Pat Deegan's

Personal Medicine for Self-Harm



Patricia E. Deegan, PhD
with Allison Stiles, MA, LPC

Pat Deegan's

Personal Medicine for Self-Harm

©2019, 2021 by patdeegan.com All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-7337002-6-9
To inquire about use please contact pat@patdeegan.com

Published by Pat Deegan

www.patdeegan.com

"This Guide helped me understand my self-harm was a survival strategy. It helped me survive a lot of bullying as a kid. Personal Medicine is helping me ask that angry kid in me, *What do you need*? *How can I help*? When I use this Personal Medicine, my self-harm impulses quiet down. "



"I used to live in shame because I self-harmed. Discovering my Personal Medicine gave me new ways to express myself.
Today I feel good about me."



"Personal Medicine helped me discover what I could DO to quiet my impulses to self-injure."

Hi friend,



My name is Pat Deegan. Like you, I have been diagnosed with a mental health condition. Learning to manage my self-harm impulses was a big challenge in my early recovery. But since discovering my Personal Medicine, I have the tools and know-how to notice impulses to self-harm and to let them pass. It feels good to live my life without the shame, confusion and secrecy that can accompany self-harm.

Remember, self-harm is not the same as having thoughts about suicide. If you are having thoughts about suicide, please contact a friend, peer supporter or mental health professional.

If you are struggling with a self-harm challenge, this Guide can help. It is intended for those of us with self-harm challenges. There are many things we can do to help ourselves. That's where this Personal Medicine Guide comes in.

Personal Medicine is what we DO to get well and stay well. It can be the big things in life that put a smile on our face and give our lives meaning and purpose. For example, working at a job we love can help us get up in the morning with a bright, positive attitude toward our day.

Personal Medicine can also be the smaller things we do to practice self-care. For example, making model airplanes can help us focus and forget about the day's worries. Playing basketball with friends can help us channel anger and diminish impulses to self-harm. Religious readings may help us feel less scared and more trusting of the world.

Importantly, Personal Medicine is what we DO. It's not what we TAKE. Using lavender oil to relax us is not Personal Medicine. Lavender oil is something we TAKE (inhale). However, lighting a candle, carefully spreading lavender oil on a pillow and meditating when the urge to self-harm hits, is Personal Medicine. It's something we DO that promotes our health.

Recovering from self-harm often means finding the right balance between what we DO and the prescribed psychiatric medicine we may take. Psychiatric medications can be helpful in our recovery. But recovery also involves becoming an expert in our own self-care. That's where Personal Medicine comes in.

As you work through this Guide, I will invite you to discover your own Personal Medicine for Self-Harm. First, you'll have a chance to **learn** about self-harm and how to use the Personal Medicine Cards for Self-Harm. Then I'll invite you to **act** and discover which Personal Medicine

Cards work best for you. The final step will be **improving** and even expanding on your Personal Medicine over time.

I hope this guided experience helps you get to know your self-harm impulses, put them in perspective, and harness the power of Personal Medicine to support your healing and recovery. You can use this Guide on your own or in a group. This is your Guide. When you are done, consider sharing it with a peer supporter, therapist, staff person, friend or family member.

I recommend moving through this Guide at your own pace. No need to do it all at once. Think of your Guide as a living document. If it makes sense, work on one section for a short while. Gain insights. Find solutions. Put your Guide down. Pick it up again when you are ready. Remember this is your journey. You are the expert in you.

Personal Medicine is powerful medicine. You can do this.





About self-harm

Self-harm is often a way of expressing and managing deep emotional distress. It can be a way of getting relief from emotional pain. Self-harm can be a way to break through emotional numbness and feel again. It can be a way of reclaiming power in a situation where we feel powerless. For some, self-harm is a way of exercising control over our body.

Self-harm does not necessarily mean we want to die. Instead, self-harm may be a way of going on with life, even when things seem unbearable. And that's the part that can be a bit tricky. Intertwined with the destructive aspect of self-harm is usually a strong, healthy part of ourselves. Untangling and keeping our healthy survival energy, while letting go of the destructive dimension of self-harm, is a goal for many of us.

Self-harm challenges are not uncommon. It is estimated that 1 in 100 people self-harm. Typically, self-harm is not an effort to "get attention". In fact, many of us self-injure in secret and attempt to hide our wounds.

The good news is there are effective treatments for self-harm. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), DBT and talk therapy can help. Trauma work and body work can be healing. If there is an underlying psychiatric challenge, like PTSD or depression, medication may help. And importantly, there are also things we can do to help ourselves. That's where Personal Medicine comes in.

Examining my self-harm

Getting to know your self-harm is an important first step. Each person's experience of self-harm is unique. Answering these questions will help you get to know your unique experience of self-harm.

If you were to stop self-harming, how would your life improve?

example: "If I were to stop self-harming, I could wear any clothes I wanted without being afraid of people seeing my wounds."

Give examples of how your self-harming gets in the way of doing things that are important to you.

example: "I've been avoiding going to the beach because of my wounds. I'd like to go to the beach again."

What situations trigger your impulses to self-harm?

example: "When I get really angry at my mother and don't express it, I feel the need to self-harm."

How long have you been experiencing challenges with self-harm? Has it been getting better or worse over time?

example: "I began to cut as a little kid. But it was very infrequent. As a teen I began to bang my face with a rock. That was rare too. But after I moved away from my abusive family into my own apartment, I self injure more often. So it's on the increase."

