

SELF-HARM

A Cry for HELP!

Self-harm, defined as the direct and intentional injuring of one's own body (e.g. by cutting), is known to be a type of physical response to emotional pain, as it distracts the individual from that pain. Since online platforms have become such an accessible and convenient way for youth to express themselves, the phenomenon that the Internet is becoming a medium for a new form of self-harm practice should not come as a surprise.

Cyber self-harm replaces emotional pain with another form of emotional pain. Such a negative emotional reinforcement is extremely worrying, as self-harming behaviours can change rapidly and even escalate in scale.

Identifying the Problem

Forums and other social media sites are arenas for this new behaviour. Youth seek out negative feedback, even if it means having to post the comments themselves. Here is how it works:

The youth may set up multiple online profiles and use different names to post abusive messages to himself or herself. The youth will post a message on his profile and log out, then log in under a new name to post a rude reply to his original post, and then log out to start the process over again. By setting up numerous accounts, he can construct an entire conversation himself, all of it in a bullying tone.

The abusive replies reinforce the youth's feelings towards himself or herself. The youth asks provoking questions like, "Am I attractive?" on a site where teens gather, like the proverbial red flag to a bull. Others charge in with negative replies, such as "you're ugly" and "you're nothing".

The Prevalence of Cyber Self-Harm

According to the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Centre, MARC, 9% of the 617 students they anonymously surveyed admitted to cyber bullying themselves. This caught experts by surprise; youth using the web in such a way and the magnitude of the problem.

A tragedy that brought this situation to light was the suicide of a 14-year-old who claimed she was being cyber bullied on a social networking site. But the site showed proof that the youth was actually writing many of the abusive comments to herself anonymously.

According to the MARC survey, 13% of those who admitted to cyber bullying themselves were boys while 8% were girls. In particular, a young boy named Ben (name modified to protect his identity) posted open-ended questions on Facebook that attracted teens. According to Ben, the negative responses he received "persuaded [him that he] was as bad as [he] thought, [he] wasn't imagining it".

Proper Assessment

Correctly identifying the case as one of cyber self-harm is the first step for therapists. After which, they must tread carefully and respectfully to gain the trust of the youth: Encouraging the youth to find supportive communities where they can feel safe and be themselves. Their online contacts need to be evaluated for potential risks such as grooming*, and their online presence

need to be made secure. One should use this as an opportunity to engage the youth in a positive and constructive way. Only after understanding the context of the situation and assessing social systems (i.e. friends, school and home), should the treatment plan be derived.

Developing a Treatment Plan

An essential step towards proper treatment is to understand what the youth hopes to feel and gain through self-harm. At this point the treatment plan should focus on addressing this behaviour and healing the damaged sense of self. Here is an overview of this plan:

1. Making Sense of Cyber Self-Harm

Therapists all agree that emotional self-harm is psychologically complex, and indicates the presence of a damaged sense of self.

Like all types of self-harm, the process in itself helps to distract the youth from the deep emotional pain he feels. With cyber self-harm, he is replacing one form of emotional distress with another. One major concern of the therapists is the fact that the negative reinforcement provided by the 'bullying' posts feeds the volatility of those feelings, which can then escalate to physical forms of self-abuse.

According to the youth interviewed, one objective behind cyber self-harm is for their distress calls to get heard though in an indirect and negative way. They try to get the attention of their peers and adults around them, in hopes that they will stand up for them by posting positive responses. They are actually looking for signs that others truly worry and care about them.

2. Breaking through the Secrecy Barrier

Workers in this helping profession have found that the biggest deterrent to providing help is the wall of secrecy surrounding cyber self-harm. According to Rachel Welch, director of SelfHarm.co.uk, youth's fear of being discovered is a much stronger motivator than their desire to seek help.

Group identity is the strongest during adolescent years. Youth are terrified of the risk of being humiliated if peers discover that they have been cyber bullying themselves. Workers must respect that fear before they can make any headway. The worker can be effective if he focuses on the fact that the youth are harming themselves, instead of pointing out the 'weird' aspect of this behaviour. The youth are already aware of and frightened by it themselves, thus often suffering from major self-esteem issues.

