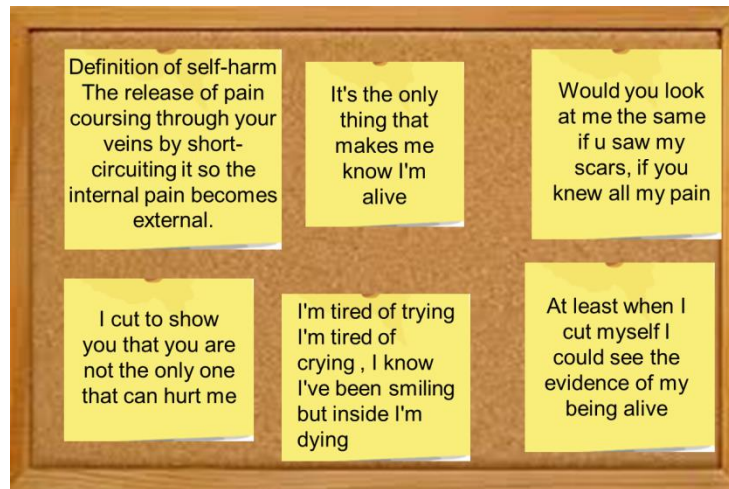


Why Our Children Are Self-Harming...



Self-harm can take many forms and can result from any number of emotional or personal situations. For most it is a very secretive, concealed act.

The statistics

- Self-harm statistics for the UK show one of the highest rates in Europe: 400 per 100,000 population. It is estimated that one in 12 young people in the UK are believed to have self-harmed at some point in their lives.
- Many of them use self-harming as a way of communicating because they feel that no one is listening and they also believe that they have no one to turn to.
- 3 in 4 young people don't know where to turn to talk about self-harm (Source: www.youngminds.org.uk)
- A third of parents would not seek professional help if their child was self-harming (Source: www.youngminds.org.uk)
- Almost half GPs feel that they don't understand young people who self-harm and their motivations (Source: www.youngminds.org.uk)
- 2 in 3 teachers don't know what to say to young people who self-harm (Source: www.youngminds.org.uk)
- While studies show that some chronic self-injurers tend to get better without therapy, many people really need professional help to open themselves to new ways of being in the world and with stress. (Source: [Cornell Research Program on Self-Injury and Recovery](#))

The Reasons for Self-Harming – Mind , the UK Mental Health Charity

“What's the point in screaming, No one is listening anyway”

To express something that is hard to put into words
To make experiences, thoughts or feelings that feel invisible into something visible
To change emotional pain into physical pain
To reduce overwhelming emotional feelings or thoughts
To have a sense of being in control
To escape traumatic memories
To stop feeling numb, disconnected or dissociated (see dissociative disorders)
To create a reason to physically care for yourself
To express suicidal feelings and thoughts without taking your own life
To communicate to other people that you are experiencing severe distress

A Parent's Viewpoint

Ten years ago, when my son was 13 years old he started cutting himself. Looking back I did not handle the situation well at all. On hearing the term “self-harm” for the first time, I remember thinking “Isn't that what the Opus Dei monks do?”, (as in those monks who engage in self-flagellation in order to punish themselves and because pain made them feel closer to God). Of course, there was nothing remotely connected to Opus Dei or religion about what my son was doing. Mainly I was angry with him as I could not understand what could possibly make him want to hurt himself, over and over again.

“It's a release from being angry”

I was also convinced that my son was the only child on the planet engaging in this (well apart from the monks) and so for the next four years he and I battled – covertly - for his survival. My son took self-harming to beyond cutting; he would stop eating for days on end, he hung out with “friends” who bullied him, he got into alcohol, drugs and as he got older, he engaged in a string of abusive relationships.

All of this served to perpetuate his idea that he needed to feel pain (physical and emotional) in order to feel something, to have control and to release the anger that silently raged within him.

"I knew that self harm worked – it was often my last port of call – it promised a resolve."

A Child's Viewpoint

"Cutting was a release, not of huge amounts of rage (although I'm still waiting for that to surface) but of less noticeable emotion – I did not know how I felt – I did not have the skills to verbalize my experiences and therefore felt very trapped in my body. I often felt as if I was sitting in a wooden box, I could see out of little gaps in the wood work but people couldn't see in. At least when I cut myself I could see the evidence of my being alive....the rest of the time I really did not care if I lived or died."

"The secrecy of being in a room of people and knowing that underneath your clothes there are burns from lighters, cigarettes and matches which are an aesthetic to the internal pain, trauma and shame I feel about myself.

I am like the junkie who shoots up down a dark side-alley but instead I am applying the 8th burn to my arm because I can feel the dark shadow of panic/shame overcoming me and I won't make it home if I don't get this hit."

So what do you do if your child is self-harming?

Mandy Saligari, founder and director of *Charter Harley Street*, explains that "Self-harm is a pattern of behaviours that, like so many addictive patterns and dysfunctional coping mechanisms, can be hidden in plain view, even in those as young as 6 or 7 yrs. old. It is often the first sign of a problem which left unaddressed frequently develops into an eating disorder or drug and alcohol addiction"

"It's the only thing that makes me know I'm alive"

Do not ignore the signs. If you feel out of your depth and if find that you cannot deal with the way your child is behaving, Mandy Saligari strongly suggests that "you seek support from a child and adolescent psychotherapist or an EMDR therapist who specialises in working with children. Trying to deal with it yourself and failing can generate negative emotions, making the child feel even more hopeless and the parent feel useless.

Both will foster resentment, which in turn drives the urge to self-harm - a vicious circle"

Philip Andrews, (Psychotherapist – EMDR Europe Accredited Consultant) believes that, "Trauma often leaves people feeling numb and depressed. Self-harm can allow them to literally feel for a short time, so as a short term solution it becomes addictive".

The light at the end of the tunnel...

It is important to remember that self-harm is not a phase someone is going through or a fad but rather a coping mechanism for depression, stress and anxiety.

There is no quick fix but over time with supportive care and attention, new ways of coping can replace the need to self-harm. .

About Charter Harley Street: **Discover the Power of Charter Harley Street**

London's leading private outpatient facility for Trauma, Addiction and Mental Health. – www.charterharleystreet.com

About Mandy Saligari: **Founder and Clinical Director, Charter Harley Street**

Mandy is a well-respected established expert in the field of addiction, parenting and relationships. Born from her passion for helping people overcome addictive behaviour, Mandy founded Charter Harley Street to address the market need for a common sense approach to recovery; one that delivers recovery for life and is underpinned by humility, gratitude and hope.