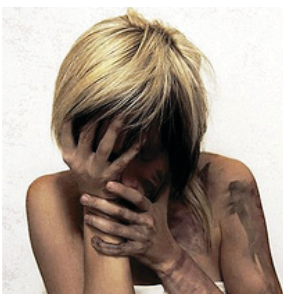


understanding self harm and depression

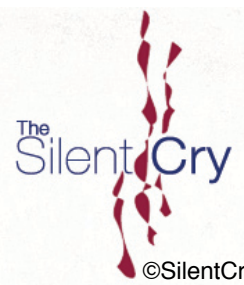
The Silent Cry



www.thesilentcry.co.uk



An independent charity for self harm and depression



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understanding

Self Harm, otherwise known as 'Self Inflicted Violence' or 'Self Mutilation' has seen an increase over the years and seems to be focussed on teenagers, but its not solely the territory of the teenagers as it can, like many things start at any age.

Self-injurious behaviour includes: bruising, cutting, burning, self-poisoning, overdosing, picking at or reinfected wounds and bone breaking. With each episode there is a release of endorphins that is experienced as pleasurable and leads to a feeling of calm and relaxation - this experience becomes addictive, and so does the behaviour.

Self-harm is often called the "secret shame", with many not wanting others to know what they are doing to their body. Indeed, a recent opinion poll showed that 41 per cent of people believed those who self-harm were selfish and 55 per cent that it was stupid. The UK has one of the highest rates of self-harm in Europe, at 400 per 100,000 .

Those who self harm are often seen as attention-seekers and many people that find it difficult to be non-judgmental, and often harm them in secret. Self-harm is neither a

suicide attempt nor purely a manipulative attention seeking behaviour - it is both a cry for help and an attempt to cope with overwhelming emotional and psychological pain.

The severity of self-harm doesn't depend on the severity of a person's underlying problems. Usually, as time passes, the person who is self-harming becomes more accustomed to the pain they inflict on themselves and so they harm more severely to get the same level of relief.

Self harm is serious and addictive to those who do it. SilentCry wants to help by giving them understanding, support and education to those who do not understand the silent cry.



who self harms

Who self harms?

There is no 'typical' person who self harms. It can be anyone. An individual who self harms can not and should not be stereotyped; they can be of all ages, any sex, sexuality or ethnicity and of different employment status etc.

'The UK has one of the highest rates of
self harm
in Europe at 400 per 100'000 population'

Honocks,J Self poisoning and self injury in adults, clinical medicine, 2 (6), 509-512
(2002) Cited in Samaritans information sheet, self harm and suicide March 2005

defining self harm



“...the commission of deliberate harm to one's own body. The injury is done to oneself, without the aid of another person, and the injury is severe enough for tissue damage (such as scarring) to result. Acts that are committed with conscious suicidal intent or are associated with sexual arousal are excluded.”

about silentcry

SilentCry was set up in 2008 to help people to deal with self harm. Whether it be the sufferer, relative or partner, it has been put in place to educate and help. Self harm is, it appears, on the increase and it is the aim of SilentCry to do address this and allow people to move forward in life, by giving them the support they need.

Self harm is misunderstood mainly because it is kept silent and people often suffer and cry alone in their silence. The severity of self-harm doesn't depend on the severity of a person's underlying problems.

Usually, as time passes, the person who is self-harming becomes more accustomed to the pain they inflict on themselves and so they harm more severely to get the same level of relief.

The danger with it being an addiction, like any addiction is that people then tend to cut deeper and more often to get the same high they experienced with the first cut. This high getting harder to find with just a simple cut. Saying that self-harmers are very wise and know where to cut that will not cause any damage to muscles, tendons or organs. They tend to push a little more, the danger comes when it is mixed with anger.

The aim is to help people deal with self harm, to help others cope with self harm and try to make peoples lives better so they do not feel the need to do it. The aim is to get the people to become strong, understand their feelings are live a better life without the need to inflict damage on themselves

secret shame

Some people are not necessarily suicidal, but deliberately self-harming by burning, cutting or scratching themselves.

This may be perceived as a way of releasing tension, but is very hard indeed for others to understand. Like attempted suicide, self-harm should be taken seriously and treated sympathetically – it may seem to outsiders that it is attention-seeking, weakness or lack of self control, but it is a symptom of genuine, often unbearable distress and emotional pain for the person concerned.

