutting yourself • poisoning yourself • over-eating or under-eating • biting yourself
- ligaturing • suffocation • picking or scratching at your skin • burning your skin • breaking bones • inserting objects into your body • hitting yourself or walls • overdosing
- exercising excessively • hair pulling • getting into fights where you know you will get hurt seeking • hypersexuality • isolating yourself • risk taking behaviours • self-sabotage • drink and drugs • self-sacrifice • rumination • digital self-harm

**DID YOU KNOW THAT AT
LEAST 10% OF
ADOLESCENTS, MOSTLY
FEMALES, HAVE SELF-
HARMED.**

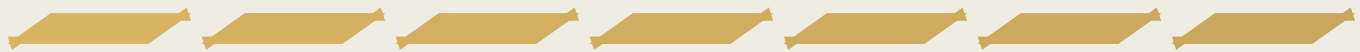
[https://www.acamh.org/research-digests/self-harm-parents-
view/](https://www.acamh.org/research-digests/self-harm-parents-view/)

Stigma and Myths

Suicidality



Attention seeking



Cry for help



Make it worse by talking about it



The typical self-harmer



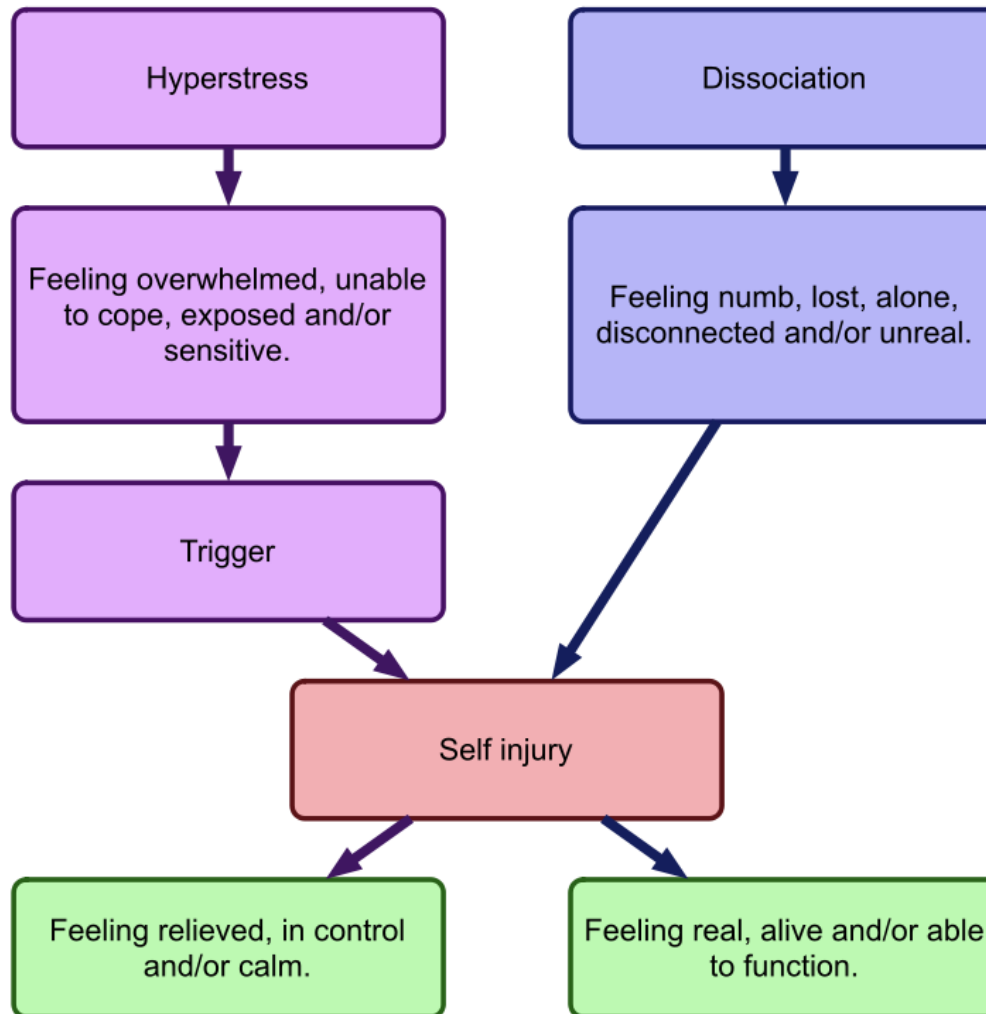
The neuroscience

- Self-harm works – very well in the short term
- It releases dopamine, adrenaline, endorphins
- It is highly addictive
- It elicits a response

Self-harm – a secondary behaviour

- Containment
- Conversion
- Communication
- Coherence
- Continue to live

Precursors to Self Injury



Source: LifeSIGNS <http://www.selfharm.org/what/precursors.html>

- *“It is like all the pain that has been building up for days just floats away in a single moment”*
- *“when I cut, it is the only time that I feel real, alive, like I am here right now”*