Describe a time when you delayed acting on your impulse to self-harm. How did you do that?

example, "I got a chance to babysit my little nephew for a couple of weeks while his parents were away. If the urges came, I just reminded myself of my responsibility to my nephew. He was my priority and I powered through the urges."

Have you discovered you already know how to do something that helps with your self-harm challenge?

If so, congratulations. That means within you is inner wisdom. Some people call this inner wisdom *resilience*. Personal Medicine taps into this inner wisdom so you can recover and get back to doing the things that are important to you.

If you didn't discover anything that helps, no worries. I believe everyone has inner wisdom. It may just take a bit more time for you to discover yours.

In the next step, we invite you to learn how others have tapped into their inner wisdom. You might want to take a break before beginning the next section.

Personal Medicine Cards for Self-Harm

Personal Medicine can be a powerful support for recovering from self-harm. We have created a series of Personal Medicine Cards to help you on that journey. These Cards did not come from a textbook. They were developed by people just like you. Each Card has a front and back. They are designed to be cut out and folded for ease of use.

On the front (left side) of each Card is a strategy for managing self-harm and a description of the strategy. The back (right side) of the Card has space for you to personalize the strategy and say if and how it helped.

One of the Personal Medicine Cards I personally find helpful is called **"Tell on Myself"**. Take a moment to read it:

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

Tell on myself before I self-harm

Self-harm is often done alone and in secret. Telling a trusted supporter we are experiencing the urge to self-harm can help. Although it's not their job to rescue us, they can remind us of our intention to be kinder to ourselves. It's important to talk with our trusted supporter and make a plan *before* the urge to self-harm strikes.

Self-Harm 08

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

Before I hurt myself, I promise to:

☐ Tell my trusted supporter I am experiencing the urge to self-harm

Name:
Phone #:

What I say to my trusted supporter:

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes - it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No - I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

Notice the front of the Card contains a generic suggestion and a brief explanation. On the back of the Card is space for you to personalize the generic strategy so it's most effective for you. There is also a space for you to say if and how it helped. Check out what I wrote on the back of my Card:

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

Tell on myself before I self-harm

Self-harm is often done alone and in secret. Telling a trusted supporter we are experiencing the urge to self-harm can help. Although it's not their job to rescue us, they can remind us of our intention to be kinder to ourselves. It's important to talk with our trusted supporter and make a plan *before* the urge to self-harm strikes.

Self-Harm 08

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

Before I hurt myself, I promise to:

☒ Tell my trusted supporter I am experiencing the urge to self-harm

Name: Deborah

Phone #: 555-555-7899

What I say to my trusted supporter: I'm having those urges again. Can we chat about something safe until the urges pass?

What I want my trusted supporter to remind me of: My intention to find new ways of expressing my pain: playing guitar, or air guitar to my rage playlist.

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☒ Yes – it helps me *(describe)*: This helps me move past the urge to self-harm

☐ No – I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

After completing my Card, I tried it for a week and then checked the box on the back to indicate it was working for me. I also described how this Card helped me.

A second type of Personal Medicine Card is called the **Blank Card**. You can use the Blank Card to create unique strategies that will help you manage self-harm. It works a little differently than the other Cards.

Is my Personal Medicine powerful?

Is it a specific activity, not a feeling/state-of-being? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Is it something I do now, not a future goal? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Is it something I do, not something I take? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Does it say how it helps me? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Self-Harm Blank

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

My plan:

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes – it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No – I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

This is the Blank Card. Notice there is no generic strategy on the front. Instead, there is a space to write your own unique strategy for what you will do. There are also four questions. Answer them to make sure your Personal Medicine is truly powerful. If you answer "no" to any of the questions, go back and revise. On the back of the Card is a space to write your plan. Be as detailed as possible. Include when you will use your Personal Medicine, how you will use it and who you will share it with. As a final step, try your Blank Card out for a week. Then indicate if it is working for you by checking the boxes at the bottom of the Card. If it's not working for you, revise it or develop another Blank Card.

Here is a Blank Card I filled out:

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

Listen to music to help me wait out the urge

- The more I self-injure, the easier it is to give in to the next urge. The less I self-injure, the less powerful the urges become.

Is my Personal Medicine powerful?

Is it a specific activity, not a feeling/state-of-being?	☒ Yes	☐ No
Is it something I do now, not a future goal?	☒ Yes	☐ No
Is it something I do, not something I take?	☒ Yes	☐ No
Does it say how it helps me?	☒ Yes	☐ No

Self-Harm Blank

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

My plan: When I feel the urge, I listen to at least one song off my playlist before acting. If I can, I listen to 2 songs. Then 3 or more. The more songs I listen to, the more likely I will wait out the urge.

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☒ Yes - it helps me *(describe)*: Music lets me express my pain and rage

☐ No - I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

This card really works for me. Filling out Blank Cards is a great way to truly personalize your Personal Medicine for Self-Harm.

A final note about Personal Medicine Cards for Self-Harm. Some people think the Cards are simply coping strategies. But Personal Medicine Cards are personalized. This makes them much more powerful than generic coping strategies. Your Personal Medicine comes from the wisdom within you. It's totally unique and so are you.



Take a break?

