

When coping means cutting

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Sam Hunt, from Birmingham, is 17. When she was severely bullied at school, she regularly cut herself with a knife - and took repeated overdoses.

Doctors say the number of people coming to A&E units with self-harm injuries is on the rise.

Sam now talks to other young people about self-harm and how to cope with it. She wrote her disturbing story for BBC News Online and explained how she broke the self-harm habit.



The rate of self-harm may be increasing

“ When I first began senior school, I found myself alone for the first time in two years, with no friends and only myself to depend on.

I thought that there would be so many people on their own like me and that it would be easy to make new friends.

How wrong I was.

I tried so hard, but it just didn't seem to work. I sat alone in many of my lessons.

At a size 12 to 14, and being taller than my peers, I realised I was developing quicker than them. At first I wasn't bothered.

Then, as I walked the corridors, people began shouting 'fatty' at me and making fun of basically everything.

One small childish comment changed my whole life: 'You smell'. It stuck and soon people were avoiding me in the corridors.

I went home every night and scrubbed myself in the shower until my skin was red.

Overdose

The angrier I got, the more they enjoyed watching me. I was getting on the bus in the morning thinking I was going to throw up from fear.

“ I went home every night and scrubbed myself in the shower until my skin was red ”

One November it became so hard for me that I gave in and took an overdose of painkillers.

'Good - that will make them sorry', I thought before I drifted to sleep.

When I woke up in the morning I decided not to tell anyone, faking illness as a cover up.

But I really did want to die. My dad and the school found out about the overdose, and a few weeks later, as I sat in my bedroom, I suddenly became so angry that I grabbed a razor and began slicing at my wrists.

I hacked away for a long time before I realised that it made me feel better cutting at myself - so I moved the razor up my arm and cut there.

In a way, I saw what I was doing to my body as an art - I enjoyed watching the blood and seeing what patterns I could make.

Cover-up

Soon I was cutting myself so often it became habit. For every person that hurt me I cut myself a little more.

I would say their names aloud. Then cut.

I was careful to cover it up, although looking back, I think that people knew but just didn't say anything. Once, I had my wrists right through to my elbows bandaged.

I took four more overdoses, each time, more desperate, I pushed up the amount I was taking, regardless of the damage I was probably doing to my body.

On the fourth occasion, I was at home alone - I just sat there thinking.

I was involved at the time with Children's Express - a journalism project aimed at eight to 18 year olds.

When someone from the project rang that evening, he tried to calm me down, and for the first time, I cried about the whole situation.

'I don't want to die,' I sobbed down the line. That night, I wanted to change.

Low point

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I was referred to both a counsellor at school, and to a child psychiatrist. I hated everything about the psychiatrist, but the counsellor helped me.

But I still found myself slipping deeper and deeper into depression. I just drew far away from any kind of relationship with anyone.

I cut myself nearly every day, in the toilets at school, at home, anywhere I could.

Other girls with similar problems approached me. One, who I'll call Rachael, was also bullied, and cut herself. We became friends.

“ Sometimes I pulled my school tie around my neck until my lips turned blue ”

Some mornings she came in with blood all over her wrists, and she hardly ever ate.

In the end, I experienced the same attitude that many people have about self-harmers: 'They can't be helped'. There seemed to be nothing that I could do.

Turning around

I continued to self-harm, finding new ways, as cutting didn't seem to have the same effect anymore.

Sometimes I pulled my school tie around my neck until my lips turned blue, and I pulled scarves around my neck, holding them tight until the whole world seemed to spin.

Once, I stood at a train station willing myself to jump off the platform, then climbed a high-rise block, finding a gate barring access to the roof.

But finally I gave in and began to talk properly to the counsellor. I began telling her what I was feeling and about the bullying.

I was prescribed antidepressants, then pills for anxiety and to help me sleep.

I met my mum, who I hadn't seen since I was four - and it was the biggest step that I have had to make.

Breaking the cycle

It's been nearly a year now since I cut myself, and I'm glad I'm not trapped in that cycle anymore.

I hope to work as a writer one day, and I'm taking AS levels and working with a mental health charity, Mind Out for Mental Health.

I read Sylvia Plath's poetry recently - which deals with issues such as depression and self-harm.

I think self-harm is one of the most difficult things a person can do to themselves - but I'd say to others in my situation that they can get to where they want to be, someday.

Everything I've experienced has just made me a stronger person.

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