- *“It’s like self-harm is the only friend I have who can make me feel better”.*
- *“I don’t want people to know, it’s not about saying “look at me”, it’s about me finding a way of feeling calm without hurting anyone else”*
- *“It’s the only thing I can control in my life, so it makes my anxiety less”.*
- *“If I didn’t cut, I would be dead. Cutting literally keeps me alive”*

<https://beaconhouse.org.uk/self-harm/self-harm-attention-seeking-or-attachment-seeking/>

The text is framed by two thick black L-shaped brackets. One bracket is on the left side, with its top horizontal bar extending to the right and its vertical bar extending downwards. The other bracket is on the right side, with its top horizontal bar extending to the left and its vertical bar extending downwards.

PARENTS WHOSE
CHILDREN SELF-
HARM

How do I know?

- unexplained cuts, burns, bite-marks, bruises or bald patches
- keeping themselves covered; avoiding swimming or changing clothes around others
- bloody tissues in waste bins
- being withdrawn or isolated from friends and family
- low mood, lack of interest in life, depression or outbursts of anger
- blaming themselves for problems or expressing feelings of failure, uselessness, or hopelessness

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-guide-to-support-a-z/parents-guide-to-support-self-harm/>

Parents' Feelings

- Guilt
- Fear
- Uncertainty
- Projective identification
- Secondary trauma
- Own our stuff!

The Dilemma

What we may feel...

