

# Scars of Survival: Innovative Strategies for Understanding and Managing Self-Harm

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What Does  
Recovery Mean to  
You?

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“I’m not even sure where the idea came from. I just knew it was something people did. I remember crying a lot and thinking, Why did I just do that? I was kind of scared of myself.”

- Joan, NYT

# What Makes This Topic Uncomfortable to Talk About?

Fear of saying  
the wrong thing

Feeling  
unprepared or  
unequipped

Worry about  
liability or legal  
implications

Discomfort with  
potential  
triggers for  
yourself

Personal emotional  
reactions (shock,  
sadness, frustration)

Navigating  
boundaries around  
disclosure and  
confidentiality

Helplessness

Concern over  
reinforcing behavior  
by giving it attention

# Provider Self-Reflection Tool

## REFLECTING ON PROVIDER DISCOMFORT WITH SELF- HARM & SUICIDALITY

### PURPOSE

This worksheet is designed to help providers explore and better understand their own emotional responses, values, and beliefs surrounding client self-harm and suicidality.



### 1. INITIAL REFLECTION

- What comes up for you emotionally when a client discloses self-harm or suicidal thoughts?
- What are your immediate physiological reactions when these topics arise in session?
- What beliefs or messages have shaped how you respond to suicidality and self-harm?



### 2. TRIGGERS AND INTERPRETATION

- What meaning do you attach to a client's self-harm or suicidal ideation?
- Have you ever felt personally responsible for a client's safety? How did you carry that?
- What past experiences may be influencing your reactions in the present?



### 4. SUPPORT AND GROWTH

- What internal or external resources do you draw upon when you feel overwhelmed by these topics?
- What would help you feel more equipped or less reactive in responding to suicidality and self-harm?
- What strengths do you bring to this work, even when it's hard.



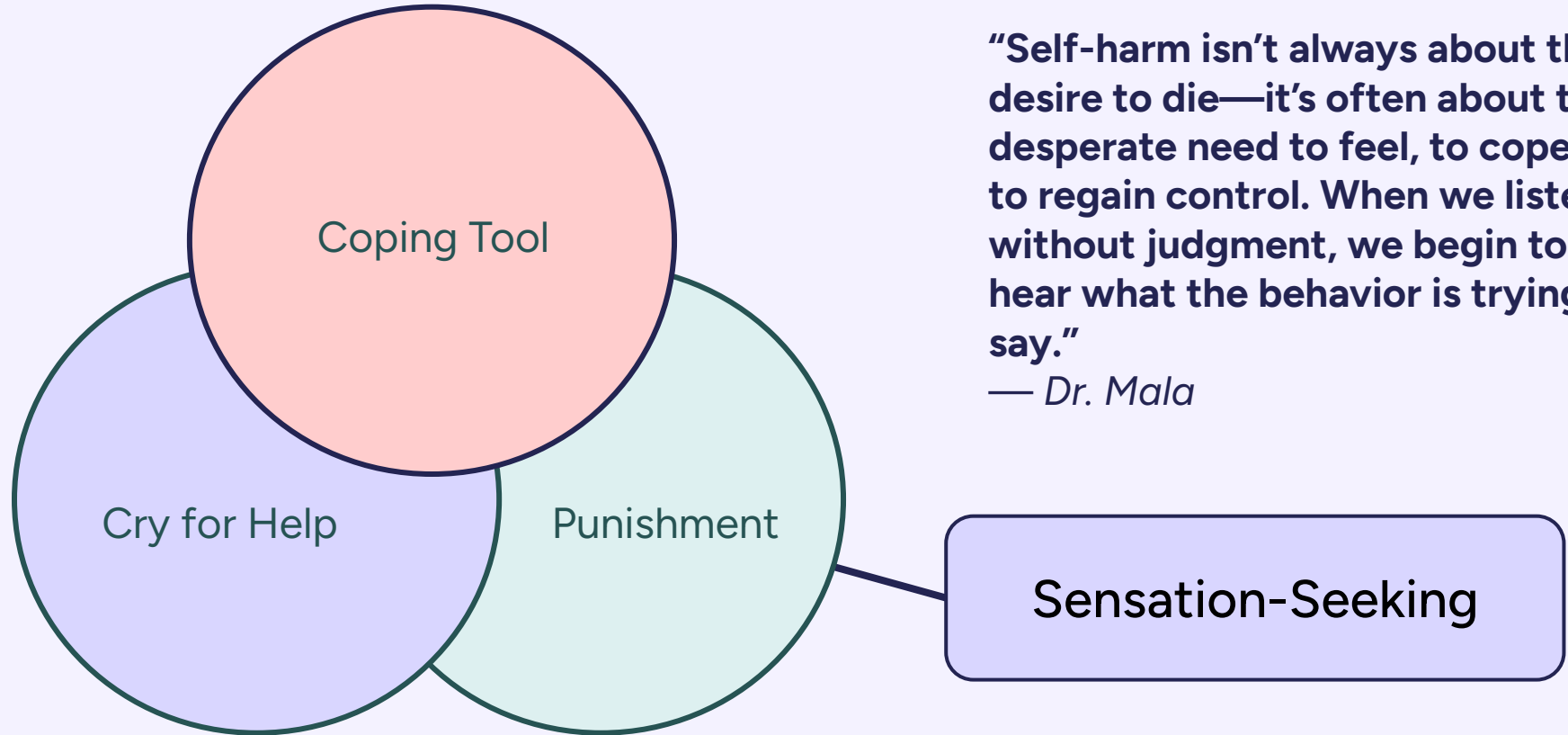
# What Is Self-Harm?

