



## SELF-HARM

Many survivors hurt themselves in many different ways. This can include cutting, burning and injuring their bodies deliberately (on purpose) and also 'accidentally' hurting themselves.

Some people also include addiction, eating disorders, 'consensual' violent or abusive sex and more 'acceptable' behaviours like workaholism or obsessively exercising (past the point of injury) in the category of self-harming behaviours.

Some women deliberately harm their breasts or genitals; others harm other parts of their body.

### WHY DO PEOPLE WHO HAVE ALREADY BEEN HURT, SELF-HARM?

There are a number of reasons why people self-harm:

- It's like 'punishing' themselves or trying to cut or burn away their perceived 'badness'.
- For some, there is a build-up of anxiety and fear followed by an act of abuse and then relief once the abuse has happened. When the abuse is no longer happening, cutting or burning can feel like a release of anxiety and tension.
- Some people use self-harming as a way of dealing with overwhelming emotions.
- Addictive type behaviours - alcohol, drugs, compulsive spending, gambling, workaholism and exercise addiction - can also be ways of trying to avoid intrusive thoughts or uncomfortable emotions.
- Hurting your own body is a way of feeling something when a lot of the time they feel numb or dissociated from their bodies.
- Some might feel that hurting their bodies [usually by cutting or burning] is a way of having some control over their bodies- control that the abuse took away.
- Some children develop self-harming behaviours, usually 'accidents' in the beginning, as a way of trying to tell that something is wrong in their lives.
- There is often a lot of shame about self-harming and many do not talk about it - even to their counsellors or in groups.
- Self-harming is often misunderstood by others - it is not 'attention seeking' or 'attempted suicide' nor is it a sign of mental illness.

### SOME STRATEGIES THAT MIGHT BE USEFUL IN CHALLENGING SELF-HARM

- Delay - try to put off self-harming for a period of time. Tell yourself you can do it if you still feel like it in ten minutes. Or an hour, or a day - whatever you are ready for.

- ❑ Don't keep whatever you use to self-harm near you. For example, lock the blades or lighter away so you have to make an effort to get them. Sometimes this delay can give you time to rethink and use some of your other strategies.
- ❑ Make and keep near, a list of reasons not to hurt yourself.

### **SOME REASONS NOT TO SELF-HARM**

- ❑ You have been hurt too much already.
- ❑ In the long term, self-harming doesn't take away the pain or make the abuse not have happened.
- ❑ There are better ways of taking back control of your body.
- ❑ It can make you feel worse afterwards.
- ❑ Every time you stop self-harm you are telling yourself you deserve to be treated better.
- ❑ It is becoming harder to hide the scars.
- ❑ This was a strategy you needed in the past, but now you have other ways of expressing your pain and dealing with your feelings.

Thanks to the Silent No More Project for this information