You have just learned about Personal Medicine Cards. If you want to take a break, now's a good time. When you are ready, move on to the next section.

Learning What Others Have Done

Here are more examples of Personal Medicine Cards in action:

Peter survived child abuse. As an adult he self-injured as a way to release emotional pain from the past. It got to the point where he stopped dating because he felt so ashamed of the scars on his body. When working through this Guide, Peter got interested in the "**Declare My Intention**" Card. Read how he personalized the Card:

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

Declare my intention

Self-harm happens in the shadows of our lives. Saying out loud, *"I want to stop harming myself"* is powerful. It shines the light of our awareness on what we have been doing to ourselves. Speaking our intention to stop self-harming is the beginning of stopping.

Self-Harm 14

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

My intention: I will keep the hurt child inside me safe. I will not hurt myself today.

How I remind myself of my intention:
(example: "In the morning I say it to myself in the mirror.") I have a beautiful picture of me holding my little nephew. I have made it my home screen on my phone. It's like code for my intention and I see it often

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

✘ Yes – it helps me *(describe)*: I am able to pause and feel like I have some control.

No – I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

After using his Card for a week, Peter began to notice the urges seemed a little less strong. He said, *"I like the idea that speaking my intention to stop cutting was the first step in stopping. I felt ready for that first step. In the morning I look in the mirror and declare my intention to not hurt myself today. I also acknowledge my intention when I see the pic of me and my nephew on my phone. It's helping me pause before acting on impulses."*

Fantasia had struggled with anorexia. Therapy helped and she started eating again. However, she began to self-injure instead of starving herself. Her therapist invited her to work through this Guide. Fantasia thought the "**Get Rid of Tool**s" Card might work for her. First, she personalized the back of the Card. Then she tried it out for a week. Check out what she wrote on the Card:

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

Keep the tools I use to harm myself out of reach

When the tools we use to self-harm are within reach, it's easier to follow through with impulses. Putting these tools out of reach can help us stop harming ourselves.

Self-Harm 09

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

I keep tools out of reach by:

- [x] Getting rid of all sharp objects
- [ ] Throwing out matches/lighters
- [ ] Clipping my fingernails
- [ ] Storing my tools in a locked cabinet
- [x] My idea: Putting all my razors in a ziplock bag and burying them in the backyard

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

- [x] Yes - it helps me *(describe)*: Putting my razors REALLY out of reach helps me ride out the urge
- [ ] No - I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

As you can see, Fantasia found the Card to be helpful. She said, *"I know it sounds radical, but I really did bury the razors in the backyard. The urges to hurt myself usually happen at night. No way I was going out in the dark to dig up that stuff."*

As time passed, Fantasia was feeling tempted to find another way to harm herself. Even though the razors remained buried, she started to think about other methods. She decided it was time to try another Card. She chose the "**Oppression**" Card. Here's how she personalized it:

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

Name the oppression contributing to my urge to self-harm

Racism, homophobia, poverty, sexism and other forms of oppression can lead to deep feelings of shame and self-loathing. Harming ourselves is not the answer. Naming the oppression we experience, how it affects us and joining with others to fight it can help.

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

The oppression I experience: I've been culture-bombed with the message I am never thin enough.

How it affects me: I've struggled my whole life with feeling less-than because of my weight. I'm over it. I'm going to fight to end the shaming of women's bodies.

Organizations or groups I will consider joining (name and contact info):

Body Positive Activism Group @ Women's Center (Thurs, 7pm)

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☒ Yes – it helps me *(describe)*: It reminds me I'm not "less than". I'm part of an amazing community now.

☐ No – I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

Adding a second Card really worked for Fantasia. Here's what she said: *"I still keep the razors buried in the backyard. And when I added the Oppression Card my Personal Medicine got turbo charged. The Body Positive Activism group is amazing. I learned I was self-injuring because I was ashamed of my body. Now I am helping to teach younger girls they are beautiful just the way they are. I would be a hypocrite if I self-injured while helping the girls. I haven't self-harmed in 4-months, and I'm still going strong".*

Azari was an art student at college. He began self-harming in high school. Around the same time, he began to feel attracted to other males. He suspected he might be gay but was not ready to explore that any further. At college, Azari's friend pointed to the scars on his arm. She told him she was a "cutter" too but had stopped. Azari felt ashamed but intrigued. He learned that Personal Medicine worked for his friend. He decided to check out this Guide. In working through his Guide, he felt the "**Wisdom-Mantra**" Card might be helpful. Read how he personalized the Card.

Use a wisdom-mantra

"I am strong enough to handle this"

"I can ride out these painful feelings"

"This urge won't last forever"

"Today will be yesterday tomorrow"

These are wisdom-mantras. We can borrow or rewrite them, or create our own.

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

My wisdom-mantra: The most common way people give up their power is thinking they don't have any. I am more powerful than this urge to hurt myself.

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes - it helps me *(describe)*:

☒ No - I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

Azari tried his card for 2 weeks, but it just didn't seem to work. He returned to his Guide and looked for another Card that might help. He settled on a Blank Card. Read what he wrote:

Draw to help shrink my urges down to size.

Is my Personal Medicine powerful?

