

Working with People Who Self-Injure:

A Resource Guide for Helping Professionals



By Tracy Riley



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Acknowledgments

My work in the area of self-injury began in the spring of 2006 when I was hired for a short 3-month contract to develop educational materials on the subject of self-injury for students and counselling staff at Queen's University. I would like to thank Dr. Michael Condra and Dr. Carol Harris for their roles in giving me that opportunity and for their support of me in various ways before and since that time. I would also like to acknowledge funding the department received that year through the Women's Campus Safety Grant (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities), as it, too, made possible that work.

My interest in working with emotion, in mindfulness, and compassion began, in essence, a very long time ago, long before I learned these particular expressions and terms.

I acknowledge all the many people and paths that have led both to the writing of this resource and to the paths I am currently on in my work and life more generally. I carry within my heart and express outwardly my sincere and deep gratitude to many people, for many things.

Never underestimate the power of love, steadfastness in love, and gift.

The beauty of a thing is its depth and meaning being revealed. To perceive that beauty, you need an eye for both appearances and for the invisible radiance of a thing. You also need the capacity to be affected.

—Thomas Moore, *Dark Nights of the Soul*, 2004, p. 223

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Introduction

My warm welcome to you.

Book's Purpose

I wrote this resource guide to help you in your work -- to help you feel knowledgeable, capable, competent, and supported when working with people who self-injure. My aim is to provide you with tools that are clear and concise, to create a resource that is short-enough that you don't need a four-week vacation to actually read it, yet that is in-depth enough that it doesn't get tossed into the pile of the mediocre and merely collect dust. My aim is that this little book is chocked full of enough inspiration and helpful conceptual and practical information that you actually use it. I want this resource to be *helpful and beneficial to you personally* -- something you will like so much, you will recommend it to others, a lot!

I have read many times and been told that many helping professionals across the spectrum lack adequate information about self-injury and how to best assist someone who is self-injuring. As a result, they also feel less confident, if not somewhat lost, and this undoubtedly creates added stress. I would like to help to ease that. My hope is that the more informed helpers are, the more encouraged, strengthened, and less stressed or distressed they will feel when encountering a person who self-injures.

My firm conviction is that one logical thing to do to support healing and well-being is to offer, generate, and inspire understanding, compassion, and benevolence in our care for and handling of one another. This applies to our support of each other at both organizational and peer to peer levels, as well as in our direct and indirect work of aiming to assist those experiencing distress— and specific to the topic of this book, to those who are intentionally injuring themselves.

Organization

The book is organized into two main sections. In Part One, the focus is on providing information to help with understanding self-injury, as well as to set the stage for directions for helping work. In Part Two, the focus is on conceptual and practical information to guide you in your efforts to be of assistance to those who self-injure.