RELAPSING

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By: Katy

You made the courageous decision to stop self-harming and even managed a certain amount of time without needing to self-harm.

You feel you're making progress, and that you have left self-harm in the past. "Never again" you've told yourself.

And then, out of nowhere, the urge to self-harm returns - and before you know it, you've done it.

And, in that moment, you feel like you've failed.

The important thing to realize is that "it happens".

You are certainly not alone. Undoubtedly at some time or another, most people who stop self-harming for a period of time, will relapse somewhere along the way.

You may have feelings that you have "failed" or that you are ashamed or angry at yourself for resorting back to the behavior you so desperately wanted to leave behind. Whilst those feelings may be understandable, they do not reflect reality. You do not deserve to feel ashamed or angry at yourself because you have tried your absolute best - and that is all you or anyone else can ask of you. You have shown courage and determination, and for that, you deserve to feel proud.

Did you know that some experts believe that relapsing is actually a necessary and important part of the recovery process, as each time we relapse, we have the opportunity to learn more about our triggers and how to deal with them in a healthier way. Although it is unfortunate that you have relapsed, try to view it an an opportunity to learn more about

yourself and to move even further ahead with your healing.

Why did I relapse?

Most of the time, we are looking for answers to our questions. Its perfectly understandable that you want to understand why you self-harmed again - maybe so that you can do something to prevent it recurring in the future.

It appears that most relapses in self-injury are preceded by an event which results in the loss of self-esteem or feelings of control, or when there has been an overload of emotions. There are advantages to becoming aware of what your triggers are, because being aware allows you to start planning how to deal with this issue in the future. Being aware of your triggers can allow you to modify your behavior whenever faced with this trigger (i.e. avoidance, getting support, disengaging etc), as well as highlighting the areas of your life where you need to do more recovery work.

It may be worth trying to identify if there were any life / personal changes or significant events that occurred prior to the strong urge to self-harm returning. Asking yourself some key questions may help prompt you to identify what the trigger actually was. This life may be a place from which to make a start:

- How have things been going at work / school? Have their been any stressful deadlines / exams to deal with? How have your relationships been with colleagues / friends?
- How is your relationships with friends / family / partner? Have you recently suffered a break up? Have you been able to live up to their expectations? Has a loved one been unwell? Have you changed therapists? Have you just started a new relationship?
- How has your health been? Have you been physically unwell? Have you changed any medications? Have you felt depressed / anxious? Have you been sleeping poorly? Have you been drinking too much alcohol / taking drugs?

- Have you suffered a traumatic event? Have you had an accident? Have you suffered a bereavement? Have you been struggling with new memories?
- Were you triggered by anything specific? Did you find a film distressing? Did you
 witness something upsetting? Did someone ask you something? Did someone say
 something to you? Did something on the news trigger you? Did you see your abuser
 / someone that looked like your abuser?
- Have you been involved in a big / stressful event recently? Marriage? Divorce? Birth of a child? Moved house?

Have I failed?

No.

You have done your best, and therefore this cannot be called failing! No matter how long you have managed to abstain from self-harm, this is an achievement that no one can take away from you.

It may be worth reminding yourself of just what your achievements in regard to this have been:

How long did you manage to not self-harm for?

Were there times you came close to self-harming, but didn't do it?

What other ways of dealing with pain / strong emotions / memories etc have a learnt during this time?

Do I feel I have learnt anything from this relapse?

Try to remember that this self-harming is a *temporary* coping mechanism that has come into play. You can and *will* move on again from here.

Having self-harmed, am I now back at square one?

NO! Absolutely not.

Having lived without self-harm for a period of time (whether a day, a week, a month, or 10 years), you will have learnt ways to cope and live life without self-harming.

There is nothing you can do which could cause this learning to be unlearnt!

Therefore, you are starting with more knowledge than you had when you stopped self-harming for the first time, or the second time...or however many times you have stopped in the past.

How do I start again?

You need to decide that you are ready to commit to not self-harming again. We all know how hard it can be to not self-harm, and therefore, unquestionably it can really help if you are committed to the plan of action before you commence it.

One of the most important things is to make sure you take care of yourself and are in the best possible state to continue on your journey after a brief interlude. Therefore, ensure that you:

- Eat well and drink plenty of water.
- Take light to moderate exercise.
- Try to get plenty of rest and sleep.
- Go to see your doctor and have a check-up. See if there is anything he can suggest that may help.
- Don't bottle up your feelings talk to someone, write, paint....whatever helps.
- Do something special for yourself or something you enjoy.

Try to think of all the things that have helped you to not SI in the past. It may be that you remember certain distractions or techniques that have worked particularly well for you - and others that didn't work so well. Knowledge is power, and having these tools at your disposable will hopefully give you a head start to getting back on the road again.

Try to enlist the support of people in your support network - and lean on them for a while if

you need to. There is no shame at all in asking for a helping hand.

Keep reminding yourself that you've proved before that you don't need to self-harm, but that you are the one in control of your behavior.

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