

Emotions and your behaviours

The emotional rewards that reinforce self-destructive behaviours are important to understand. Two types of behaviours that people with overwhelming emotions often engage in are cutting / self-injury, and manipulating others. Both of these behaviours offer short-term rewards that make them likely to be repeated.

Cutting/Self-injury

Many people who cut, burn, or scar themselves say that their actions make them feel better or that their actions relieve some of their pain. To a certain degree, they're right. Cutting and other types of self-injury can cause the body to release natural painkillers called *endorphins* that help relieve the pain. These painkillers can make a person feel physically and emotionally better for a very short amount of time. Yet as temporary as these rewards are, these physical and emotional feelings reinforce self-injury in the future. And while the pain relief is temporary, the scars, the memories, and the guilt that often accompany these actions still remain.

If you engage in any cutting or self-injuring behaviors, identify what those behaviors are in the space below. Then identify what the temporary rewards might be. And finally, identify what the long-term cost and dangers are, due to those behaviors.

The cutting and self-injuring behaviours that I engage in are: _____

The temporary rewards for my behaviours are: _____

The long-term costs and dangers of my behaviours are: _____

Manipulating Others

Other forms of manipulation can have short-lived emotional rewards that lead to repetition. When you force someone into doing what you want, maybe you feel satisfied or in control. These can all be strong emotional rewards, especially considering that many people with overwhelming emotions feel like their own lives are out of control. But, again, even these emotional rewards are temporary.

Here are some examples. Whenever Brandi felt bored she liked to "mess with people," just to give herself pleasure. Often she would lie to her friends and tell them fake rumors she claimed to have heard about them. Then, when her friends would get upset, Brandi would pretend to comfort them. This made her feel powerful, until her friends discovered the truth and then stopped talking to her. Similarly, Jason was very controlling of his girlfriend Patricia. When they would go out for dinner, he would order for her, even if she wanted something different. He also wouldn't let her spend time with her friends; he was constantly calling her on her mobile phone to see where she was; and he told her that if she ever left him, he'd kill himself. Patricia really cared about Jason, and she didn't want to see him get hurt, but eventually, Jason's manipulative behaviors wore her out. So, despite his suicidal threats, Patricia broke up with him.

Remember, no one likes to be manipulated. Eventually, the person who is being manipulated gets tired of being controlled and puts up resistance. Then the relationship becomes confrontational and unrewarding and often ends very painfully. This is usually the worst possible result for a person struggling with overwhelming emotions because he or she is often extremely afraid of being abandoned by others. In fact, all the manipulative behaviors are usually attempts to cope with this fear of being left alone and to force people to stay with them. But when the relationships fail, the fear of being abandoned becomes a reality, and this can set off even more incidents of self-destructive behaviors.

If you engage in any manipulative behaviours, identify what those behaviours are in the space below. Then identify what the temporary rewards might be. And finally, identify what the long-term cost and dangers are due to those behaviours.

The manipulative behaviours that I engage in are: _____

The temporary rewards for my behaviours are: _____

The long-term costs and dangers of my behaviours are: _____