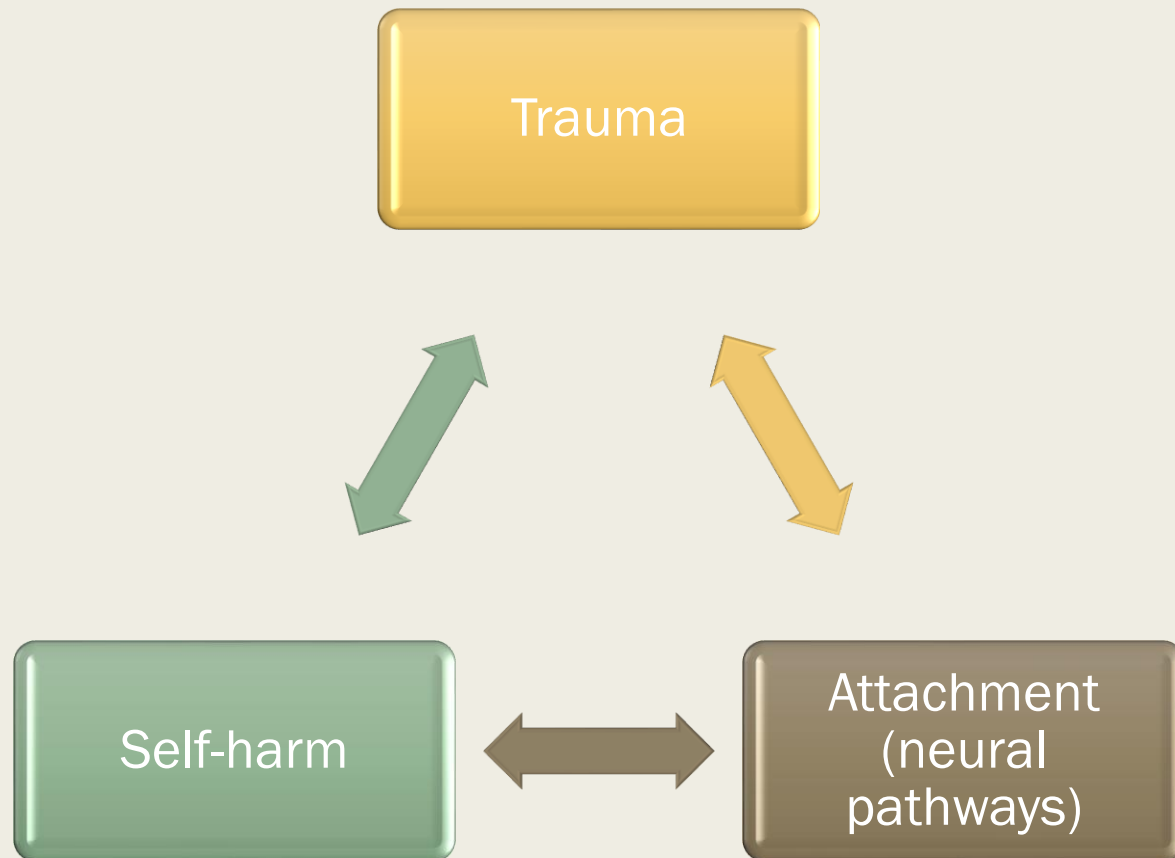
- Blame of child, self or other
- Policing
- Rejection
- Focusing on the injury not the child

What helps...

- Self-harm is a the symptom
- Open communication
- Spend time together
- A sense of normality
- Optimism
- Support

Connection before correction

- Self-harm is attachment based
- It is resolved through attachment



Alternatives

- Armando Favazza 1987

‘A morbid form of self-help’

- Understand why the impulse is happening...
- Identify the triggers...
- Understand the triggers...
- Plan around the triggers where possible...
- Delay the impulse...

<https://www.adolescentselfinjuryfoundation.com/things-to-do-besides-self-harm>

Anger and Frustration

- exercise • hit cushions • shout and dance • shake • bite on bunched up material
- tear something up into hundreds of pieces • go for a run • break twigs

Fear and sadness

- wrap a blanket around you • spend time with an animal • walk in nature • let yourself cry or sleep • listen to soothing music • tell someone how you feel • massage your hands • lie down and breathe slowly.

Need to Control

- write lists
- tidy up
- have a throw-out
- write a letter saying everything you are feeling, then tear it up
- weed a garden
- clench then relax all your muscles

Numb and Disconnected

- flick elastic bands on your wrists
- hold ice cubes
- smell something with strong odour
- have a very cold shower

Shame

- stop spending time with anyone who treats you unkindly
- recognise when you are trying to be perfect and accept that making mistakes is part of being human
- remind yourself that there are reasons for how you behave – it is not because you are ‘bad’

Self-hatred – wanting to punish yourself

- write a letter from the part of you that feels the self-hatred, then write back with as much compassion and acceptance as you can
- find creative ways to express the self-hatred, through writing songs or poetry, drawing, movement or singing
- do physical exercise
- use marker pen to draw on your arms
- hold ice cubes
- flick an elastic band on your wrist

What makes it better?

- Time
- Care
- Self-care
- Wellbeing
- Self-awareness
- Practice
- Support
- Good nutrition
- Exercise
- Friends
- Relaxation
- Education
- Occupation
- **Parents**