Those who have made progress with youth suffering from cyber self-harm suggest that the best solution is to enquire what they need, gain insight into their minds as to their thoughts and why they are suffering. By finding out as much as possible with openness and curiosity, one will promote trust in the relationship. This is the starting point towards developing a treatment plan.

3. Change Happens Slowly

Pointing out how dangerous and illogical cyber self-harm is can elicit agreement from the youth, but it doesn't mean that they will stop doing it. Clearly, there are complex psychological processes involved.

Cyber Self-Harm (cont'd from page 1)

To illustrate, Ben (mentioned above) knew something was very wrong with his actions, but he could not stop. He had to ask a self-harm support team if what he was doing was qualified as self-harm because he was not sure. Fortunately, he finally accepted that it was self-harm and received help.

4. Dangers of Questionable Contacts

A worker should ask for a list of all contacts that the youth has made online. Many of these contacts are possibly complete strangers. Emotionally vulnerable youth are at risk of experiencing grooming* so they require support to distance themselves from such strangers. The youth may need practical help; such as deleting email addresses, creating a new Facebook account and deleting old messages. The youth can simultaneously be introduced to forums and online groups that are positive, safe and supportive.

Connecting with others can be a significant way to build feelings of self-worth. It is important to encourage the youth to get involved in projects that help others. This is a powerful method that promotes feelings of self-worth. It is far more effective than an adult telling him that he is important.

5. Importance of Honesty

Cyber self-harm is deeply rooted in secrecy and deception. One of the most critical actions that a helping adult can bring to the equation is honesty. It is essential to be upfront with the youth about any lack in one's understanding towards the youth's situation. When approached with openness, non-judgment and humility, the youth will be more willing to respond positively. What the youth looks for is reassurance and acknowledgement that he is normal and not 'weird'. Even if an adult does not understand the reason behind the cyber self-harm, his acceptance is the first step for the youth to feel the trust and consequently let go of the façade.

The Road to Recovery

Cyber self-harm occurs at the intersection of vulnerability and technology. Though the medium and method used are new, the behaviour is well-known. Adults working with these youths should provide compassion, honesty and a helping hand that will lead them onto the path towards psychological health. All self-harm can lead to trauma, so even if the behaviour stops it may take time for the emotional scars to fade.

**Grooming: When a sexual predator gives toys and other things to a youth to gain trust and sexually harm the youth.*



THINK
Before You Post!

In April, MeToYou conducted an assembly talk for Damai Secondary School's lower secondary students on the topic of Social Media and its positive and negative impacts.

The objective of the talk was to convey the message: Whatever you post online can either lead to a positive outcome (i.e. anti-bullying social movements), or a negative outcome (i.e. cyber bullying).

Thus, it is important to THINK before posting on social media: Is it going to be *True*; is it going to be *Helpful*; is it going to be *Inspiring*; is it *Necessary* to post what they plan to, and is it a *Kind* post.

The students were very responsive and enthusiastic when questions were posed. At the end of the day, they were able to recall the core message – **THINK before you post!**

Parents' Support Group: Navigating Around Gaming and Social Media

Earlier in January, MeToYou kick-started our Parents' Support Group (PSG), titled "*Gaming. Social. Media. (G.S.M.) Navigator*". This is a combination of therapeutic and psycho-educational group work and it is conducted in an open-group style to cater for working parents. Through this PSG, we aim to create a safe environment for parents to share their feelings when it comes to parenting, in relation to their children's gaming and online habits. We also aim to facilitate an open discussion among parents on ways to guide and nurture their children in this Internet-dominated era.

