

# 166 SELF HARM COPING STRATEGIES

“Your brain is lying to you if it says you deserve pain. You don’t, you deserve love and compassion”

## THE COPING STRATEGIES THAT WORKED FOR ME:

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2. \_\_\_\_\_
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**You are so brave. Keep going...  
there is always a solution!**

### **Alternatives for when you're feeling angry or restless:**

- Scribble on photos of people in magazines
- Viciously stab an orange
- Throw an apple/pair of socks against the wall
- Have a pillow fight with the wall
- Scream very loudly
- Tear apart newspapers, photos, or magazines
- Go to the gym, dance, exercise
- Listen to music and sing along loudly
- Draw a picture of what is making you angry
- Beat up a stuffed bear
- Pop bubble wrap or balloons
- Splatter paint
- Scribble on a piece of paper until the whole page is black
- Write your feelings on paper then rip it up
- Use stress relievers
- Build a fort of pillows and then destroy it
- Throw ice cubes at the bathtub wall, at a tree, etc
- Make a soft cloth doll to represent the things you are angry at; cut and tear it instead of yourself
- Break sticks
- Make yourself as comfortable as possible
- Stomp around in heavy shoes
- Play handball or tennis
- Yell at what you are breaking and tell it why you are angry, hurt, upset, etc.

### **Alternatives that will give you a sensation (other than pain) without harming yourself:**

- Hold ice in your hands, against your arm, or in your mouth
- Run your hands under freezing cold water
- Splash your face with cold water
- Put PVA/Elmer's glue on your hands then peel it off
- Massage where you want to hurt yourself
- Take a hot shower/bath
- Jump up and down to get some sensation in your feet
- Write or paint on yourself
- Take a cold bath
- Put tiger balm on the places you want to cut. (Tiger balm is a muscle relaxant cream that induces a tingly sensation. You can find it in most health food stores and vitamin stores.)

### **Alternatives to help you sort through your feelings:**

- Phone a friend and talk to them
- Make a collage of how you feel
- Negotiate with yourself
- Identify what is hurting so bad that you need to express it in this way
- Write your feelings in a diary
- Free write (Write down whatever you're thinking at that moment, even if it doesn't make sense)
- Make lists of everything such as blessings in your life
- Make a notebook of song lyrics that you relate to
- Call a hotline
- Write a letter to someone telling them how you feel (but you don't have to send it if you decide not to)
- Start a grateful journal where every day you write down three: good things that happened/ things that you accomplished/ are grateful for/ made you smile. Make sure the journal is strictly for positive things. Then when you feel down you can go back and look at it
- Learn HALT signals (hungry, angry, lonely, tired)
- Get out on your own, get away from the stress
- Plan regular activities for your most difficult time of day
- Make a phone list of people you can call for support. Allow yourself to use it.
- Pay attention to your breathing (breath slowly, in through your nose and out through your mouth)

### **Alternatives for when you're feeling panicky or scared:**

- "See, hear and feel"- 5 things, then 4, then 3 and countdown to one which will make you focus on your surroundings and will calm you down
- Listen to soothing music; have a CD with motivational songs that you can listen to
- Meditate or do yoga
- Name all of your soft toys
- Hug a pillow or soft toy
- Hyper focus on something
- Do a "reality check list" - write down all the things you can list about where you are now (e.g. It is the 10th November 2019, I'm in a room and everything is going to be alright)
- With permission, give someone a hug
- Drink herbal tea
- Crunch ice
- Feel your pulse to prove you're alive
- Put your feet firmly on the floor
- Accept where you are in the process. Beating yourself up, only makes it worse
- Touch something familiar/safe. Leave the room
- Lay on your back in bed comfortably (eyes closed), and breathe in for 4, hold for 2, out for 4, hold for 2. Make sure to fill your belly up with air, not your chest. If your shoulders are going up, keep working on it. When you're comfortable breathing, put your hand on your belly and rub up and down in time with your breathing. If your mind wanders to other things, move it back to focusing ONLY on the synchronized movement of your hand and breathing.

