



MART October the 19th

How to help traumatized children

how to deal with **self-harm and self destruction**
following trauma experiences

what do we
mean by :

self harm

- cutting oneself with a sharp object
- burning oneself
- hitting oneself
- banging the head
- other ways of inflicting pain upon oneself

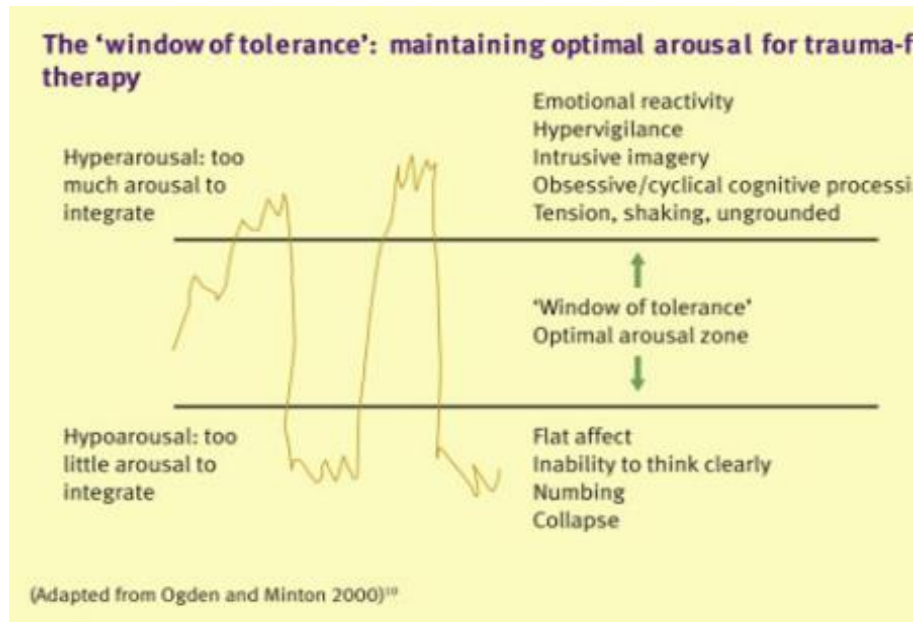
self –destructive behavior

- risk-taking behavior
 - driving, too fast, jumping from high places etc
- drugs and alcohol

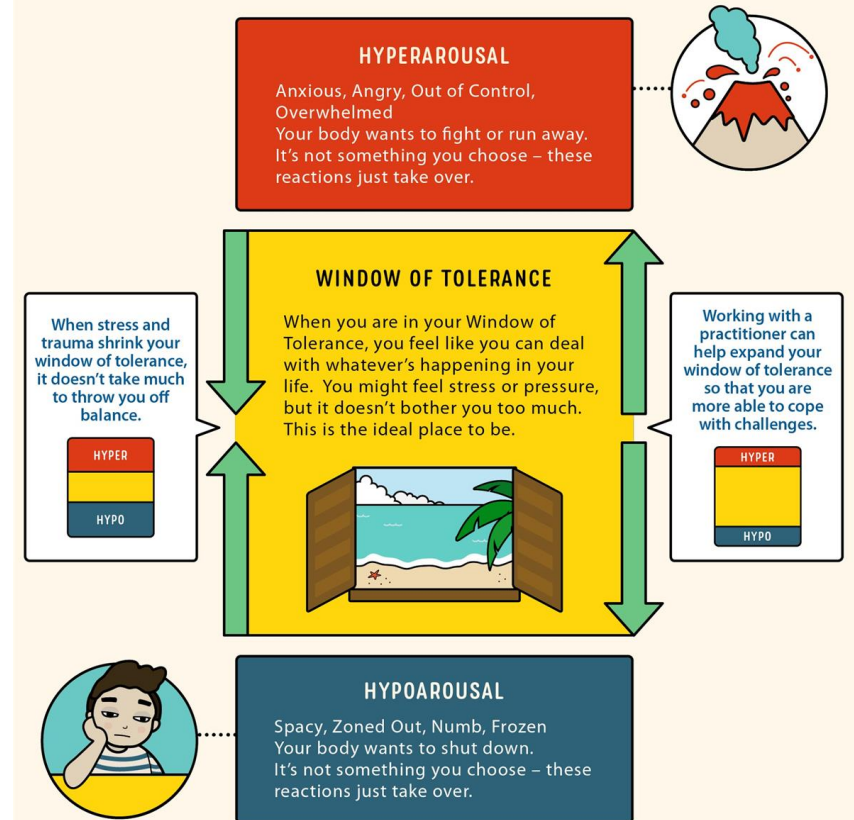
inflicting harm on your own body – without the intention of dying

Window of tolerance

This is a model used to understand reactions to stress and trauma that can be useful in the work of stabilization.



