

taking control of your life: surviving and rising strong 30

for you to know

Pop star Demi Lovato shared, “I am a survivor in more ways than you know.” You too have learned to be a survivor! Many people who engaged in self-harm have stopped hurting themselves. They have overcome and grown from their difficult and destructive experiences and gone on to live much healthier and happier lives. There are people who harm themselves who will say they are happy with hurting themselves. However, you now know this is quite the contrary; often people who engage in self-harm feel guilty, shameful, and even worthless, but not happy. Sometimes your mind might play tricks on you, and you might begin to believe that self-harm makes you happy or fixes your problems. Remember to take a rigorous, hard, and honest look at yourself—you know your own truth. When the urge to self-harm arises or you notice the thoughts and feelings that come before the self-harm behavior, ask yourself these questions:

Does self-harm make you happy?

Does self-harm fix your problem(s)?

Does self-harm cause you physical and/or mental scars?

Being a *survivor* of self-harm means:

having mindful awareness of your self-harming thoughts and feelings;

no longer engaging in your self-harming behaviors, thoughts, and feelings to the best of your ability;

learning and engaging in healthier ways to cope and manage your pain and suffering without self-harm—choosing to do something different (for example, self-care);

moving through, overcoming, and growing from the painful and harmful experiences—rising strong.

rising strong: you are a survivor!

You are ...

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Awareness: You have learned how to be mindful, spaciouly and directedly aware. You can choose where to put your attention. You can respond instead of automatically react.

SURVIVOR

Strengths: You have many strengths to help you cope and manage painful situations. You can use these strengths to make different choices and take new paths.

Unique: Don't try to be anyone else. They are already themselves. You are you, with your gifts, flaws, talents, and imperfections. You are, like every human, perfectly imperfect.

Respect: You deserve self-respect and respect from others. Don't let others tear you down. Haters are going to hate. Hang with those who lift you up, not those who bring you down.

Values: Values are the qualities you consider important to you and a way to live your life. Use these to guide your actions and choices.

Intuition: Trust your gut. Sometimes people can get stuck in their heads. When in doubt, check in with how you feel physically—take a “gut check,” and if it doesn't feel right, let this awareness guide your decision-making process and do something different.

Valuable: No one is going to value you as much as you do or can. It is so important to value all the parts of yourself and realize you do, in fact, have worth. Self-care is a great way to show yourself how valuable you are. Setting boundaries and saying no are also ways to respect yourself.

Openhearted: Your willingness to share your love and express warm feelings to others and to yourself is important to feel safe, secure, and connected.

Resilience: The ability to bounce back and recover even after adverse and difficult situations, traumas, or tragedies this is part of post-traumatic growth.

take control of your life

English philosopher Francis Bacon wrote, "Knowledge itself is power." One way to take control of your life is through knowledge. The more you know, the more able you are to make thoughtful decisions and choices about the actions you take. The following questions can help increase your knowledge and the power to combat self-harming thoughts and feelings before they lead to behaviors.

Write about your awareness of your senses, thoughts, and feelings.

Write down five of your strengths here.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

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What are some of your unique qualities?

What does it mean to you to be perfectly imperfect?

What does respect mean to you?

Who are the people in your life who respect you?

What are some of the values that are important to you?

Connect your mind and body to make decisions—use the information your body provides you physically to connect to your thoughts. Do you ever have a felt sense or a feeling in your gut, a hunch, or intuition about who people are (good, bad, trustworthy or not) or about events (what is going on or how something might turn out)? If so, explain.

When something doesn't feel right to you, where in your body do you feel it?

What self-care activities do you like to do?

What does self-love mean to you?

Who in your life is it safe to be openhearted toward?

What are some current things that require you to be resilient in order to get through the angst they bring up?

mindful takeaway in the moment Being a survivor means that every day you try your best to put one foot in front of the other and work to do the next right thing. Being a survivor doesn't mean perfection; rather, it is about progress and a willingness to grow, change, and look at yourself with acceptance and honest, open eyes.

break up with self-harm

It's time, with kindness, compassion, and assertiveness, to write a break-up letter saying farewell to your relationship with your self-harming behaviors. Let go of the power you've given over to the behaviors, as well as the thoughts or feelings that have been self-harming.

You can use these points to help you write your break-up letter:

- Acknowledge the self-harming behaviors that were there for you when you didn't know how else to cope with pain, stress, and suffering.

- Recognize whatever thoughts or feelings that would arise right before you did these self-harming behaviors.
- Acknowledge what you have learned, what you need, what is important to you, and what does not serve you or help you grow.
- Express gratitude for what you have learned. Perhaps you learned to become stronger; perhaps you learned something about what you need in your life, or something you no longer want.
- Explain why these behaviors, thoughts, and feelings no longer serve you.
- Share what you plan to do now instead of hurting yourself.

Use a separate piece of paper to write your break-up letter.

Looking at what you wrote, what feelings, thoughts, or physical sensations came up for you?

How do you feel now that you have written this break-up letter?

congratulations on being a survivor!

Now that you have finished saying your final farewell to self-harm, fold, crumple, or tear up your letter. Throw it away and begin the process of letting go. It no longer serves you. You can be free from the feelings, thoughts, and relationship you have had with self-harm.