Understanding Self-Injury

Milwaukee Police Department
Crisis Intervention Training 2015

Laurie Buesing, MS, LPCIT, CSW
labuesing@yahoo.com
Overview

• CBT Framework to Understand People
• Poem
• Self-Injury Defined
  – Self-Injury vs. Suicide
• Functions of Self-Injury
• Risk Determination
• Characteristics of population
• Resources
Understanding People

The Titanic
Understanding People
A Cognitive Behavioral Approach

Behaviors

Environmental Stressors

Thoughts

Situational Stressors

Feelings
Understanding People
Example – “Battery to PO”

Mother:
T – I forgot about the PO Box; I don’t have time for this; I have 20 other things to do
F – Frustrated; Stressed
A – Take rest of lunch to go; Tell child to hurry; Not actively listen

Officers:
T – You Can’t Trust Anybody; I can’t believe my brother’s hurt; The world is messed up
F – Anger; Fear
A –

Child:
T – Oh yeah, my toy needs batteries; I can’t wait to play with my toy
F – Excited; Happy
A – Talk loud, fast; Ask mom to get batteries; whine, cry, beg, etc.
Self-Injury Defined

“Deliberate, self-inflicted destruction of body tissue resulting in immediate damage, without suicidal intent and for purposes not socially sanctioned”

International Society for the Study of Self-Injury 2007

• Intentional Coping mechanism
• It WORKS for the individual to relieve psychological distress
Self-Injury vs. Suicide

• **Intent** (Motivation, Goal and Outcome)

• Suicide
  - Intent is to END the distress
  - Hopeless / Helpless

• Self-Injury
  - Intent is to MANAGE or RELIEVE the distress
  - Hope / Control
Functions of Self-Injury

- **Affect Regulation (Biological)**
  - Anxiety, Numbness

- **Control**
  - Emotions, social, environment

- **Self Punishment / Defense**

- **Communication**
  - Making emotional pain physical
  - Symbolic
High Risk Self-Injury

• Assess for Thoughts & Feelings
• Plan, Intent, Social Supports, Positive Coping

IMMEDIATE INTERVENTION – ED or INPATIENT
  – Psychosis
    • Delusions
    • Hallucinations
  – Suicide Rehearsal
Characteristics of Population
Psychological and Environmental Factors

• Poor Communication & Problem Solving
• Low Stress Tolerance
• Affect dysregulation
• Emotionally Constricted
• Rigid Thinking / Perfectionistic
• Invalidating Environments
• Histories of Abuse
How to Approach Self-Injury

• Officer Safety / Scene Safety
• Ask for compliance
• Be aware of emotional distress
• Don’t express judgment
• Listen
• Understand it works for THEM
• Don’t tell them never to do it again
Resources


• SAFE: Self Abuse Finally Ends - 1-800-DONT-CUT

• Self Injury: A struggle

• American Self-Injury Clearinghouse
  – [http://www.selfinjury.org](http://www.selfinjury.org)

• Self Injury

• Mayo Clinic

• The Secret Cut
  – DVD by Dr. Lisa Boesky