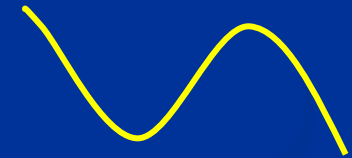
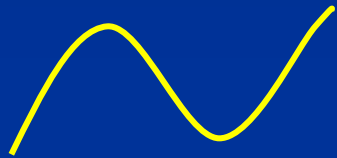


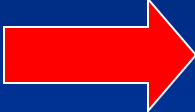
Understanding Non-Suicidal Self-Injury in Teens



Tina R. Goldstein, Ph.D.
Kimberly D. Poling, L.C.S.W.

Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic, University of Pittsburgh

Objectives

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- Understand non-suicidal self-injurious behavior (NSSI)
 - Discuss common motivations underlying non-suicidal self-injurious behavior in teens
 - Review strategies for assessing NSSI

What is Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI)?

- NSSI is any physically self-damaging act performed:
 - without intent of killing oneself
 - with full intent of inflicting physical harm to oneself (O'Carroll et al., 1996)
- Examples:
 - scratching
 - cutting
 - burning

How Common is NSSI in Adolescents?

14-39% of community adolescent samples

40-60% of adolescent psychiatric samples

Which Adolescents Engage in NSSI?

- Most often begins in early adolescence
- Associated with:
 - Axis I diagnoses (63% externalizing, 52% internalizing, 60% substance use disorders)
 - Axis II diagnoses (67%; primarily cluster B)
- No sex, race or SES differences

Characteristics of NSSI in Adolescents

- 89% report thinking about NSSI for a few minutes or less before engaging in the behavior (Nock & Prinstein, 2004)
- 80% report experiencing little to no pain during NSSI
- 18% endorse alcohol or drug use during NSSI

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Why Do Adolescents Engage in NSSI?

Overwhelmingly, teens report they engage in self-injury to escape or reduce painful emotions:

- to cope with feelings of depression: 83%
- to release unbearable tension: 74%
- to cope with nervousness/fear: 71%
- to express frustration: 71%

Why do Adolescents Engage in NSSI?

Other reasons adolescents report for engaging in NSSI:

- to feel something, even if it was pain (34%)
- to punish oneself (31%)
- to get other people to act differently or change (15%)
- to get attention (14%)
- to get help (14%)

Why do Adolescents Engage in NSSI?

The behavior is reinforced (i.e., it works)...

- 60% report emotional relief afterwards (Kumar et al., 2004; Nock & Prinstein, 2004)
- social reinforcement
 - e.g., attention, help, removal of expectations/demands

NSSI and Suicidal Behavior

- NSSI and suicidal behavior commonly co-occur in teens
 - 70% of teens who engage in NSSI report lifetime history of suicidal behavior
- NSSI as risk factor for suicidal behavior
 - longer history of NSSI
 - more methods
 - absence of physical pain during NSSI

Suicide Continuum



Passive
death wish

Suicidal ideation
no method

Suicidal ideation
with plan

Suicide
Attempt

Completed
Suicide



Suicidal Ideation



Non-suicidal self-injury

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Assessing NSSI: General Guidelines

- An ongoing process
- Do not be afraid to ask direct questions about self-harm
- Begin with general questions, move to more specific
- Be gently persistent in seeking details

Assessing NSSI: Create a Validating Environment

Levels of Validation (Linehan, 1993; Miller & Comtois, 2002)

- Unbiased listening and observing
- Accurate reflection
- Articulating the “unverbalized”
- Validation in terms of past learning or biological dysfunction
- Validation in terms of present context
- Radical genuineness

The Importance of Maintaining a Non-Judgmental Approach

- Therapist validates the emotional need behind the behavior

AND

- Elicits consequences about specific problem behaviors from the teen
- All in a non-judgmental manner, e.g.:
“You’re doing the best you can, and you can do better”
(Linehan, 1993)

What is a Chain Analysis?

