

Caregiver Training Understanding Self-Harm Behaviour

Participant Material

Alberta Children and Family Services
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Alberta

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Key Takeaways



Self-Care Strategies



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Self-Harm Definition and Risk Factors

Self-harm is when a person hurts themselves or engages in risky behaviours purposefully without wanting to die by suicide.

Risk factors:

- Abuse/neglect
- Bullying
- Past episodes of self-harm
- Losses
- Inability or difficulty coping
- High self-criticism
- Addictive behaviours/substance-use
- Peers/family members who self-harm
- Mental illness
- Struggles with sexual identity and gender



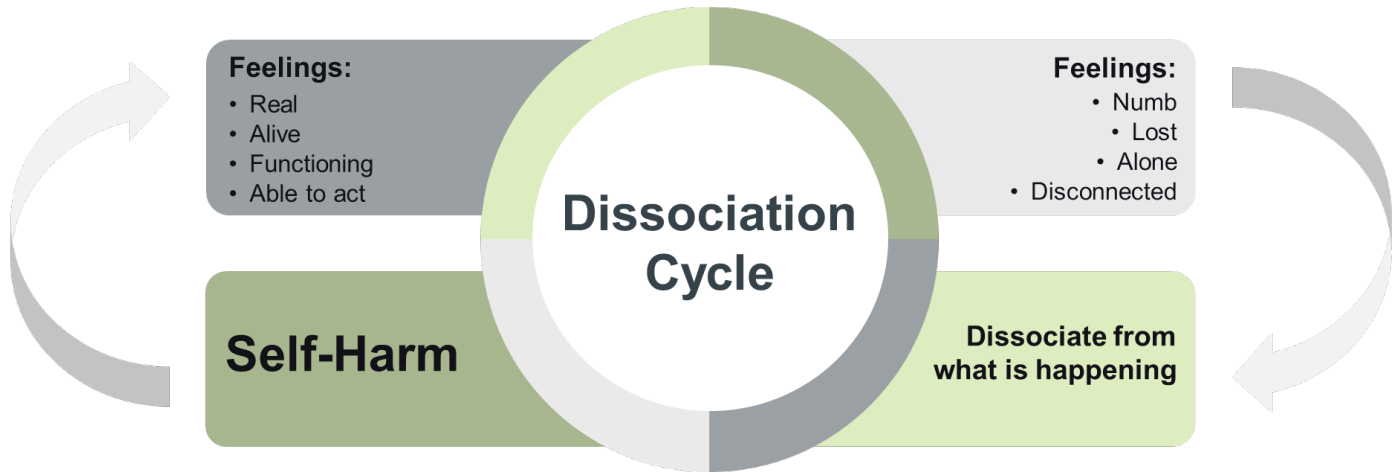
Hyper-Stress Cycle



The hyper-stress cycle is when the child/youth is dealing with overwhelming negative thoughts.

- In this cycle, the child/youth is experiencing a “tornado” of negativity assaulting their mind and they are unable to turn off their thoughts.
- As emotional distress increases, it leads to a trigger.
- The trigger is individual to each child/youth and may be something that appears quite small or irrelevant.
- Those dealing with the child/youth may describe them as irrational and overreacting.
- It is important to understand that there might not be a trigger but often there will be something that sets off the storm of thoughts.

Dissociation Cycle



The dissociation cycle is when the child/youth is detached from life, detached from emotions, from their body.

- Dissociation is associated with youth who have suffered through trauma or abuse. They keep themselves emotionally safe by dissociating themselves from what is happening.
- Psychological/physical pain caused by severe abuse can cause the individual to learn to separate themselves mentally from the actual feelings during bouts of abuse.

Forms of Self-Injury / Self-Harm

Self-Injury

- Cutting
- Scratching
- Biting
- Burning the skin
- Picking at skin or wounds
- Hitting to the point of bruising or breaking bones

Self-Harm

- Taking more of a medicine than prescribed (self-poisoning)
- Eating overly spicy (hot) foods, limiting food or bingeing
- Wearing very tight or painful clothing
- Playing high-risk sports
- Engaging in unsafe sex
- Overuse of negative self-talk or digital self-harm

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Responding in a Trauma-Informed Way

DO

DON'T



Show compassion

Pity or blame them

Respect what the person is telling you, even if you don't understand it

Joke about it

Stay emotionally neutral

Guilt them about how their action affects others

Use active listening skills

Give them ultimatums or make assumptions

Encourage them to use their voice, rather than their body as a mean of self-expression