How Trauma Can Affect Your Window Of Tolerance



1 Typical long-term survival strategies

Scan/Freeze	Attachment	Flight	Fight	Submission	Dissociates, shuts down
<p>Focuses on potential threats.</p> <p>Lacks concentration.</p> <p>Thinks rigidly.</p> <p>Tense.</p>	<p>Clingy.</p> <p>Rejects others or easily feels rejected.</p> <p>Fears abandonment.</p>	<p>Runs away.</p> <p>Hides.</p> <p>Isolates.</p> <p>Avoids.</p> <p>Withdraws.</p>	<p>Hyperactive.</p> <p>Unable to follow through.</p> <p>Compulsive.</p> <p>Impulsive.</p> <p>Resists.</p> <p>Hits or kicks.</p> <p>Hurt themselves</p> <p>Engage in risktaking behavior</p>	<p>Compliant, submissive, reserved.</p> <p>Pleasing.</p> <p>Does not show needs.</p> <p>Focuses mostly on the needs of others.</p>	<p>Forgetful, daydreams.</p> <p>Numb, tired.</p> <p>Low energy.</p> <p>Passive.</p> <p>Collapses.</p> <p>Somatic complaints.</p>

the fight and the anger is turned inwards instead of to the attacker, but also the flight /avoid and the numbing

how can this behavior be seen as communication

to oneself (intrapsychic)

- It is better to feel a physical pain than the emotional
- better feel pain than being numb
- acknowledging for oneself: I am hurt/wounded /it is true

making the pain real, not dissociated

- punishing oneself- shame and guilt

to others:

- give me comfort and attention
- see my pain
- see my anger
- help me
- by punishing myself, I also punish you for not taking away my pain

Most often:
why children
and teen-
agers inflict
pain upon
themselves

- Lack of capacity to tolerate
- negative emotion
 - fear,
 - aggression,
 - frustration,
 - loss,etc

- lack of capacity to identify
and regulate the emotions



case Lina

- 16 years old
 - admitted to psychiatric ward after what had been interpreted as a suicide attempt- which she denied
 - Had been sexual abused by fathers brother since she was 10- Father – an alcoholic- had witnessed the abuse without stopping it
 - later she was raped by a teacher in a summercamp
 - also raped by a boy in school

linas story

- in therapy with me for many years
 - in the beginning she was also incontinent for urine and sometimes also for feces
 - very uncomfortable about any feelings in her body
 - had moments of freeze position, could not move
 - had dissociative moments, did not remember whether she had been out during the night
- she was cutting herself in her arm till she was heavily bleeding, had to go to emergency clinic
- when exploring what did she communicate- it showed that a variety of feelings was behind the behavior



lina

we made an agreement : each time she was about to use the knife, she should sit down and write me an email – what was going on inside her

slowly she learned to differentiate between anger, shame, numbness, etc and was able to talk it through in the next session

Lina learned to control the behavior, but had some relapses during very stressful periods

other self destructive behavior as communication

drug abuse:

- trying to forget
- easing the feelings
- seeking companionship with others

risk seeking behavior:

- releasing tension
- getting outlet for aggressive impulses
- «taking control by playing with death threatening elements»

Current questions for young people about self-harm

Have you hurt yourself on purpose?

Tell me what you did to yourself to hurt yourself.

What did you want to achieve by hurting yourself?

Did you wish you would die as a result of the injury?

Did you wish that something would change as a result of the injury?

How did you feel before you hurt yourself?

How did you feel right after?

How do you feel now about hurting yourself?

What do you think may have triggered your desire to harm yourself?

When did you first hurt yourself?

How many times have you hurt yourself in the past?

