

4<sup>th</sup> Annual Congress on MENTAL HEALTH

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**Embracing our scars: Self-harm 101****Bree Wiles**

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Self-harm is still a topic that is not talked about enough, especially with the growing concern for the safety of LGBTQIA+ youth. Many LGBTQIA+ youth end up engaging in some form of self-destructive behavior from dealing with the stigma and negative socialization around them. Within the LGBTQIA+ youth population, self-harm alongside depression and suicide is especially common. This disparity shows the importance of providing LGBTQIA+ youth with resources that affirm their identities. As professionals and parents, it is important to understand the types of self-harm, average age range when it can occur, causes, populations, risk factors, and self-harm in connection with mental health and suicide. It is imperative to provide protective factors for LGBTQIA+ youth in helping to replace self-harming behaviors with positive coping strategies. This author provides lived experience and a multitude of professional experiences working with LGBTQIA+ youth that has shown how taking away self-harming tools is not always the most effective strategy to mitigate self-harming behaviors. Helping LGBTQIA+ youth in different contexts including from a professional, parent, and educator perspective allows unique ways in which each can assist an LGBTQIA+ youth who is self-harming. The stigma, shame, and many misconceptions about self-harming behaviors is discussed in depth including from the lived experience of this author and professional experiences working with queer youth. Most importantly, it is imperative to know how to approach LGBTQIA+ youth who are self-harming including how to speak in a compassionate and empathy-based framework. Clear interventions and therapeutic techniques based in evidence-based practices on alternatives to self-harm, lived experience, and previous practices with queer youth who are self-harming are provided and discussed.

**Biography**

Bree Wiles is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker at UCLA Hospital. She currently works in the inpatient pediatrics unit where she works with youth ages 0-25. She interned at D'Veal Family and Youth Services and helped to create the LGBTQIA+ program within the agency. She has provided LGBTQIA+ identity trainings to administration in the Department of Mental Health, the Department of Children and Family Services, probation, and school districts. She interned at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, in the Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine - Center for Transyouth Health and Development where she provided short term therapy to trans youth. She worked in outpatient community mental health where she focused on providing therapy to queer youth and trained staff in LGBTQIA+ competencies. She has presented at national conferences on self-harm in the queer community. She looks forward to opening a private practice where she will work with LGBTQIA+ youth.