### **Alternatives for when you're feeling guilty, sad, or lonely:**

- Congratulate yourself on each minute you go without self-harming
- Draw or paint
- Look at the sky
- Call a friend and ask for company
- Buy a cuddly toy
- Give someone a hug with a smile
- Put a face mask on
- Watch a favorite TV show or movie
- Remember a happy moment and relive it for a while in your head
- Try to imagine the future and plan things you want to do
- Look at things that are special to you
- Compliment someone else
- Make sculptures
- Watch fish
- Play with a pet
- Imagine yourself living in a perfect home and describe it in your mind
- Allow yourself to cry; crying is a healthy release of emotion
- Accept a gift from a friend
- Carry tokens to remind you of peaceful comforting things/people
- Take a hot bath with bath oil or bubbles
- Curl up under a comforter with hot cocoa and a good book
- Make affirmation tapes inside you that are good, kind, gentle (Sometimes you can do this by writing down the negative thoughts and then physically re-writing them into positive messages)
- Make a tray of special treats and tuck yourself into bed with it and watch TV or read

### **Alternatives that are completely bizarre. At the least, you'll have a laugh:**

- Crawl on all fours and bark like a dog or another animal
- Run around outside screaming
- Laugh for no reason whatsoever
- Make funny faces in a mirror
- Without turning orange, self-tan
- Put faces on apples, oranges, or other sorts of food
- Go to the zoo and name all of the animals
- Blow bubbles
- Pull weeds in the garden

### **Alternatives that will hopefully make you think twice about harming yourself:**

- Think about how you don't want scars
- Treat yourself nicely
- Remember that you don't have to hurt yourself just because you're thinking about self-harm
- Create a safe place to go
- Acknowledge that self-harm is harmful behavior: say "I want to hurt myself" rather than "I want to cut"
- Repeat to yourself "I don't deserve to be hurt" even if you don't believe it
- Remember that you always have the choice not to cut: it's up to you what you do
- Think about how you may feel guilty after self-harming
- Remind yourself that the urge to self-harm is impulsive: you will only feel like cutting for short bursts of time
- Get your friends to make you friendship bracelets: wear them around your wrists to remind you of them when you want to cut
- Be with other people
- Make your own list of things to do instead of self-harm
- Make a list of your positive character traits
- Put a Band-Aid on the area where you'd like to self-harm
- Recognize and acknowledge the choices you have NOW
- Pay attention to the changes needed to make you feel safe
- Notice "choices" versus "dilemmas"
- Lose the "should-could-have to" words. Try... "What if"
- Kiss the places you want to SH or kiss the places you have healing wounds. It can be a reminder that you care about myself and that you don't want this
- Choose your way of thinking, try to resist following old thinking patterns
- The Butterfly project- draw a butterfly on the place(s) that you would self-harm and if the butterfly fades without self-harming, it means it has lived and flown away, giving a sense of achievement. Whereas if you do self-harm with the butterfly there; you will have to wash it off. If that does happen, you can start again by drawing a new one on. You can name the butterfly after someone you love.
- think about what you would say to a friend who was struggling with the same things you are and try to be a good friend to yourself.
- Make a bracelet out duct tape, and put a line on it every day (Or any period of time) you go without self-harm. When it's full of lines, take it off and make a chain out of all the bracelets and hang it up somewhere where you can be reminded of your great progress.

### **Alternatives that will distract you or take up time:**

- Count up to ten getting louder until you are screaming
- Sing on the karaoke machine
- Complete something you've been putting off
- Take up a new hobby
- Tell and laugh at jokes
- Play solitaire
- Count up to 500 or 1000
- Surf the net
- Make as many words out of your full name as possible
- Count ceiling tiles or lights
- Search ridiculous things on the web
- Color coordinate your wardrobe
- Go to the park and play on the swings
- Call up an old friend
- Go "people watching"
- Play a musical instrument
- Watch TV or a movie
- Paint your nails
- Alphabetize your books
- Make origami to occupy your hands
- Doodle on sheets of paper
- Dress up or try on old clothes
- Write out lyrics to your favorite song
- Play a sport
- Read a book/magazine
- Do a crossword
- Draw a comic strip
- Make a chain link out of paper counting the hours or days you've been self-harm free using pretty colored paper
- Knit, sew, or make a necklace
- Buy a plant and take care of it
- Memorize a poem with meaning
- Learn to swear in another language
- Look up words in a dictionary
- Go outside and watch the clouds roll by
- Find out if any concerts will be in your area
- Make your own dance routine
- Trace your hand on a piece of paper; on your thumb, write something you like to look at; on your index finger, write something you like to touch; on your middle finger, write your favorite scent; on your ring finger, write something you like the taste of; on your pinky finger, write something you like to listen to; on your palm, write something you like about yourself
- Notice black and white thinking
- Go on YouTube
- Scrapbook
- Color in a picture or coloring book.
- Pay attention to the rhythmic motions of your body (walking, stretching, etc.)
- Choose a random object, like a paper clip, and try to list 30 different uses for it
- Pick a subject and research it on the web - alternatively, pick something to research and then keep clicking on links, trying to get as far away from the original topic as you can.