Is it a specific activity, not a feeling/state-of-being?	☒ Yes	☐ No
Is it something I do now, not a future goal?	☒ Yes	☐ No
Is it something I do, not something I take?	☒ Yes	☐ No
Does it say how it helps me?	☒ Yes	☐ No

Self-Harm Blank

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

My plan: My urges feel so strong and big sometimes. Drawing an image of my self-harm urge as something small or harmless helps. I carry my colored pencils and a small notebook with me wherever I go, so I'm always prepared.

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☒ Yes – it helps me *(describe)*: When I am bigger than my urge, I feel more in charge.

☐ No – I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

This Card worked well for Azari. He painted his powerful urge to self-harm as a tiny bird. He said, *"The first Card I tried didn't work too well. So, I tried a Blank Card. I filled it out and followed my plan. When an urge to self-harm came up, I took out my pencils and notebook and drew something small and harmless – a baby bird. It seemed ridiculous to let something so small force me to self-harm. I learned that I can notice the urge to self-injure, but I don't have to do it. My art helps me shrink it down to size. My Personal Medicine is helping me manage my self-harm challenges."*.



I hope you are excited

by these examples of Personal Medicine in action.
Personal Medicine is powerful medicine.



Now it's time to move into action.

In this section of your Guide, you will find Personal Medicine Cards for Self-Harm, including Blank Cards. There is one Card per page. Read each Card to see if it interests you. There's a place to write down your thoughts about each Card. Then you can indicate if you want to use the Card, not use the Card or use it later. It's okay to write on the Cards. There is a second complete set of Cards at the end of your Guide.

I recommend starting with just one or two Cards. What's important is to get started. This is your Guide. You can always come back and try other Cards when you're ready.

Don't forget to personalize and make a plan for each of the Cards you try out.

Use a strong sensation

Strong sensations can interrupt the impulses and thoughts that lead to self-harm. Essentially, a strong sensation can snap us out of the impulse to self-harm.

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

When I experience urges to self-harm, I:

- ☐ Hold a piece of ice
- ☐ Use smelling salts
- ☐ Snap a rubber band
- ☐ Clap my hands
- ☐ Take a cold shower
- ☐ My idea:

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes – it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No – I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

My thoughts about this Card:

Will I try this Card?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe later

Self-soothe

Self-soothing means comforting ourselves. It doesn't come naturally to many of us. It may take practice.

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

When I experience urges to self-harm, I soothe myself by:

- ☐ Putting on lotion
- ☐ Playing with my pet
- ☐ Listening to music
- ☐ Taking a warm bath
- ☐ Wrapping myself in a warm blanket
- ☐ My idea:

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes – it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No – I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

My thoughts about this Card:

Will I try this Card?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe later

Remember the good times

Pleasant memories and positive experiences can help us challenge traumatic memories that can intensify urges to self-harm. When urges strike, reflecting on a positive experience can help.

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

A positive experience I remember:

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes – it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No – I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

My thoughts about this Card:

Will I try this Card?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe later

Focus on something that takes all my attention

It is difficult to focus on two things at once and we can use that to our advantage. When thoughts of self-harm are taking over, we can do an activity that requires focus and attention. This can help distract us from urges to self-harm.

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

When I experience urges to self-harm, I focus on:

- ☐ Playing a video game
- ☐ Organizing my music or photos
- ☐ Working on a puzzle or a word search
- ☐ Playing basketball
- ☐ Watching my favorite show
- ☐ My idea:

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes - it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No - I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

My thoughts about this Card:

Will I try this Card?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe later

Breathe through urges to self-harm

Slow, purposeful breathing can calm our body, helping us let go of stress as we exhale. The goal is to continue this slow breathing until intense emotions recede to a manageable level. Practicing calm breathing when we are not experiencing urges can help us learn how to do it when we need to.

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

To calm my breathing, I:

- Take a slow breath in through my nose
- Hold my breath for 4 seconds
- Exhale slowly through my mouth
- Repeat until my breathing is calm and urges decrease

My plan to practice calm breathing:

My plan to use calm breathing:

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes – it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No – I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

My thoughts about this Card:

Will I try this Card?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe later

Find another way to express myself

For many of us, self-harm is a way to express strong emotions such as hurt, anger, abandonment or betrayal. There are other strong and powerful ways to express ourselves.

When I experience urges to self-harm, I:

- ☐ Paint how I feel, even if I'm not an artist
- ☐ Scream and yell into a pillow to express my hurt
- ☐ Express myself through dancing
- ☐ Write how I am feeling in a journal
- ☐ Express my truth in an online chat group with others like me
- ☐ My idea:

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes – it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No – I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

My thoughts about this Card:

Will I try this Card?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe later

Fight the self-harm addiction

Some people view self-harm as a form of addiction. This is because when we self-harm, our bodies release natural, pain-killing chemicals similar to opiate drugs. And just like opiate drugs, we can become addicted to self-harm because our bodies crave more of the natural chemicals.

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

When I want to self-harm, I repeat to myself:

(example: "The urges will only get worse if I continue to self-harm. Each time I self-harm, I rev up the cycle of addiction. I will not become a self-harm addict.")

I wait out the urge by:

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes – it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No – I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

My thoughts about this Card:

Will I try this Card?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe later

Tell on myself before I self-harm

Self-harm is often done alone and in secret. Telling a trusted supporter we are experiencing the urge to self-harm can help. Although it's not their job to rescue us, they can remind us of our intention to be kinder to ourselves. It's important to talk with our trusted supporter and make a plan *before* the urge to self-harm strikes.

