

Helpful Responses To Someone Who's Self-Harmed

by Cheryl Rainfield, 2011

- Come from a place of compassion;
- Understand that self-harm is NOT acting out, manipulation, or a failed suicide attempt; the person is usually trying to cope with deep and overwhelming emotional distress, pain, and often abuse or trauma;
- Do not blame, accuse, punish, or threaten; those things only make it worse;
- Ask why—and listen to the answer. Try to understand and not judge;
- Ask what the person needs;
- Educate yourself about self-harm (check out [the Secret Shame website](#), a fantastic resource. You may also want to read my books SCARS for a deep understanding of the many reasons why someone might cut, or read some of the other articles on my site. If you find them helpful, I hope you'll also pass them along to the person you know who's self-harming. They need to know that they're not alone.);
- Give the person my [Reasons Not To Hurt Yourself](#) (<http://cherylrainfield.com/blog/index.php/2011/05/06/reasons-not-to-hurt-yourself>). You may want to read it, too;
- Make sure the person has support. Give her/him a list of helpful crisis and support lines that they can call, text, chat, or email. I recommend [RAINN.org](#), especially for survivors of rape and sexual abuse, and [CrisisTextLine](#) for many helpful support lines. Encourage them to see a therapist or social worker if they can;
- Help the person find alternatives to self-harm—when they tell you they want to. Distraction in safe ways can be a fantastic technique to help get through when things are hard. See [this article](#) <http://joannebeggs.com/article-10-ways-reduce-stress.html> by therapist Jo-Anne Beggs for some ideas;
- Make concrete offers of help (give a meal, go to a movie with them, etc.);
- Listen, and offer a supportive ear, or help them get support;
- Know your own limits, and don't give more than you can.
- Let them know the things you like about them. It may sound small, but people who self-harm or who have been abused need to learn to love and appreciate themselves, and need to hear good things about themselves often. Eventually it will go in there more.