Coping tool

Habit

Emotional  
response

# The Role of Self-Harm



**"Self-harm isn't always about the desire to die—it's often about the desperate need to feel, to cope, or to regain control. When we listen without judgment, we begin to hear what the behavior is trying to say."**

*— Dr. Mala*

What Can Trigger Self-Harm?





# Long-Term Effects

Source of  
shame

Cover-up  
worries

Also, source of  
pride

# Covering Scars: Pros and Cons

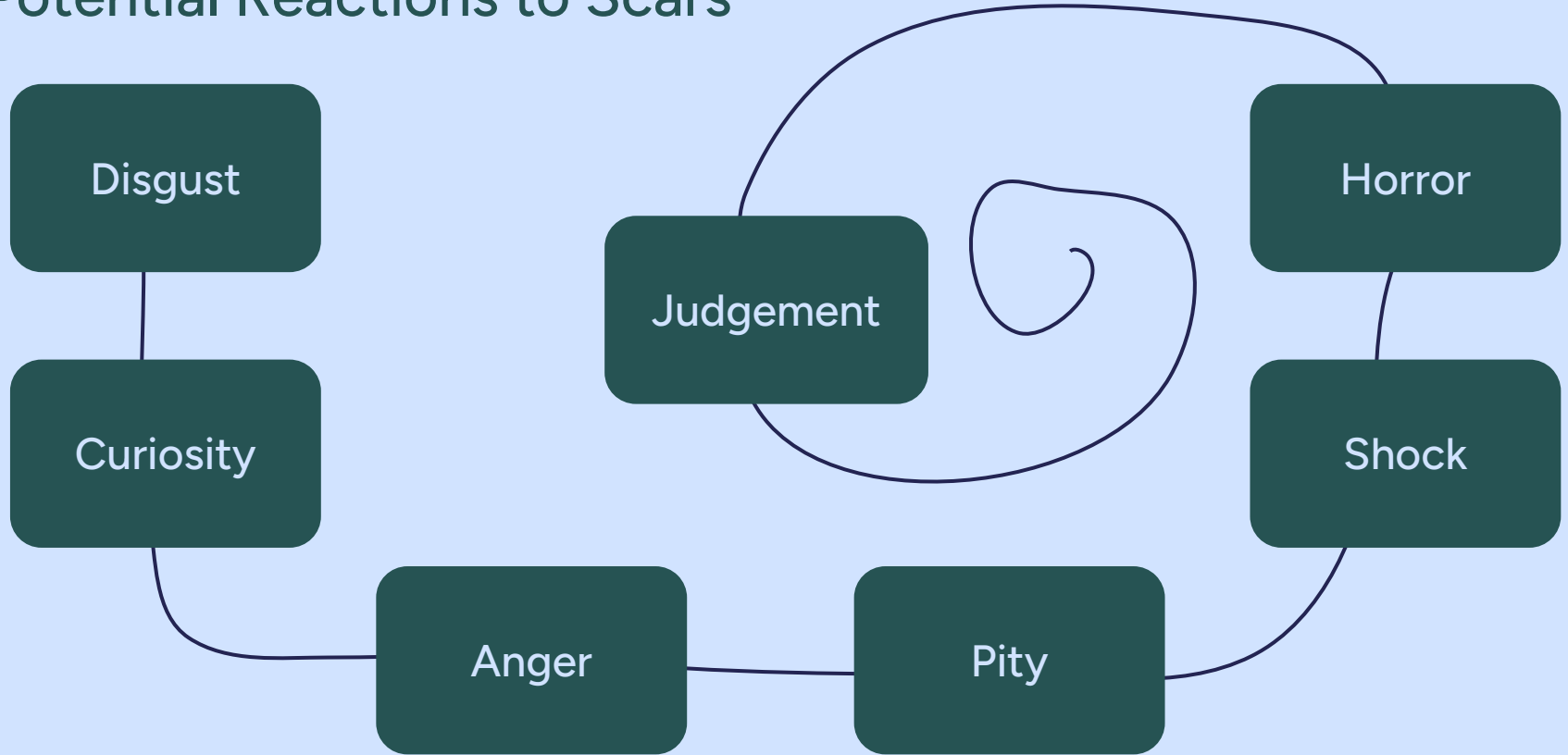
## Pros:

1. Increased mental & physical comfort
2. Increased self-confidence
3. Avoids reminders that could re-trigger

## Cons:

1. Lack of acceptance can cause ongoing distress
2. Mental preoccupation
3. Reduced quality of life

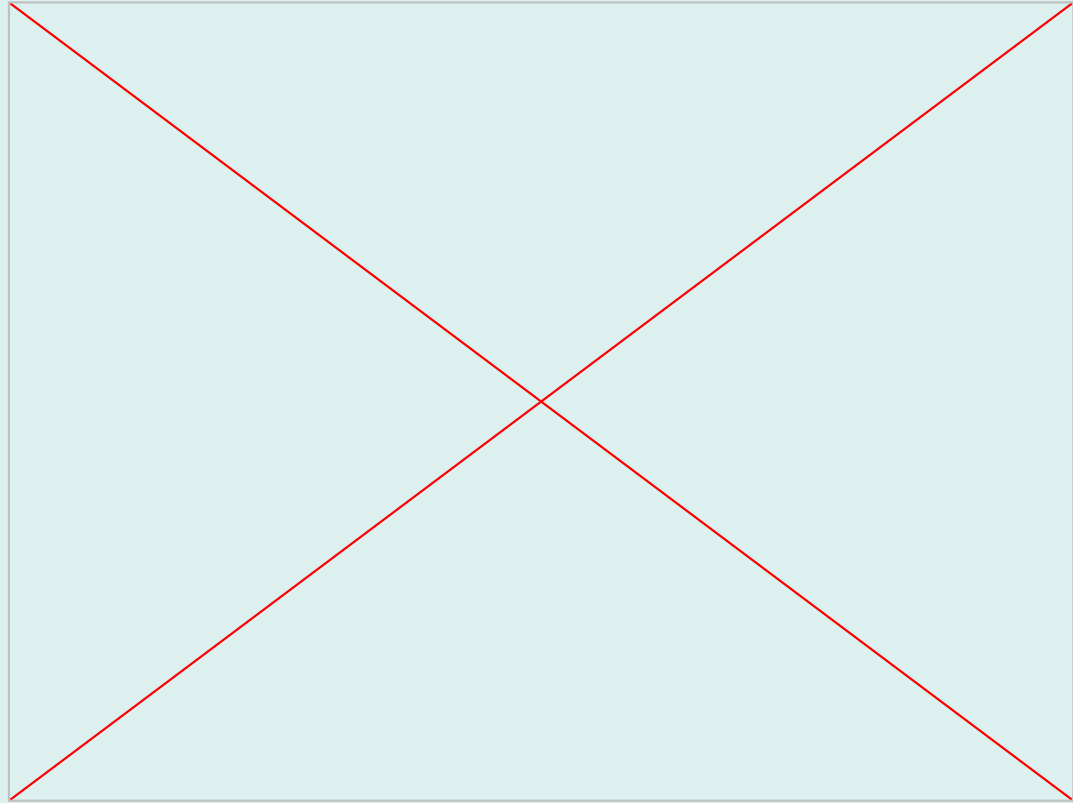
# Potential Reactions to Scars



# Reactive and Proactive Healing

# Treatments for Self-Harm

- Replacement skills
- CBT and DBT
  - Finding the root cause  
of the behavior
- Family involvement



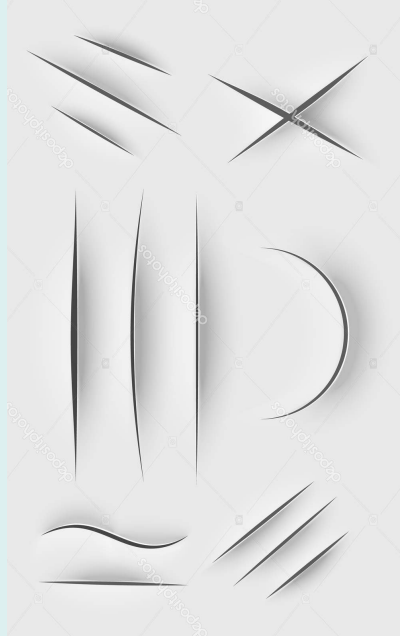
# Develop Replacement Skills

Instead of focusing on not doing it,  
**focus on doing something else.**

1. Potential skills include:
  - a. Drawing with a red marker.
  - b. Holding ice.
  - c. Intense exercise, like burpees.
  - d. Contacting a help line.
  - e. Snapping a rubber band.
  - f. Cutting paper.
  - g. Drawing hard with a pen.
  - h. Set something on fire (safely).
    - i. Put yourself around other people.
  - j. Write a poem.
  - k. TIPP.
    - l. Go on a walk.

# Building Trigger Tolerance

Benign shapes and objects can trigger someone with a history of self-harm, even if they've accepted their scars.



1. Trigger tolerance is a key component of relapse prevention.



# Lead Away from Personification

Acceptance is great.

Pride isn't a necessity.





# Abstinence + Acceptance

= healing

= hope

= confidence

# Acceptance Looks Different on Everyone

Acceptance might mean choosing not to cover up visible scars, or it could mean pursuing permanent coverups, medical treatments, or style changes.

*There are scars  
under this!*



# No Right Choice, Only Their Truth

Concealment may work best for now, but that may change—and vice versa. (And that's okay!)

Emphasize their control in the decision and their actions.

Getting through  
the  
moment...and  
the aftermath.



Exercise:

Step Into Understanding: An  
Empathy Walk

Recovery isn't a destination—it's a dialogue. Between our wounds and our wisdom, between the self we protect and the self we're becoming. Recovery isn't linear, and it isn't quiet—it's a series of brave decisions to stay curious, connected, and compassionate. Whether you're a provider, parent, or person walking through your shadows, you belong here. You deserve tools, truth, and tenderness. -Dr. Mala

# Thanks!

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