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

Before I hurt myself, I promise to:

☐ Tell my trusted supporter I am experiencing the urge to self-harm

Name:

Phone #:

What I say to my trusted supporter:

What my trusted supporter reminds me of:

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes - it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No - I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

My thoughts about this Card:

Will I try this Card?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe later

Keep the tools I use to harm myself out of reach

When the tools we use to self-harm are within reach, it's easier to follow through with impulses. Putting these tools out of reach can help us stop harming ourselves.

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

I keep tools out of reach by:

- ☐ Getting rid of all sharp objects
- ☐ Throwing out matches/lighters
- ☐ Clipping my fingernails
- ☐ Storing my tools in a locked cabinet
- ☐ My idea:

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes – it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No – I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

My thoughts about this Card:

Will I try this Card?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe later

Reach out for help

Self-harm can lead to social isolation and shame. Reaching out can connect us to non-judgmental supporters. In most areas, there is free, confidential, 24-hour help.

In the US:

S.A.F.E. Alternatives
(Self-Abuse Finally Ends)
1-800-366-8288

Crisis Text Line
Text: HOME to 741741

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

When I need to reach out, I call/text:

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes - it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No - I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

My thoughts about this Card:

Will I try this Card?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe later

Use a wisdom-mantra

"I am strong enough to handle this"

"I can ride out these painful feelings"

"This urge won't last forever"

"Today will be yesterday tomorrow"

These are wisdom-mantras that remind us of our intention not to self-harm. We can borrow or rewrite them, or create our own.

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

My wisdom-mantra:

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes – it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No – I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

My thoughts about this Card:

Will I try this Card?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe later

Get to know my self-harm triggers

The urge to self-harm is triggered by specific feelings, people and/or situations. For example, failing a test at school can be a trigger because it brings back feelings of shame from the past. Knowing our triggers means we can recognize these feelings and make a plan to resist the urge to self-harm.

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

My triggers:	My plan:

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes - it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No - I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

My thoughts about this Card:

Will I try this Card?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe later

Name the oppression contributing to my urge to self-harm

Racism, homophobia, poverty, sexism and other forms of oppression can lead to deep feelings of shame and self-loathing. Harming ourselves is not the answer. Naming the oppression we experience, how it affects us and joining with others to fight it can help.

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

The oppression I experience:

How it affects me:

Organizations or groups I will consider joining
(name and contact info):

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes – it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No – I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

My thoughts about this Card:

Will I try this Card?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe later

Declare my intention

Self-harm happens in the shadows of our lives. Saying out loud, *"I want to stop harming myself"* is powerful. It shines the light of our awareness on what we have been doing to ourselves. Speaking our intention to stop self-harming is the beginning of stopping.

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

My intention:

How I remind myself of my intention: *(example: "In the morning I say it to myself in the mirror.")*

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes - it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No - I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

My thoughts about this Card:

Will I try this Card?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe later

Listen to my kindness hero

We all have someone we look up to as a hero for kindness and compassion: a family member or neighbor, a wise teacher, a religious figure, a movie character or a community leader. Even animals can be kindness heroes. When the urge to self-harm arises, we can ask ourselves *"what would my kindness hero say to me right now?"*

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

My kindness hero:

What my kindness hero would say to me when I have the urge to self-harm:

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes – it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No – I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

My thoughts about this Card:

Will I try this Card?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe later

Use a distraction plan

Impulses to self-harm can arise suddenly and with intensity. Being ready with a distraction plan can help. A distraction plan might include bouncing a basketball, helping someone else, walking outside, listening to our favorite music.

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

My distraction plan:

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes – it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No – I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

My thoughts about this Card:

Will I try this Card?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe later

Explore how my cultural traditions explain my "self-harm"

In mainstream culture, body piercing, food deprivation, self-flagellation, etc. may be considered self-harm. However, such practices may also have meaning within our culture. Consulting with community elders and spiritual guides can help us make sense of our experience.

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

How the mainstream explains my behavior:

How my cultural traditions explain my behavior:

What I learned:

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes – it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No – I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

My thoughts about this Card:

Will I try this Card?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe later

Embrace and honor the survivor within me

A strong instinct for self-preservation is often at the root of impulses to self-harm. As we work on reducing self-injury, it can help to embrace and honor the part of us that is wanting to survive.

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

When I feel the impulse to self-harm, I redirect my thinking and say: *(example: "I've been through so much in my life. This impulse is not about destroying myself. It's about surviving. I'm good at that.")*

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes – it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No – I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

My thoughts about this Card:

Will I try this Card?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe later

Is my Personal Medicine powerful?

Is it a specific activity, not a feeling/state-of-being? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Is it something I do now, not a future goal? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Is it something I do, not something I take? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Does it say how it helps me? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

My plan:

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes – it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No – I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

My thoughts about this Card:

Will I try this Card?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Maybe later

Is my Personal Medicine powerful?

Is it a specific activity, not a feeling/state-of-being?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Is it something I do now, not a future goal?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Is it something I do, not something I take?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Does it say how it helps me?	☐ Yes	☐ No

Self-Harm Blank

Personal Medicine: Self-Harm

My plan:

Does this Personal Medicine work for me?

