

DISTRACTION TECHNIQUES & ALTERNATIVE COPING STRATEGIES

Some people use self-injury as a way to cope with negative feelings, often because they haven't learned how to do that in a healthier way.



Identifying the feelings and thoughts that lead to self-injury, and challenging them, can be important to the recovery process

STOPPING IS EASIER IF YOU CAN FIND OTHER WAYS OF EXPRESSING AND COPING WITH YOUR FEELINGS

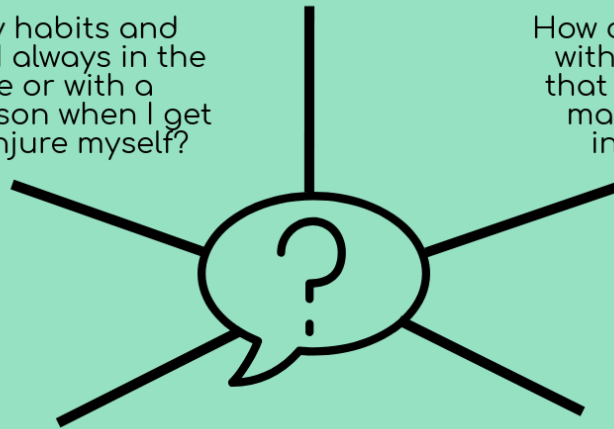
IDENTIFYING FEELINGS AND SITUATIONS

Ask yourself...

What was going on in my life when I first began to injure myself?

What are my habits and routines? Am I always in the same place or with a particular person when I get the urge to injure myself?

How can I better deal with the situations that trigger me and make me want to injure myself?



How do I feel just before I want to injure myself?

Do I always feel the same way when I get the urge to injure myself?

YOU MAY WANT TO KEEP A DIARY OF YOUR FEELINGS AT DIFFERENT TIMES!

WHAT CAN I DO INSTEAD?

If you're...



FEELING SAD

- Do something slow & soothing
- Take a hot bath
- Give yourself a present
- Play with a pet
- Make a list of things that make you happy
- Visit a friend
- Play with a pet
- Hug a loved one or stuffed animal
- Do something nice for someone else
- Call a friend & just talk about things you like
- Baby yourself somehow
- Listen to soothing music
- Light sweet smelling incense
- Curl up with hot cocoa and a good book



FEELING ANGRY

- Slash an empty plastic bottle, piece of heavy cardboard, or an old shirt
- Squeeze ice
- Make a soft cloth doll to represent thing you are angry at--cut and tear it instead of yourself
- Hit a punching bag
- Use a pillow to hit a wall, pillow fight style
- Rip up an old newspaper or phone book
- Make clay models and cut or smash them
- Bang pots and pans together
- On a sketch or a photo of yourself, mark in red ink what you want to do--then cut & tear the picture
- Dance, clean, exercise



FEELING GUILTY OR BAD ABOUT YOURSELF

- List as many good things about yourself as you can
- Read something good that someone has written about you
- Do something nice for someone else
- Remember when you've done something good
- Think about why you feel guilty, and how you might be able to change it



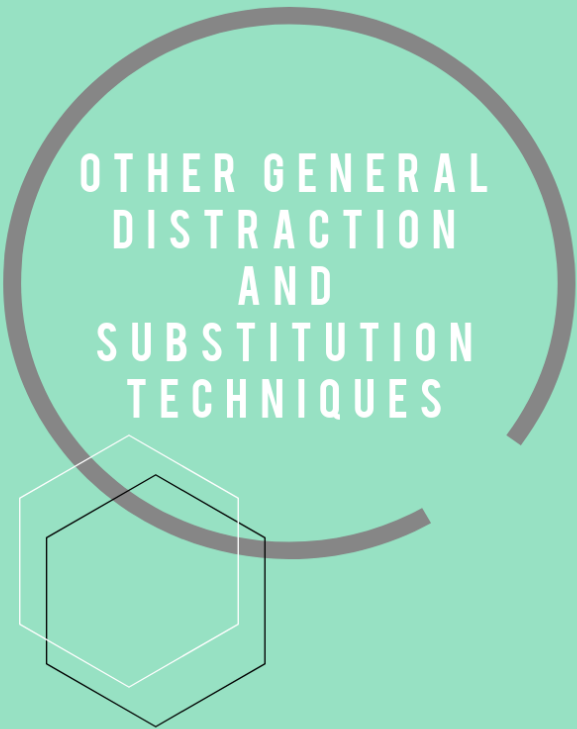
FEELING EMPTY OR UNREAL

- Squeeze ice
- List the many uses for a random object (like, what are all the things you can do with a twist tie?)
- Interact with other people
- Put a finger into frozen food, like ice cream
- Bite into a hot pepper or chew a piece of ginger
- Slap a tabletop, hard.
- Take a cold bath
- Stomp your feet on the ground
- Rub liniment under your nose
- Focus on how it feels to breathe. Notice the way your chest and stomach move with each breath.



WANTING TO FOCUS

- Do a task that requires focus and concentration
- Eat a raisin mindfully--how does it look, feel, smell? Chew slowly, notice how the texture and taste change as you chew.
- Choose an object in the room, examine it carefully and then write as detailed a description as you can
- Choose a random object and try to list 30 different uses for it
- Pick a subject and research it on the web



OTHER GENERAL DISTRACTION AND SUBSTITUTION TECHNIQUES



Reach out to others

- Phone a friend
- Call 1-800-DONT-CUT
- Go out and be around others



Express yourself

- Write down your feelings in a diary
- Cry--crying is a healthy & normal way to express your sadness or frustration
- Draw or color



Keep busy

- Play a game
- Take a shower
- Do homework
- Listen to music, read, clean, or cook



Do something mindful

- Count down slowly from 10 to 0
- Breathe slowly, in through the nose and out through the mouth
- Focus on objects around you and think about how they look, sound, smell, taste, and feel
- Do yoga or meditate



Release your frustrations

- Break old dishes
- Throw ice cubes at a brick wall
- Throw eggs in the shower
- Throw darts
- Punch or scream into pillows
- Slam doors
- Exercise

FOR MORE RESOURCES

Cornell Research Program on Self-Injury and
Recovery
<http://www.selfinjury.bctr.cornell.edu>

Youth Risk and Opportunity Lab
<https://www.yrocornell.com>