

The Tip of the Iceberg: Responding to Self-Injury

Mental health professionals have struggled to understand self-injury for decades, with varying degrees of success and compassion. Because of the complexity of self-harming behaviours and a variety of issues involved in self-injury, clinical responses have often been only moderately beneficial, and in some cases distinctly harmful.

This course will offer helpful guidelines to workers who wish to improve their capacity to respond usefully to clients who self-harm. All the information given to participants will be immediately translated into conveying the same information to the client. Numerous activities and exercises will be used as therapeutic tools. Specific issues and strategies will be explored, as well as workers' limitations in dealing with clients who self-injure. Participants will be equipped with a handbook full of clinical and practical exercises and treatment activities that can be used the very next day. With the use of experiential group activities and movie clips, it will be a high energy and fun educational day.

Program Outline

Understanding self-injury and its context

Terminology

Behaviours that are harmful but are not self-injurious

A disorder on its own?

Statistics

Characteristics of self-injury

Differentiating from chronic suicidality

Incorporating differences between chronic suicidality and self-injurious behaviours in the process of assessment

Types of self-injury

The course of self-injury

Physiological aspects of self-injury

Initial exploration of the functions of self-injury

Translating this information to your client (activities and clinical exercises in groups)

- Relief from intense feelings
- A method of coping
- Stopping, inducing or preventing dissociation
- Euphoric feelings
- Physically expressing emotional pain
- Communication
- Self-nurturing
- Self-punishment
- Trauma re-enactment
- Establishing control

Models of self-injury

- The Addiction Model
- The Operant Conditioning Model
- The Observational Learning Model

Treatment approaches which can be integrated to create an effective recovery model.

Specific techniques, already translated into the language appropriate to use during a therapy session, quizzes, questionnaires and other clinical tools to assist clients to:

Increase insight into the purpose of self-injurious behaviour

Strategies to reduce or stop self-injury

Helping your client address self-injury

Recognize pre-warning signs

The correct goal of treatment

Reasons for ending SI

Talking about SI with others

Altering the behaviours associated with SI

- Frequency
- The manner in which the person engages in SI
- Creating new habits

Formulating a plan for new coping habits.

Changing the rituals

- Environment
- Instrument
- Procedure

Getting support

Understand the role of a relapse and accept relapse

The thoughts and feelings cycle of self- injury

Challenging negative thoughts

Changing the feelings

Changing sensations

Finding Alternatives for:

- Grounding and reorienting
- Self-soothing
- Expressing anger
- Becoming creative