☐ Yes – it helps me *(describe)*:

☐ No – I will try another

© 2021 Pat Deegan PhD & Associates, LLC

My thoughts about this Card:

Will I try this Card?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe later Planning to use my Personal Medicine

Now that you have your own unique Personal Medicine Cards for Self-Harm, it's time to make a plan for using them. Here are some questions for you to consider:

Where will I keep my Personal Medicine Cards?

example: "In my wallet so they're always with me; I'll also take a picture of my Cards and save them on my phone."

When will I use my Personal Medicine Cards?

example: "When I am feeling the impulse to self-harm. I usually feel it in my body first."

How will I know if my Personal Medicine Cards are helping?

example: "I'll know my Card is helping if I can delay or even move past the urge to self-harm without acting on it."

Are there friends or family I want to share my Cards with?

Are there staff or professionals I want to share my Cards with?

example: Peer specialist, psychiatrist, therapist, community elder or a religious leader



Congratulations.

You have selected one or more Personal Medicine Cards for Self-Harm and developed a plan for using them. You have done a lot of work to get to this point. Please consider taking a break and coming back to your Guide when you feel ready.

In my experience, it takes time to manage self-harm challenges. And that's okay. Even starting with one Card at time is a great beginning. You are on your way.

Improve



Using and tracking Personal Medicine

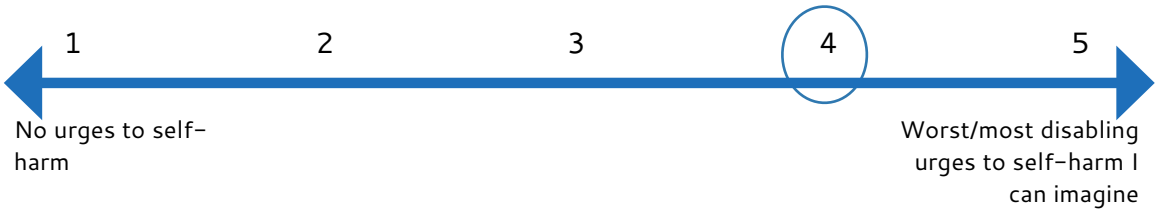
So far you have used your own words to examine your self-harm challenges. You have explored what others have done to reduce their self-harm. And you have selected Personal Medicine Cards to try out.

Now it's time to discover if your new Personal Medicine Cards are truly helpful. Think of yourself as a scientist. You have some new Personal Medicine Cards that are all about you. Now it's time to test if they actually work to help you reduce your self-harm.

Your next step is to use your Cards for the next seven days. Each day, complete the Personal Medicine Tracker in this section. There is an extra Personal Medicine Tracker at the end of your Guide as well.

On the next page is an example. It is followed by your Personal Medicine Tracker to fill out. Use it to track the power of your Personal Medicine Cards for Self-Harm.

Example Today, my urges to self-harm were:



What helped today?

Today I used my Personal Medicine. I followed the plan on my Card. When I woke up, I looked in the mirror and said, "I will not self-injure today."

What didn't help today?

I messed up at work today and my boss let me know she was upset with me. I got really angry because she didn't even ask my side of the story. The angrier I got, the more I wanted to self-injure.

I used my Personal Medicine Cards:

- [x] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Maybe later

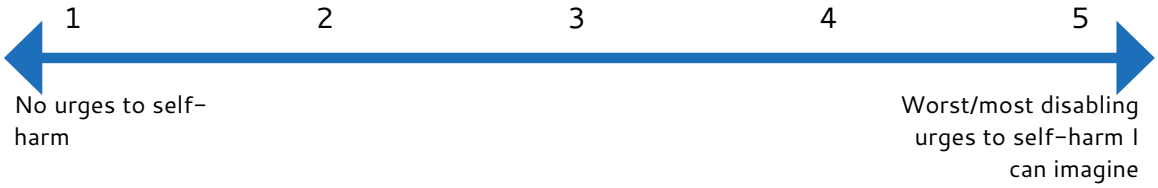
I took my prescribed medicine (if I use meds):

- [x] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Maybe later

My notes:

Getting treated unfairly makes me really angry. Then I want to self-injure. Maybe it would help to record myself saying my intention on my phone. Then I can listen to it during the day and remind myself.

Day 1 Today, my urges to self-harm were:



What helped today?

What didn't help today?

I used my Personal Medicine Cards:

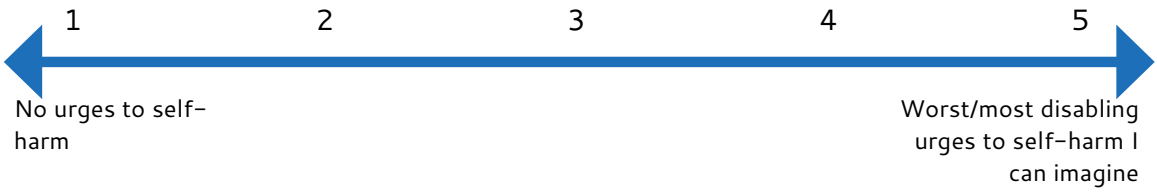
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe later

I took my prescribed medicine (if I use meds):

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe later

My notes:

Day 2 Today, my urges to self-harm were:



What helped today?

What didn't help today?

