



► Professionals ◀

**CASE STUDY:** Bodies Under Siege communities

# Considering referral to an online community

Case study provided by a Community Manager working at an online mental health service.

## What are the Bodies Under Siege communities?

Bodies Under Siege (BUS) was the name of the first psychiatry book on non-suicidal self-injury. In 1996 the BUSlist was conceived by and for people participating in self-injury to support each other towards recovery in the form of an electronic mailing list. It has had several incarnations and is now in the form of a phpBB board (forum community) and a live chat.

## What are the potential risks of a young person engaging with the BUS community? What are the positives?

The BUS communities have been around for nearly 20 years in one form or another and have very comprehensive and realistic guidelines that have been developed and refined over time. The guidelines are well supported, monitored and moderated throughout the communities.

While graphic descriptions of self-harming behaviour (as well as methods and tools) are not allowed, the communities do allow basic descriptors like "I cut..." "I burnt..." which could be enough to trigger some self-injurers. To manage this, members must also give a warning before posting items like this, but depending on stage of recovery you might want to think about how the young person would manage a situation like this. They also allow private messaging (PM), and even though it comes with strict usage rules it's still essentially un-moderated and potentially risky for the development of unhealthy friendships/relationships.

## When would you suggest it to a young person and how would you manage the risks of that referral?

Before recommending a BUS channel to a young person, talk through the potential risks and how they might manage those.

### Some questions to start these conversations are:

- *Would you click on a post with a trigger warning? Would there be a context in which it could be beneficial?*
- *Are there areas of the forum that we should stick to – at least in the beginning? (Some areas are safer than others).*
- *What would you do if someone asked to PM you? What sorts of things would you need to see in their post history to accept? Or will you just deny all PMs (at least to begin with)?*
- *What are some of the boundaries that you want to put in place around your usage as well as developing friendships/relationships with other members?*
- *What are some of your own warning signs/flags that it's time to log off?*
- *Is there any other content (like ReachOut.com forums) to use alongside the BUS forums/chat?*

If the young person does decide to join, it could be beneficial to sign them up and go through the guidelines together, and have discussions about each point. You might also want to make sure you schedule in time to chat through their BUS experiences in your sessions or discussions over time.

**Content, tools and technology for professionals supporting youth mental health and wellbeing.**

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