

On Edge – Learning about Self Harm – Resource pack for teachers and professionals working with young people

Self-harm among young people is a significant and growing public health problem. The Truth Hurts report (2006)¹ suggests that on average two teenagers in every secondary school classroom will have hurt themselves in response to the pressure of growing up in an increasingly complex and challenging world. Further research from Cello and Young Minds (2012)² found that Young people also say self-harm is their number one concern for their peers, above bullying, gangs, binge drinking and drug use. However those in closest contact with young people often have limited knowledge of self-harm, which results in a poor response when a young person finally finds the courage to tell someone they need help.

In the same territory, the Scottish Government in its Suicide Prevention Strategy (2013 – 2016) makes a commitment to take forward further work on self-harm through the work on responding to people in distress. This supports the view that people who use self-harm as a way of coping is not well understood and mainly used as a way of coping with distress. Many people, who are in touch with other services, say that they try to avoid contact with hospital services if possible and there is a public health responsibility to support individuals.

‘On Edge’ is an education resource pack and has been developed, through a partnership approach by Choose Life (Renfrewshire Council), West Dunbarton CHCP, West Dunbartonshire Council, NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde (Health improvement) and Inverclyde CHCP. The resource aims to

- tackle the myths that surround self-harm;
- reduce the stigma associated with it by increasing understanding of its function;
- reduce the barriers to help seeking by raising awareness of sources of support and promote a consistent humane response to a behaviour, which is a manifestation of distress.

Careful consideration in the development of the pack has taken account of Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC - Scottish Government, 2006), Curriculum for Excellence (Education Scotland, 2010) and The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007 (Scottish Government, 2008). On Edge is therefore aimed at S2 pupils and above. The learning intentions for each lesson are based on the Curriculum for Excellence Level 3 Experiences and Outcomes.

There are 2 films that accompany the pack; Millie’s Story – this 20 minute film looks at the impact various life events has had on a fictional character’s mental health and wellbeing. The film implies the young girl called Millie is self harming but the focus is more on the cause rather than the action she takes. Dean’s Story also looks at how a young boy – Dean is dealing with an number of difficult feelings.

¹ Truth hurts: report of the National inquiry into self-harm among young people, Mental Health Foundation 2006

² http://www.youngminds.org.uk/about/our_campaigns/cello_self-harm