- A chain analysis is a detailed assessment of any behavior.
- Often our patients have difficulty identifying precipitants or contributing factors for their NSSI.
(“I don’t know *why* I cut, I just did”)
- The chain helps orient the teen to the idea that NSSI, like all behaviors, happens for valid reasons – even if we are not initially aware of those reasons.
- The chain helps you and the teen make sense of NSSI. This can help the teen develop a better sense of control.

How to Conduct a Chain Analysis

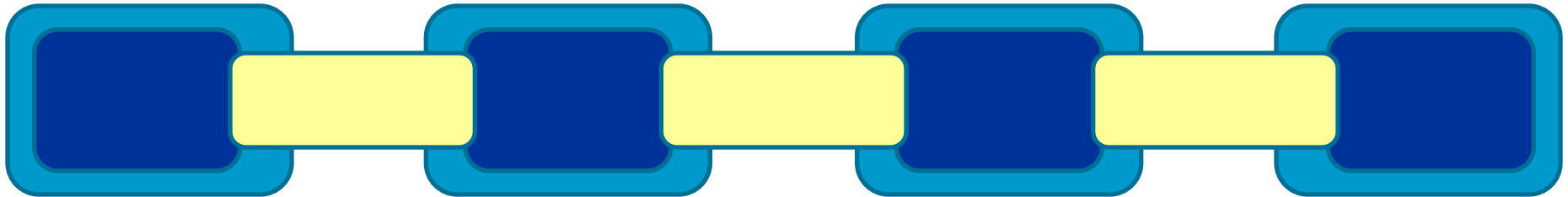
- Start by asking teen to describe in detail the events (both internal and external) that led up to the most recent incident of NSSI
- As the teen tells the story, the clinician records the details on paper as a way of really *seeing* the chain of events
- Goal: to recreate the day in such detail that it is as if watching a movie of the events of the day

Chain Analysis

What was the problem behavior?

For each link below, consider:

- Events
- Thoughts
- Feelings



_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

What were your vulnerability factors?

What were the consequences?

What were your protective factors?

How to Conduct a Chain Analysis

Figure out the problem you are targeting
(i.e., self-injury)

- Choose a specific incident of the behavior
- Preferable to choose a recent incident

How to Conduct a Chain Analysis

Prompt for:

- Thoughts:** What were you thinking?
What went through your head?
- Feelings:** How were you feeling?
What kind of a mood were you in?
What did you notice in your body?
- Behaviors:** What did you do?
How did you act?
- Vulnerabilities:** Why then?
Consider sleep, eating, prior events
- Consequences:** What happened afterwards?
Consider reinforcement and punishment

How to Conduct a Chain Analysis

While you go through the chain together:

- notice the chain of events moment-to-moment over time
- highlight, observe patterns, and comment on implications

How to Conduct a Chain Analysis

- Identify on the chain the “point of no return”
- Determine how to “break links” between prompting event and “point of no return”
- Identify ways to “break links” between problem behavior and consequences

How to Conduct a Chain Analysis

- Review the chain carefully with the teen
- Ask: “what emotional NEEDS were you attempting to meet through the behavior, even if the results were not what you might have wanted?”

How to Conduct a Chain Analysis

- Explore with the teen how he/she feels about having the identified emotional needs
- Help the teen develop respect for his/her emotional needs
- Foster self-validation of emotional needs
- Explore alternative ways he/she can go about getting his/her needs met

Summary

- NSSI as distinct from suicidal behavior
 - and also a risk factor for suicidal behavior
- NSSI serves a function for the teen
- Use of chain analysis to understand NSSI
 - triggers
 - vulnerability factors
 - emotional needs
 - consequences

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-
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Resources

- Brent DA, Poling KD, Goldstein TR (2011). *Treating depressed and suicidal adolescents*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Spirito A & Overholser J, editors (2003). *Evaluating and treating adolescent suicide attempters*. San Diego, CA: Elsevier Science.
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