

Self Harm Article by Steve O'Driscoll

Hi my name is Steve O'Driscoll and I do sessional work for Launchpad which is a platform for people with mental health problems. Twelve months ago, with the help Alisdair Cameron who is the team-leader at Launchpad, I set up and now facilitate a group for people who self-harm and I thought I would write this piece to try to allow people to have a greater understanding as to why people self-harm, also the different types and how to treat someone if you know they are self-harming. I was a self-harmer for over 20 years and am now in recovery and have a passion to try to support other people with the same problems.

To start with, a lot of people have the idea that anyone who self-harms is seeking attention which is so untrue; people use self-harm as a coping mechanism and as a way of being in control. There are so many different ways in which people self-harm, such as cutting, skin picking, burning, strangulation, taking risks, self poisoning, over dosing, hair pulling, nail biting, friction burns, punching things, drug and alcohol abuse, re-opening healing wounds and inserting foreign objects under the skin to name but a few.

It is now a good idea if you know someone who is self-harming to supply them with a self-harm first-aid kit. You may think this is a strange idea but at least you will have peace of mind that the person is self-harming safely i.e. with sterile equipment. For a person who cuts, an example of a kits contents would be surgical tape, bandages, scissors, saline water, anti-septic, plasters, pain killers and sterile blades. The idea of the first aid kit is to reduce the chance of infection which can lead to more serious problems.

People who self-harm are mostly females the reason for which males may have the macho attitude and not seek help. There is also a rise in the number of school children and students who self-harm which could be due to the pressure of obtaining high grades and also bullying. If you know someone who is self-harming try to be non-judgemental, be supportive and just listen to the person and try to understand why it is they need to self-harm. A lot of people also have a fear of people who self-harm but you will mostly find that a person will only cause harm to themselves and no-body else.

There are also several coping techniques which may help a self-harmer:

- The 15 min rule. If a person feels the urge to harm they can try to distract themselves for 15 mins by, for example, doing some cleaning, taking a bath, go for a walk etc.
- Elastic band. Carry an elastic band in your pocket and when the urge to harm comes put the band around the wrist and ping the elastic band. This is supposed to have the same sensation as cutting.
- Ice Cubes. Keep some ice cubes with red dye in the freezer and when the urge comes hold the ice cubes in the hand and as they melt they create the illusion that it is blood and also the numb sensation has the same effect.
- First Aid Kit. As mentioned before it may also be a good idea to put some items in the kit which remind them of good times in life and the idea is when the person goes to the kit to self-harm they will also see the things that remind them of good times and it may stop them from carrying out the act.

There are so many more that I could mention such as take a cold shower, bite a hot chili, and some people even get a tattoo which gives the same feeling.

There is no cure for self-harm but treatment focuses on the person as a whole as more often than not there is an underlying mental health problem ie. depression, anxiety etc.

For more info on the self injury group you can contact Launchpad on
01912330382 or

firstcut-selfawareness.weebly.com

Many thanks Steve.