I used my Personal Medicine Cards:

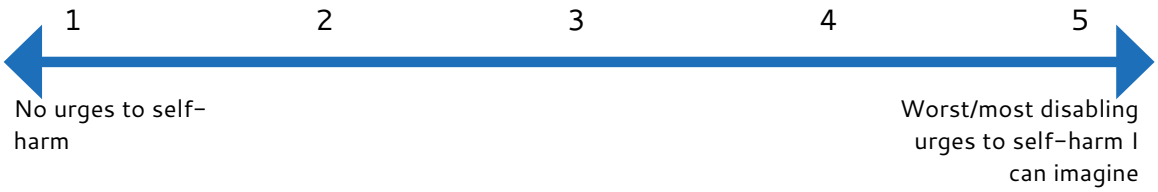
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe later

I took my prescribed medicine (if I use meds):

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe later

My notes:

Day 3 Today, my urges to self-harm were:



What helped today?

What didn't help today?

I used my Personal Medicine Cards:

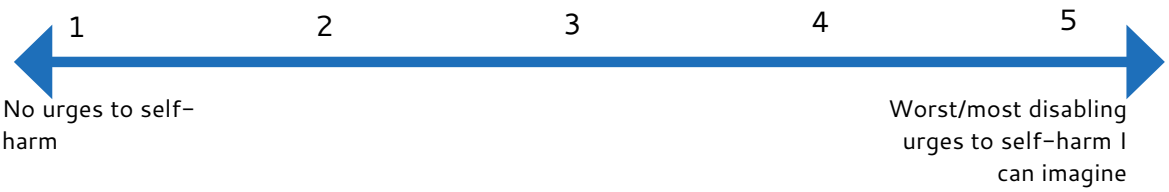
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe later

I took my prescribed medicine (if I use meds):

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe later

My notes:

Day 4 Today, my urges to self-harm were:



What helped today?

What didn't help today?

I used my Personal Medicine Cards:

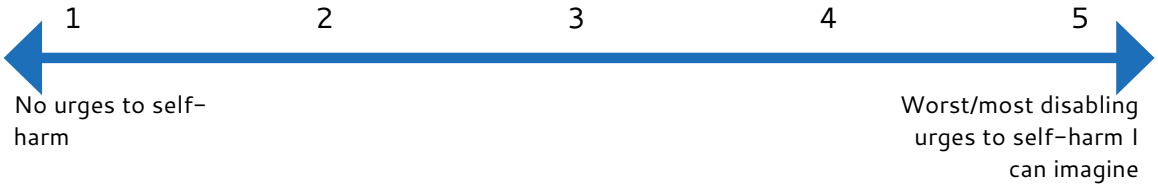
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe later

I took my prescribed medicine (if I use meds):

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe later

My notes:

Day 5 Today, my urges to self-harm were:



What helped today?

What didn't help today?

I used my Personal Medicine Cards:

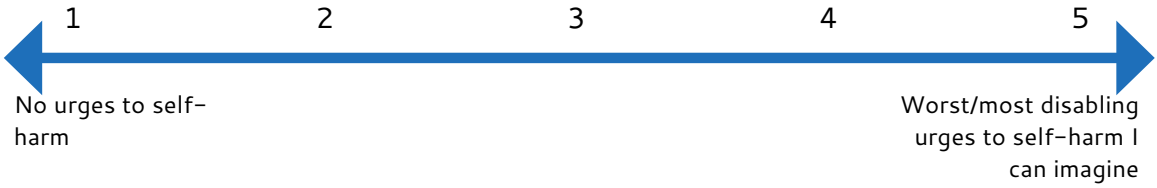
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe later

I took my prescribed medicine (if I use meds):

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe later

My notes:

Day 6 Today, my urges to self-harm were:



What helped today?

What didn't help today?

I used my Personal Medicine Cards:

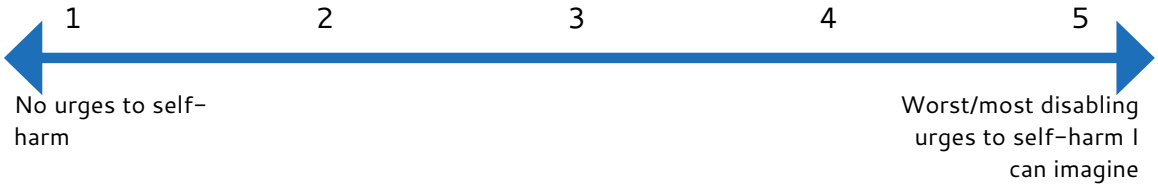
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe later

I took my prescribed medicine (if I use meds):

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe later

My notes:

Day 7 Today, my urges to self-harm were:



What helped today?

What didn't help today?

I used my Personal Medicine Cards:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe later

I took my prescribed medicine (if I use meds):

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe later

My notes:



Hey there.

You just spent a week being a scientist. You tested your new Personal Medicine Cards for Self-Harm.

If you need a break to re-energize, now is a good time to take it.

Evaluating my Personal Medicine

Now it's time to evaluate if your Cards actually helped your self-harm. Look back at your Personal Medicine Tracker and answer these questions:

Overall, what went well during my tracking week?

example: "I used my Personal Medicine Card for Self-Harm every day. And I learned that each time I got really angry, I felt an urge to self-harm. Now I see a pattern. My urge to self-harm is not just random".

