The Assessment and Treatment of Adolescent and Adult Self-Harm

‘The Feelings, Thoughts and Voices of Self-harm and Suicide’

A One Day Workshop with Professor Stephen Briggs
(University of East London)
&
Dr Terence Nice (University of Kent)

Venue: Thannington Resource Centre, Thannington Road, Canterbury.
Kent CT1 3XE

Date: Wednesday 11th December 2013

Time: 9.30-4.30 Lunch is between 1pm-2pm with various eateries in the locality.

Cost: Private & Public Organizations – Block Bookings per person (£50); Individual (£60); Student £40.

How to Book: Please contact Dr Terence Nice to reserve a place at: T.A.Nice@kent.ac.uk or Terence.Nice@nhs.net. Tel: 01227 823380 or 01843 604777.

Payment: Please send a cheque made out to Terence Nice or request an invoice. Cheques should be sent to: Orchard House, 17 Church Street. Broadstairs. Kent. CT10 2TT. Thank you.
Programme of the Day

9.30-9.30: Arrival, Coffee and Registration

9.30-10.15: Setting Goals and Sharing Experiences

10.15-11.15: ‘The Hurting’

Coffee: 11.15-11.30

11.30-12.30: ‘Defences and Suicidal Feelings’

12.30-1pm: Exercise

1pm-2pm: Lunch

2pm-3pm: ‘Internal Relatedness in Suicidal States’

3pm-3.15: Coffee

3.30-4.15: ‘Interior Voices of Suicide’

4.15-4.30: Plenary Session
Outline of the Sessions

The Hurting: This session examines the thoughts and feelings that underpin adolescent self-harm, in particular, self-cutting and self-poisoning. These thoughts and feelings are related to powerful and intense emotions that commence with the onset of puberty and an emerging adolescent sense of self. In order to harm the self, the young person must have a representational schema of a psychological and bodily sense of self. The integration of interior and exterior states is a fundamental task of adolescence and parents are instrumental in holding and containing troubled adolescents. Self-harm can be conceived as a means of regulating highly disturbed states of stress and distress.

Internal relatedness in suicidal states
This session explores some qualities of internalised relationships that can be seen in suicidal states when "someone is hurting/killing/mutilating someone". These relationships are characterised by having an aim of changing or restoring, through suicidal acts, the other’s view of the self, and/or resolving a seemingly impossible internal conflict, which threatens to overwhelm the self. In these moments there can be a suspension of reality – especially but not only in adolescents - when there is what Maltzberger calls a 'transient psychotic state" accompanied by a belief that death can be survived. These themes will be illustrated by case examples to generate discussion of how to recognise and address these qualities of internal relatedness in clinical work.

Defences and suicidal feelings
This session explores how communications defending against overwhelming anxieties can make it difficult for clinicians to identify, and respond accurately to, suicidal intentions. Two different patterns of defensive narrative relatedness will be explored to illustrate; in these suicidal relatedness and conflicts are either downplayed or exaggerated. These have the effect of applying pressure on the therapist to enact a role in the other’s suicidal conflict. These defended narratives also relate to perceptions of the body, which can be treated as if an attachment figures, or a representation of an ‘object’ and it thus becomes part of the suicidal conflict. The session will focus on exploring these themes, with case illustrations, to consider how clinicians can make sense and work with these communications within the therapeutic relationship.

Interior Voices of Suicide
This session considers the phenomena of destructive suicidal voices that can compel adults to take their own lives. Where do these destructive voices come from and how do they arise? We examine the developmental and clinical aspects of these inner voices. Are such voices organic disorders or residues of an instinctual death drive as described by Freud or perhaps ghosts in the nursery made
manifest in adulthood. How do we address these voices therapeutically in order to moderate their impact in our clinical work?

**Biographies**

**Stephen Briggs** is Professor of Social Work and Director of the Centre for Social Work Research at the University of East London. I worked in the Adolescent Department at the Tavistock Clinic for more than 20 years as a clinician, teacher and researcher. I have researched and written widely on adolescent mental health, self-harm and suicide, and infant mental health and infant observation. My books include: *Working with Adolescents and Young Adults: A contemporary psychodynamic approach* (2008), *Growth and Risk in Infancy* (1997), and *Relating to Self-harm and Suicide; psychoanalytic perspectives on practice, theory and prevention* (2008, edited with Alessandra Lemma and Will Crouch). I was a member of the NICE Guideline development Group for Self-harm; longer term management (CG133, 2011).

**Terence Nice**: I am Lecturer in Psychological Therapies at the University of Kent, Canterbury. I trained as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist at the University of Kent before going onto the MA in infant observation at the Tavistock Clinic, London. I have always been fascinated by a developmental trajectory with regards to child, adolescent and adult mental health. Recently, I completed my doctoral thesis ‘Troubled Minds and Scarred Bodies’ and presented a paper upon the issue of self-harm at the UKCP Research Conference, Regents Park, London. I am a member of the UKCP Research Faculty Committee. I have chaired and co-chaired the second and third annual UKCP research conference. Recently, I have published an article on self-harm in The Psychotherapist based upon my own doctoral research. I am currently undertaking some post-doctoral research into adolescent self-harm and in psychotherapy process research.