

Embracing Our Scars: Self-Harm 101

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Abstract : Self-harm is still a topic that is not talked about enough, especially with the growing concern for the safety of LGBTQIA+ youth. LGBTQIA+ youth are coming out at earlier ages, thus bringing to attention the added risks for this population. Many LGBTQIA+ youth end up engaging in some form of self-destructive behavior from dealing with the stigma and negative socialization around them. Within the LGBTQIA+ youth population, self-harm alongside depression and suicide is especially common. This disparity shows the importance of providing LGBTQIA+ youth with resources that affirm their identities. As professionals and parents, it is important to understand the types of self-harm, the average age range when it can occur, causes, populations, risk factors, and self-harm in connection with mental health and suicide. It is imperative to provide protective factors for LGBTQIA+ youth in helping to replace self-harming behaviors with positive coping strategies. Helping LGBTQIA+ youth in different contexts, including from a professional, parent, and educator perspective, allows unique ways in which each can assist an LGBTQIA+ youth who is self-harming. The stigma, shame, and many misconceptions about self-harming behaviors are discussed in depth including from the lived experience of this author and professional experiences working with queer youth. Most importantly, it is imperative to know how to approach LGBTQIA+ youth who are self-harming, including how to speak in a compassionate and empathy-based framework. Clear interventions and therapeutic techniques based on evidence-based practices on alternatives to self-harm, lived experience, and previous practices with queer youth who are self-harming are provided and discussed.

Keywords : LGBTQ+, mental health, self-harm, depression

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