

## Video transcript: Brief contact in the emergency department

I think every time you see a self-harming client you've got an opportunity to make a difference.

One of the differences is engaging with that service user in a way that begins to make them feel that they want to come back to the service, and in general the NHS service. Because obviously one of the things that happens if they get a bad experience is that they won't come back.

Most self-harmers don't go to services, we don't know about most self-harmers... we really, really don't, they're a hidden population, and probably more so amongst men than women. So it's really important to have an experience which is a good experience.

Now it's not going to be transformatory in the sense that they're going to change as a result of that encounter, but there is going to be a shift in their relationship to the, sort of, care institutions and the NHS in this situation. The kind of people that I have seen who have been self-harming, they'll have been self-harming for 30, 40, 50 years, some of them, and they'll have had bad experience after bad experience.

It doesn't really help them to feel that they're going to come back and have some more of this, what happens is they only go in extreme circumstances when they really have to go because they are in such a terrible state. But if they have an encounter with someone who says, even in a 10-minute consultation, I'm going to really try to get to some sort of understanding... even, forget about understanding, acceptance really, that's all that needs to happen, and some sort of sense that there's a human being who's accepting another human being is interested in them. That's very, very, profoundly important.

It then opens up the space in which you can then say to that person, 'look, we've had an interesting discussion, this is obviously a terrible time for you, would you like to consider thinking about having further psychological work.' So that 10 or 15-minute encounter can be massively pivotal. Not in the sense that they've changed as a result of that encounter, but they've shifted to say, 'I want to carry on with this, in a way which gives me a continuation of the experience I'm having with you, which is that you are accepting me, making me feel that it's worth exploring. I'm a worthwhile person. It's worth bothering.'

Remember, one of the things about self-harmers is they absolutely hate themselves most of the time. They've got horrible, terrible feelings about themselves, so if anybody is giving them a slightly different experience, a validating experience—there's a therapist that talks about the invalidating environment that self-harmers come from, that if you give them a validating experience and say, what you're going through is real... in brackets I might not think this is the best way of you doing it but I'm not going to say

anything about that, I'm going to remain silent about that for the time being, close brackets... then they can feel they are having an experience in which something about them is being accepted. Maybe, which may be really pivotal, it may be [an experience] like they've never had before.

At that point, you can either make it a possibility that now they'll move on to something else, or you can just enforce the problem which is creating yet another invalidating experience, which is to say that, 'life is shit. It doesn't matter if they're professional or not, they're all just the same.'"