Remind them how it looks or what people will think



Preventing Self-Harm Using Protective Factors

**Strong,
positive
relationships**

**Skills
development**

**Engagement
in positive
activities**

**Opportunities
for emotional
expression**

**Consistent
structure
and
boundaries**

**Promote
healthy peer
relationships**

**Connection
to
community
and culture**

**Access to
supportive
adults**

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Supporting the Protective Factors

- Be patient and listen without judgement
- Validate their emotions
- Create a home environment where it's safe to talk
- Watch for warning signs
- Stay attuned to the child's or youth's needs
- Collaborate with the child's or youth's support team
- Celebrate their strengths and achievements

How to Support and Advocate for Children/Youth

An illustration of a woman with glasses and a ponytail, wearing a light blue shirt, sitting on a bed and talking to a young girl with a ponytail, wearing a grey shirt and blue jeans. They are in a room with a window and a bookshelf in the background.

Tap on the link below to listen to Amanda as she explains how her and her family supported a youth who was self-harming.

LINK: <https://vimeo.com/1033184955/a7ab17e31a?share=copy>

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Self-Care Strategies



DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK!

You are an important part of the child's life. It's easy to get overwhelmed, but don't let it affect your relationship with them.

When I feel stressed, anxious, or tired I will:

Self-Care Resources

Name	Contact #	Description
AFKA – Caregiver Support Team	https://afkaonline.ca/program/s/caregiver-support-program/	Link to reach out to the AFKA Caregiver Support Team if you have questions or need support.
Alberta Health Services – Mental Health Services	https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/amh/Page14063.aspx	Mental health programs & services available in Alberta
Family Resource Networks – Supporting Alberta families	https://www.alberta.ca/family-resource-networks#jump-links-2	Resources and tips for Alberta families.



Course Resources

Name	Link	Description
Centre for Suicide Prevention – Self-Harm and Suicide	https://www.suicideinfo.ca/local_resource/self-harm-and-suicide/	Article about the link between self-harm and suicide
Cornell Research Program on Self-Injury and Recovery	https://selfinjury.bctr.cornell.edu/documents/15_misconceptions.pdf	Top 15 misconceptions of self-injury
Cornell Research Program on Self-Injury and Recovery	https://www.selfinjury.bctr.cornell.edu/perch/resources/distraction-techniques-pm-2.pdf	Distraction Techniques and Alternative Coping Strategies
MyHealth.Alberta.ca – Non-Suicidal Self-Injury in Children	https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?Hwid=acl8551	Article and resources to support children
MyHealth.Alberta.ca – Self-Harm and Youth	https://myhealth.alberta.ca/alberta/Pages/self-harm-and-youth.aspx	Article and resources to support youth
National Alliance on Mental Illness – How to Respond to Self-Harm	https://www.nami.org/advocate/how-to-respond-to-self-harm/	Article on how to respond to self-harm in a trauma-informed way



Course Resources (Cont.)

Name	Link	Description
National Library of Medicine – The relationship between self-injurious behaviour and suicide in a young adult population	https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17606825/	Abstract and related articles
National Library of Medicine – Examining non-suicidal self-injury among adolescents with mental health needs	https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24712902/	Abstract and related articles
The Skeletons in My Closet	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G17iMOw0ar8	Video by Dr. Stephen Lewis



Additional Resources

Name	Link	Description
American Psychological Association – Who self-injures?	https://www.apa.org/monitor/2015/07-08/who-self-injures	Article
CMHA – Youth and Self-Harm	https://cmha.ca/news/youth-and-self-harm/	Article and resources
Government of Canada – Suicide, self-harm, and suicide-related behaviours in Canada: Key statistics	https://health-infobase.canada.ca/mental-health/suicide-self-harm/	Latest statistics and resources
Mental Health Literacy – Understanding Self-Injury / Self-Harm	https://mentalhealthliteracy.org/understanding-self-injury-self-harm/	Article
Samaritans – How social media users experience self-harm and suicide content	https://media.samaritans.org/documents/Samaritans_How_social_media_users_experience_self-harm_and_suicide_content_WEB_v3.pdf	Research
The Psychology of Self-Injury by Dr. Stephen Lewis	https://the-psychology-of-self-injury.simplecast.com/episodes	Podcast episodes related to self-harm



My Local Resources

Name	Location	Phone #	Description