Self harm is a way of physically releasing an emotion in order to show to them that there really is something wrong. It can be a call for help but depends where the person does the self harming.

Most self harmers attack areas of their body that are not visible, such as the arms and thighs. But every now and again a real cry for help will be that they will do it where it is more visible and when challenged make a story up out of how it happened. They try to make it sound as if it was an accident, however bad it seems.

Self harm can also be attributed to a release of emotion through the cutting of the skin, they almost say it is euphoric and can hear the negativity being released. The danger being that they can revert back to this when things get very tough and start to harm.

The UK has one of the highest rates of self-harm in Europe, at 400 per 100,000 population. It is probably much higher than that, but people who self harm find the reaction at accident and emergency units as differing.

Some people have reported that they have been treated with contempt, as they are believed to be selfish and attention seeking.

Self-harm is often called the “secret shame”, with many not wanting others to know what they are doing to their body. Indeed, a recent opinion poll showed that 41 per cent of people believed self-harm were selfish and 55 per cent that it was stupid.

Those who do it are often seen as attention-seekers and many people that we have worked with have found it very difficult to find non-judgmental support and so often harm them in secret. Self-harm is neither a suicide attempt nor purely a manipulative attention seeking behaviour - it is both a cry for help and an attempt to cope with overwhelming emotional and psychological pain.

Listen and understand the silent cry of pain !

distractions

The following is a list of some different techniques that may provide some instant relief instead of self-harming. They may be useful as the first step towards stopping self-harming. However, they should not be considered a substitute for seeking professional help.

- Using non-toxic art materials to draw on your body to represent what would have happened if you had self-harmed, e.g. draw a red line on your arm.
- Hold an ice cube in your palm.
- Plunge your arm in a bucket of cold water.
- Put Tabasco sauce on your tongue.
- Have a cold shower.
- Wax your legs.
- Punch a pillow or a cushion.
- Scream or shout out loud.
- Talk to someone.
- Snap an elastic band on your wrist.
- Promise yourself a treat.
- Express your feeling in words: such as poetry, drawing and keeping a diary.

friends and relatives do's and don'ts

It can be very upsetting to be close to someone who self-harms – but there are things you can do. The most important is to listen to them without judging them, or being critical. This can be very hard if you are upset – and perhaps angry – about what they are doing. Try to concentrate on them rather than your own feelings – although this can be difficult.

Do's

- Talk to them when they feel like self-harming. Try to understand their feelings, and then move the conversation to other things.
- Take some of the mystery out of self-harm by finding out about it.
- Find out about getting help – maybe go with them to see someone.
- Help them to think about their self-harm not as a shameful secret, but as a problem to be sorted out.



Don'ts

- Try to be their therapist – therapy is complicated and you have enough to deal with as their friend, partner or relative.
- Expect them to stop overnight – it's difficult, and takes time and effort.
- React strongly, with anger, hurt, or upset – this is likely to make them feel worse. Talk honestly about the effect it has on you, but do this calmly – in a way that shows how much you care for them.
- Make them promise not to do it again, or make your involvement with them the basis for an agreement for stopping.
- Make yourself responsible for their self-harm, or become the person who is supposed to stop them. You must get on with your own life as well. Make sure you talk to someone close to you, so you get some support.

facts

It's not attention seeking.

People self harm because they are in psychological pain and trying to cope. They could be showing something is wrong and need to be taken seriously.

People self harm in different ways.

Some people cut their arms or legs, others bang or bruise their bodies. It also involves burning, hair pulling, scratching or anything that causes injury to the body.

People are mad if they cut themselves!

All sorts of people self harm, it is a release and also an addiction that needs to be treated as such.

I am the only one!

Contrary to belief, self harm is private and often kept a secret because of the nature of self harm. People keep it a secret for years fearing the reaction of others.



Is it a suicide attempt?

No, people who harm don't want to die, just be in pain. People cut to feel alive and therefore use it to prove that to themselves.

depression

Depression is a very common experience. Everyone feels fed up, miserable or sad sometimes. Usually, the reason seems obvious - a disappointment, frustration, losing something or someone important - but not always; sometimes we're just 'in a mood', 'have got the hump', 'feel blue,' 'got out of bed the wrong side', and we really don't know why.

Depression can be so severe that life hardly feels worth living and sufferers often find that they just cannot cope with things as they used to. Other people may think they have 'given in', but depression of this degree is an illness and needs treatment. It is not a sign of weakness - even powerful personalities can experience deep depression. Winston Churchill called it his 'black dog'.