Conducted on a monthly basis (every last Friday of the month), topics covered till date include:

1. **January** Understanding how Generation Gap plays a Part in Parenting
2. **February** Youth and their Life-Stage Development
3. **March** How come Youth Nowadays are so Hooked onto the Internet
4. **April** Key Warning Signs of Addiction
5. **May** Communicating with Youth

In January, an overview of how horizontal stressors (i.e. environmental influences and culture) interact with vertical stressors (i.e. family structure, attitude towards education and values) were discussed. Additionally, inter-generational transmission of values and expectations were also explored, enabling parents to see how their pasts affect their parenting styles and how these relate to their current observations in their children.

The key topic in February was on understanding the development of life stages in youth. Using Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, parents were able to identify how Internet usage and gaming fit into their youth's current life stage.

Subsequently in March, parents explored the push and pull factors toward gaming for their children, along with the gaming's function for youth. This provided a paradigm shift in understanding the term "Internet Addiction", as parents are now able to see beyond gaming and understand the underlying context and reasons for their children's gaming habits.

In April, parents explored the key areas of addiction to understand what exactly constitutes addiction and where their children are faring right now.

Through enriching discussions on a specific theme each month, parents have constantly feedback that they gained a sense of universality — the feeling of having problems similar to others and that they are not alone; and gained new knowledge from one another on tackling their parenting challenges at home. On another note, it had been observed that this PSG had been cathartic for some parents as it helped them to release the emotional tensions in their daily parenting. Also, the act of parents sharing their life stories and supporting one another empowers themselves!

Through the parents' support group, I got to know many things that I did not know initially. With the new knowledge gained, it allows me to pre-empt future parenting situations that can happen.

Also, through this support group, it also made me feel that I'm not alone in this and that things are not as bad as what they seem and there is a possibility of things becoming better.

M, PSG Participant

It has been an enriching experience and learning from other parents as well as from all the social workers on the issues of cyber related matters. It is also helpful to gain insights and understand the various types of cyber games.

K, PSG Participant

It has been a fruitful experience as we have learned various methods on how to cope with our son's computer addiction. After the sharing by other parents we realise that we're not alone and there's always help available from your organisation and other parents alike.

Mr and Mrs A, PSG Participants

Heartfelt Notes from our Parents' Support Group (PSG)

Through the sharing session, I learn and practice ways on how to communicate more effectively with my child.

Mrs W, PSG participant

Coming to the support group gives me a more detached view of my distressed situation with my son. It allows me to learn new and neat coping techniques and also gain support that there are other mothers going through similar situations as mine.

Mrs K, PSG Participant

I find that the parents' support group is a very good platform where parents and counsellors come together to share problems and to exchange ideas on how to improve parent and child relationships. We also discuss the current issues facing the teenagers nowadays. I often feel enlightened and encouraged after each group discussion and went home with new information and techniques that the counsellors imparted to us. I would like to thank the counsellors for all the time and effort in organising the parents' support group and has given us loads of advice and emotional support.

Mdm T, PSG Participant

The monthly sessions with other parents are very beneficial to me. I am currently trying to apply the knowledge that I have taken away from the sessions. Such as being more patient, listen to my child and think more before reacting. Although communication with my child can still be challenging, I hope to see some improvement along the way.

Through the sessions, we were sharing information on effective discipline and how we can apply it to our children. The staffs at MeToYou have valuable information and were excellent listeners and encouraging to the parents who attended the sessions.

P, PSG Participant

Seniors are the **New YO!!!ung**



Continuing our efforts in providing the youth a platform to engage in meaningful community work, YO!!! (Youth Outreach) has grown steadily in size and scale since January 2015! :D

In view of the increasingly apparent inter-generational gap, YO!!! collaborated with seniors from YAH! (Young At Heart), a sister agency under Montfort Care, and provided a bridge for the two invaluable assets of community to come together.

On the morning of the 19th of March, both youth and seniors gathered at Jurong East Sports Complex. Despite meeting each other for the first time, they were full of vim and vigor! Both parties actively participated in and were partnered up through an ice-breaking game before the start of the journey! After which, with the lead of Jurong East Sports Complex officers, our youth and seniors successfully completed an astonishing 5km route around Chinese Garden and Jurong Lake! Surprisingly, the seniors remained energetic and lively while our youth were the ones exhausted and drained! This certainly challenged the youth's conventional and stereotypical view that seniors are frail individuals, and pushed them to reconsider their view on the silver population.