2 Treatment models

DBT- Dialectical behavior Therapy

- combines mindfulness with konitiv behavior therapy

T-SIB – Treatment of Self-Injurious Behavior

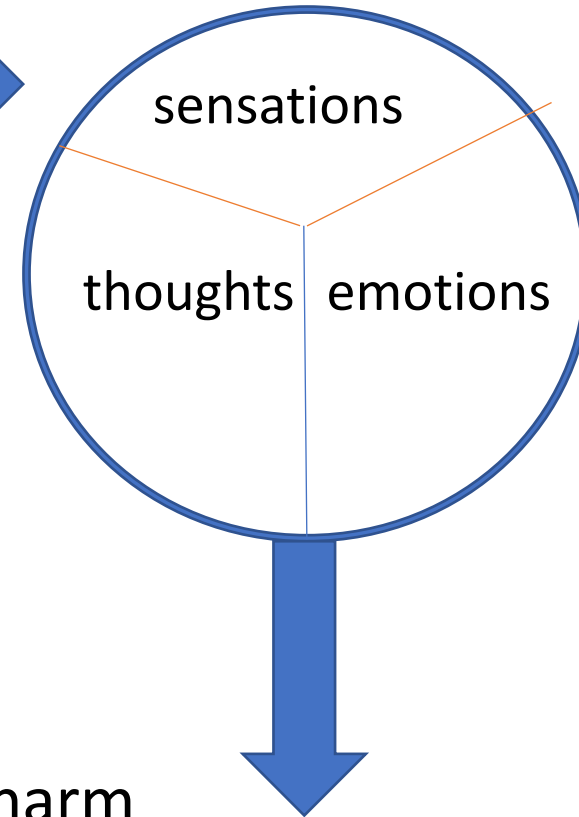
- a short version of DBT

Psychoeducation

Psychoeducation on the link between



- senses: touch, taste, smell, hearing, seeing,
- thoughts :telling yourself it did not happen, dissociation, suicidal thoughts, no hope for the future nobody cares etc
- emotions anger, self-hate, guilt, shame
- aggression, risktaking , destroying objects, self-harm eating disorder(overeating or anorexia)



BEHAVIOR





3 questions

1. What **causes** the behavior –
 - what inner or outer triggers was the cause in every incident of self-harming behavior
2. what **maintains** the behavior
 - what consequences follow the behavior that re-inforces the behavior
3. what kind of **mastery / coping strategies are missing**
 - what new skills must be taught

question 1

what kind of mental strain was **causing** the behavior:

- 1. what kind of mental strain was **causing** the behavior:
 - intrusive memories from war experiences?
 - numbness or frozen feeling?
 - hyperarousal? /high anxiety
 - other triggers that the person is unaware of?or
 - interpersonal conflicts (quarrel, rejection, lack of care, attention and comfort)
- Helpers respons accordingly:
 - teach regulatory exercises, breathing, muscular exercises,
 - teach awareness exercises, body-scanning, mindfulness exercises
 - do trigger work together (detect, protect and gradual exposure)
 - finding new ways of communicate your needs to others



question 2

what maintains the behavior:

- in the body:
 - pain -inflicting releases endorfines- gives a pain relief
 - pain -also blocks the amygdala respons . Blocking the fight/flight/ freeze respons- also a pain relief
- in relationships:
 - gives attention and sometimes care
 - less demands are put upon you because others are afraid they may worsen the ehavior
- Helpers respons accordingly:
 - psychoeducation about the body reactions
 - why it helps on short sight, but is a dysfunctional strategy on longer sight
 - finding other ways of blocking the pain
 - train to tolerate unpleasant feelings (expand the window of tolerance)
 - talkin to oneself
 - teaching skills – There are other ways of getting needs met
 - having family understand and reacting differently

question 3

what new skills are needed

Awareness of body signals

Emotion regulation

relaxation and
downregulating exercises

upregulating: touch/ tactile
stimulation , smell
(ice/eyerubbing exercises)

Emotion tolerance

Also communication skills.
how to address other
people, how to regulate
interpersonal conflict

3 questions - Lina

What caused the selfharm-behavior

- breaking the numbness, replacing emotional pain with physical pain, release of tension, self-hate /punish herself,

What maintained the behavior

- addicted to the endorfine kick, getting attention and care, signaling to parents that something was very wrong

What new skills did she have to learn

- Body awareness, sharing and talking and writing /putting the feelings into words, thereby expanding emotion tolerance. But also reinforcing her creative skills, using drawing and painting.



conclusion

- strengthen self awareness and self-compassion
 - strengthen emotions regulation
 - strengthen communication skills
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- creating hope and mastery