As in the everyday depression that we all experience from time to time, there will sometimes be an obvious reason for becoming depressed, sometimes not. Physical illnesses, bereavement, money and housing worries or relationship problems may all bring about a period of depression. Unlike the short episodes of depression that most of us experience, with depressive illness the feeling of depression is much more intense and goes on for much longer - months rather than days or weeks.



symptoms

There is a school of thought that depression is all of life's problems that have been internalised and implode which results in depression.

Depression can strike at any time, and the symptoms vary from each person. People express some or all of the following indicators.

- feelings of unhappiness that don't go away
- losing interest in life
- becoming unable to enjoy anything
- finding it hard to make even simple decisions
- feeling utterly tired
- Loss of Humour
- feeling restless and agitated
- losing appetite and weight (some people find they do the reverse and put on weight)
- difficulty in sleeping
- waking up earlier than usual
- going off 'sex'
- losing self-confidence
- feeling useless, inadequate and hopeless
- avoiding other people
- feeling irritable
- feeling worse at a particular time of day, usually mornings
- thinking of suicide - this is very common in depression and is much better talked about than ignored

triggers

Many things can trigger debilitating depression. Feelings of depression are caused by a chemical change that affects how the brain functions.

A normally functioning brain is a giant messaging system that controls everything from your heartbeat, walking, and your emotions. The brain is made up of billions of nerve cells called neurons. These neurons send and receive messages from the rest of your body, using brain chemicals called neurotransmitters.

These brain chemicals—in varying amounts—are responsible for our emotional state. Depression happens when these chemical messages aren't delivered correctly between brain cells, disrupting communication.

Think of a telephone: if your phone has a weak signal, you may not hear the person on the other end. Their communication is muted or unclear.

Friends and relatives as well as the depressed person are anxious to know why they are depressed. Usually there is more than one reason, and these affect different people in very different ways. Depression does not follow any pattern and is certainly unique to the individual.

It is quite normal to feel depressed after distressing events, like bereavements, loss of job, divorce, house moves etc, but normally after a time feelings are worked through about what has happened, and people come to terms with the adjustments in their life. But sometimes such events lead to more serious and persistent depression from which we find it harder to emerge.

friends and family

Family and friends often want to know what they can do to help. Being a good listener (and a patient listener if you've heard it all before) is very important.

It is helpful to spend time with someone who is depressed. They don't need to be nagged, but they need to be encouraged, perhaps to talk, but also to keep going with some of the things they normally do. Someone who is depressed will find it hard to believe that they can ever get better. Reassurance that they will get better can be helpful, but may have to be given reassurance over and over again. On a practical level, make sure that they are eating enough of the right food and try and motivate them to do small tasks each day.

What needs to be attempted is to see the depression from the sufferers point of view and understand what they may be going through.

Often a depressed person will try and talk about how they feel and they are just not listened to, you need to find out how that made them feel at the time and who didn't listen.

Those who have never experienced depression may not understand, not through ignorance but through the fact that they see a perfectly healthy person, who can smile and talk and claims to be suffering from depression.

What they fail to realise is that depression is an illness, a very real illness that like all illnesses can result in death by suicide.

stigma

It is not true that everyone understands, it is also not true that there is not a stigma attached to depression or any of its family, those being stress and anxiety.

There are many misconceptions about depression that are made by people who assume so much without speaking to the most important person, the depressed person. It is not always ignorance, but the fear of not knowing what to say or do or that they may find that they trigger something off in themselves. But this does not help the depressed person at all, In fact if you look at the exercise earlier it will show this.

Let me list some of the things I have heard about depression and then you can do the exercise at the end.

- You look ok; you must be faking it to get attention.
- Oh you have depression; there is a woman in the other department who is mad as well.
- Is it contagious?
- Oh depression, that's the same as stress, isn't it.
- I knew someone who had depression once, they killed themselves.
- It's only weak people who get depression
- Just pull yourself together.
- Women get that all the time?
- Be careful, you'll pass that on to your kids.
- You have changed, you used to be fun?

The stigma stays and can often be hard to shake off because people always tend to remember the negative and not the positive aspects of a person and their behaviour. But the one thing to remember is that it is a serious condition and because people do not understand they judge you on their own fears and expectations.

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