Throughout the event, our youth showed initiative; preparing the bicycles and adjusting the saddles for seniors, befriending and cycling alongside them, as well as taking up the role of safety marshals to ensure seniors do not fall behind. All these little efforts warmed the seniors' hearts, and they in turn showed their care and concern over lunch by interacting with the youth as if they were their own grandchildren. Some seniors even called their youth partners their 'grandson' or 'granddaughter'!

For MeToYou, it was touching to see such connection between seniors and youth. With this, we certainly look forward to the possibility of a reunion in the near future to maintain the bond, as well as to fulfill the wishes of the youth to keep in touch with the community.



On the 5th of April, MeToYou joined the Marine Parade NPC Community Policing System (COPS) Roll Out at Marine Crescent and was one of the community partners invited to showcase our services to the public. With the aim to raise public awareness about cyber-related crimes such as cyber bullying and love scams, 11 youth volunteers from YO!!! came forward to man the MeToYou booth and engaged the public through various activities.

For instance, one of the activities was to seek the public's responses on cyber bullying and love scam scenarios, asking them to jot down the possible things they can do if they were in the shoes of the victims or bystanders. This helped to incite empathy amongst members of the public and consequently, the awareness towards these issues. Besides this, the public was also attracted to our 'Spot The Difference' activity, which required them to spot 7 differences between a flyer and banerect. Another hot favourite was our 'Real Life Instagram Frame' of which they could take photos with.

Despite the hot weather and huge public turnout, our youth volunteers continuously displayed their youthful energy in engaging the public. A few of them even patiently and respectfully explained the activities to Emeritus Senior Minister, Mr Goh Chok Tong, when he visited the



MeToYou booth. Such public campaigns allowed our youth volunteers to not only hone their social skills when interacting with the public, but also to foster the spirit of teamwork.

Seeing the growth of our youth volunteers was definitely an enormous encouragement for MeToYou to continue providing YO!!! as a platform for youth to be engaged in enriching and meaningful offline experiences! With this, YO!!! is certainly progressing, growing and becoming a place of positive peer influence for the youth! Let's look forward to YO!!! in the coming months! :D

Attention, Class!

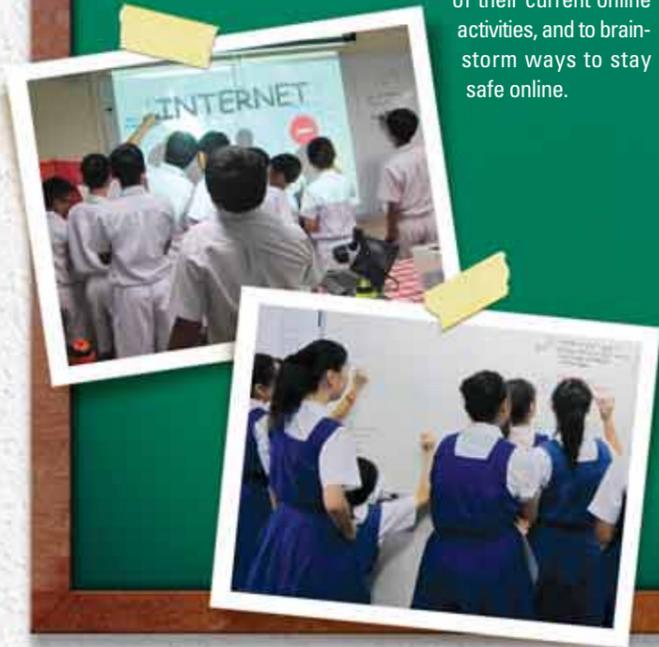
During the first quarter of 2015, MeToYou conducted a series of community education workshops for CHIJ St. Theresa's Convent and St. Joseph's Institution, reaching out to over 720 students! Content covered in these workshops include a mix of existing topics ("Balance Use of the Internet", "Cyber Bullying" and "Cyber Wellness") and new topics of interest and relevance to the students ("Excessive Gaming" and "Social Media & Me").