Overall, what could have gone better?

example: "I self-injured one day this week which was not cool. But I'm going to keep using this Card. I'm also going to review the other Cards and add a new one. On Friday I'm going to talk to my therapist about this anger thing I am learning."

What's next?

☐ Continue to use my Card

If your Card worked for you, check the "Yes" box at the bottom of the Card. Keep using it as long as it's working for you.

☐ Modify my Card

If your Card was helpful but needs tweaking, revisit the back side and make changes so it's more effective.

☐ Try a different Card

If your Card was not helpful, check the "No" box at the bottom of the Card. Consider trying another. You could also create your own unique Blank Card.



Congratulations.

You have selected Cards to try out. You have tracked your progress for a week. You have learned some lessons.

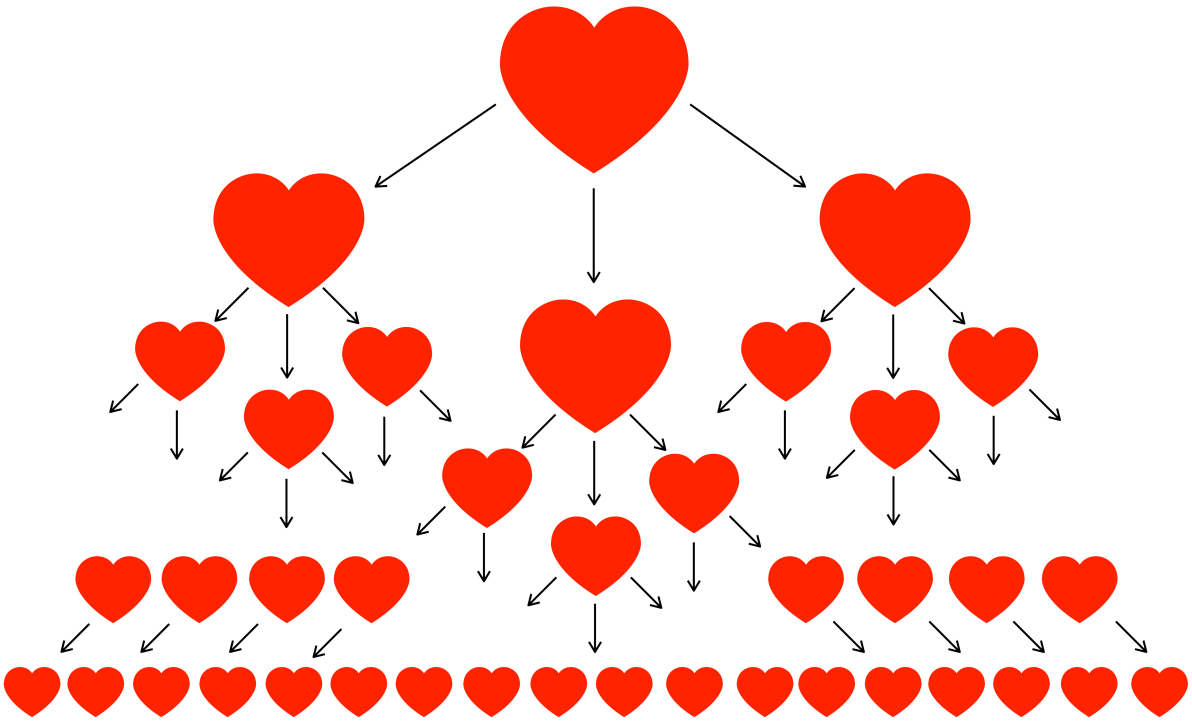
As you move forward, keep observing what helps and what doesn't. You can add to your Personal Medicine over time. The more Personal Medicine you have, the more options you have for managing the inevitable challenges that are a part of life.

You are on your way.

Onward

Moving forward

As you move forward on your recovery journey, it can also help to "pay it forward". Paying it forward is an expression. It means if someone has shared a bit of wisdom with you, then you can show your gratitude by sharing it with one or two other people. Then, if those people pass on the wisdom to one or two more people, it begins to grow and grow. If you are a visual thinker, paying it forward looks like this:



In this Personal Medicine Guide, I shared some wisdom about Personal Medicine for Self-Harm with you. Now that you've completed the Guide, can you think of someone you know who is feeling burdened or limited by self-harm? If so, consider sharing with them what has worked for you.

We love stories. If you'd like to share your experience with this Guide, please email us at: **personalmedicine@patdeegan.com**

If you use social media, you can share your story and read others' stories by marking your posts with **#personalmedicine**

You can find us at:

patdeegan.pda

patdeegan

patdeegan.pda

patdeegan.pda



https://www.patdeegan.com/

Pat Deegan & Associates is constantly improving to better serve you. If you have questions, comments, or suggestions, please feel free to email. We'd love to hear from you.
info@patdeegan.com

About Pat's Recovery Approach

Pat Deegan's Recovery Approach focuses on the person instead of the illness and offers hope-filled tools, technologies and training for people, families and providers. Using Pat's Approach, people can get and keep the life they want, and staff gain the knowledge and skills for practicing true recovery-oriented care.

Our tools include an empathy building experiential simulation (Hearing Distressing Voices), staff and program training (Academy + Library; Certified Personal Medicine Coaching, Medication Empowerment), self-help workbooks (Guides), and our award-winning clinical software (CommonGround).