In the "Balance Use of the Internet" workshops, students were challenged to think about pros and cons of the Internet, and to recognize the importance of self-management in preventing problems associated with excessive use. The "Cyber Wellness" workshop then builds on the former by asking students to critically think about the risk levels of their current online activities, and to brainstorm ways to stay safe online.

Recognizing the importance of covering both the breadth and depth of cyber wellness education, specific topics such as "CyberBullying" were introduced. Here, students were educated on the different types of cyber bullying, the impact of cyber bullying on victims, and what students can do as a victim or a bystander.

In addition, to keep abreast and meet the changing normative needs of the students, two new topics, "Excessive Gaming" and "Social Media & Me", were introduced. For the former, students were asked to identify the pros and cons of gaming through an interactive debate, and were taught to identify the key areas to look out for should they become too immersed in gaming. For the latter, students were asked to identify the dangers of existing social media platforms that they are using, and come up with creative means to tackle these dangers. Additionally, facilitators explored with students on how the different social media platforms serve different purposes for different groups of people.

Responses from the students have been largely positive, with majority being participative and indicating that the workshop had been useful for them. Feedback from the students include asking MeToYou facilitators to share more experiences and real-life stories to them, to have more games, and for MeToYou to conduct workshops for them again!



A Story of Change...

Jonathan* was introduced to MeToYou when he joined one of our in-school programs. It has been almost a year since he joined us, and we are truly proud of the progress that he has achieved.

When Jonathan first joined MeToYou, it was difficult to engage him. He would do whatever he wanted to, and would not hold much regard for anyone. At times when he felt that someone offended him, he would resort to taking unnecessary actions in attempt to solve the issue. All these have gotten him the disciplinary attention of his school.

In school, Jonathan was not focused and did not take things seriously. He would not do his assignments and would not turn up for his co-curriculum activity (CCA). Back at home, Jonathan would neglect housekeeping and instead, spend long hours gaming on the computer, disregarding his father's request for him to stop.

Due to these various issues, Jonathan had a strained relationship with his father, and had an unpleasant time in school.

It took a few months before MeToYou was able to engage Jonathan effectively, and we were very glad that he was willing to step out of his comfort zone to make change possible. As MeToYou engaged him more and more regularly, we began to notice a slow but progressive change in him.

Today, Jonathan is no longer the impulsive boy we once knew. He is now able think before he acts, and is now able to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behaviours. With regards to school, Jonathan now puts effort into academics and is doing well; topping his class in various subjects' tests. He has also resumed his CCA, and is currently holding a leadership position.

At home, Jonathan is now able to adjust his priorities. Currently, he not only makes time for academic revision, but also gyms regularly to keep fit! This is a stark contrast to his past, where he would play computer games the moment he reaches home. Most importantly, his relationship with his father has also improved.

Nonetheless, Jonathan still enjoys playing computer games as he aspires to be a game designer. However, he now has better time management and is no longer hooked on gaming.

Presently, Jonathan is even a regular volunteer with MeToYou and is willing to help whenever he can!

Jonathan's journey was not easy and smooth, but his determination to change for the better warmed our hearts. Truly, change does not occur overnight but it is youths like Jonathan who motivate us to keep on going.

**Name has been changed to protect the identity of the youth.*



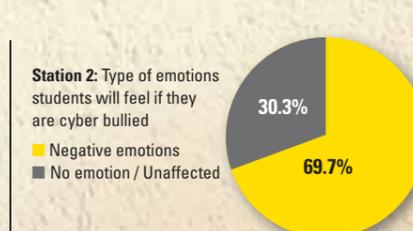
Learning Symposium!

On the morning of 27th March, MeToYou was invited by St. Hilda's Secondary School to set up a booth at their Learning Symposium event. At this learning symposium, students had the chance to visit booths set up by many community partners to learn more about their services, programmes, and community outreaches. This carnival-style symposium was held exclusively for all Secondary 3 students during their two recess slots which lasted about 45 minutes each. It was a great platform for MeToYou to educate both students and teachers on two prevalent cyber issues: Cyber-Bullying and Love Scams.

In order to engage students through fun and interactive ways, two activity stations were set up in the booth. Station 1 was on cyber-bullying and love scams: Students read three case studies surrounding the two cyber issues and wrote down the solutions they would have taken if they were a victim and a bystander in any of the case studies.



Station 2 was a game station focused on cyber-bullying: Students wrote on paper the emotions they would feel if they were being cyber-bullied. They were then invited to crush these papers and throw them from a distance; into either of the three buckets prepared (these actions mimic the "crushing" and overcoming of negative emotions and "throwing" them out of the students' lives). Attractive prizes were given out for each successful throw into the buckets. Responses from both stations were collated and presented in the pie charts below.



Through this symposium, students are now aware that MeToYou is a direct and safe channel for them to seek help for cyber-related issues. Some students even signed up to be a MeToYou youth volunteer! In general, the symposium ran smoothly and students who visited MeToYou's booth enjoyed themselves, especially at the game station. Two groups of students have even expressed strong interest in partnering MeToYou to conduct their Service Learning Projects!

Looking Ahead!

G.S.M. Navigator (*Gaming. Social. Media. Navigator*) provides a platform for parents to gain new knowledge in relation to parenting in this Internet-dominated era. Through the facilitation of a safe environment, parents are able to share their feelings when it comes to guiding and nurturing their children in relation to their children's gaming and online habits. Each session focuses on a specific topic in relation to children and parenting, and through the creation of a rich discussion in each session, we hope that parents can benefit and learn from one another.

5 & 12 August (Wednesdays)
Love Scams and Extortion Workshop
Venue: CHIJ St. Theresa's Convent

14 August (Friday)
Assembly Talk & Booth
on Cyber-related Crime Awareness
Venue: St. Patrick's School

28 August (Friday)
Parents' Support Group (Open to Public)
Venue: Blk 6 Marine Terrace

4 July (Saturday)

Parents' Workshop (Hougang)
Time: 5pm – 7pm
Venue: Tony Buzan Learning Centre,
Hougang Mall

13 – 17 July (Monday – Friday)

Cyber Wellness Week (Booth)
Venue: Temasek Secondary School

22 July (Wednesday)

Cyber Bullying Workshop
Venue: CHIJ St. Theresa's Convent

29 July (Wednesday)

Love Scams and Extortion Workshop
Venue: CHIJ St. Theresa's Convent

31 July (Friday)

Parents' Support Group (Open to Public)
Venue: Blk 6 Marine Terrace

25 September (Friday)

Parents' Support Group
(Open to Public)
Venue: Blk 6 Marine Terrace

Venue: Block 6 Marine Terrace

Time: 7.00pm to 9.00pm

(light refreshments will be provided from 7.00 – 7.30pm)

Dates: Monthly basis, every *last Friday* of the month

To register: Call us at **9173 1766** (Dan or GQ)

or email us at dan.chan@metoyou.org.sg or

guanqun.goh@metoyou.org.sg

Things to note:

- Session will be conducted in English.
- If there are any dietary restrictions, do inform us so that we can cater the food accordingly.
- Child-care will not be provided. However, should that be the only obstacle for attending the PSG, do inform either Dan or GQ and we can work together to figure a way out.

MeToYou's Calendar of Events

2015

MeToYou Contacts

MeToYou Cyber Care

Handphone: 9173 1766

Email: contact@metoyou.org.sg

Website: www.metoyou.org.sg

Address:

- 27 Telok Blangah Way #01-1018, Singapore 090027
- 53 Marine Terrace #01-227, Singapore 440053

Please feel free to contact us if you have any queries on cyber-related matters! :D