**SELF HARM FACT SHEET**

**What is self-harm?**

Self-harm is essentially a coping mechanism that enables a person to deal with very difficult feelings, painful memories or as a way with dealing with overwhelming experiences and the associate intense emotional distress.

Self-harm means that you harm yourself on purpose. Self-harm isn’t a mental health problem, but it is often linked to mental distress.

It is common for people to self-harm in secret. You may do this because you feel as though your thoughts and feelings aren’t acceptable to other people.

You might not want others to know, as you might be anxious about what they think. Self-harm can be both distressing for you and your loved ones. This is because they may not be able to understand why you self-harm.

People self-harm in different ways such as the following:

• Cutting

• Burning

• Scalding with hot water

• Banging or scratching your body

• Sticking sharp objects into your body

• Eating or drinking things that are poisonous

• Not letting wounds heal

• Take too many tablets, known as an ‘overdose’

**Who Self harms?**

Self-harming behaviours as a means of coping do not discriminate so in affect anyone may self-harm (including males, females, young, old, employed, unemployed. Gay, lesbian, straight. Rich, poor, strong intelligent). However, self-harm is more common in young people who live with depression and anxiety.

There are common factors that may increase the likelihood of self-harm. Such as if you…

* have a mental health issue (such as depression, anxiety, borderline personality disorder, or an eating disorder)
* have a substance abuse issue,
* are female,
* are a young person,
* are in prison,
* are an asylum seeker,
* are a veteran of the armed forces,
* are gay, lesbian or bisexual,
* have lost a loved one through suicide, or
* are a survivor of physical, emotional or sexual abuse as a child or as an adult.

**Why do I self-harm?**

People self-harm for different reasons. These reasons may change over time. You might self-harm to:

• deal with strong emotions like anger or sadness,

• punish yourself for things you think you’ve done wrong,

• make yourself feel normal,

• make others aware of how you are feeling,

• distract yourself from feelings, or

• get relief from feelings.

*You may self-harm to manage feelings*

Being overwhelmed by feelings is a common reason that people self-harm. Often these will be feelings such as sadness, guilt and hopelessness. You may self-harm because you find it difficult to put your feelings into words. You may find your emotions physically uncomfortable. Or you may be aware of how you are feeling. But you may feel that your emotions are unmanageable or unacceptable. Physical pain can distract you when you are in emotional pain. For a lot of people self-harm releases tension, brings relief and helps to relive pressure. Even if you don’t understand why you are feeling this way.

*You may self-harm to communicate*

You may self-harm to try and show others how you feel. Some people may think that you are attention-seeking. This is a common misunderstanding. Most people try to hide their self-harm behaviours from family and friends. Some people may self-harm to communicate to others how they are feeling. But this might not be the only reason behind the self-harm.

*You may self-harm to have control*

Self-harm can be a way of feeling in control of your body or your environment. You may self-harm if you dissociate, so that you can feel real. Dissociation means that you feel like you are detached from yourself, or from reality. You may self-harm so that you feel ‘normal.’ Self-harm may be a method that you use to stay in control of your day to day life.

*You may self-harm to punish yourself*

You may self-harm to punish yourself for feelings or behaviours that you think are your fault. Even if you didn’t do anything wrong, you may feel like you hate yourself. This is a common reason why people self-harm. You may not understand why you feel like this. You may not be able to link your feelings to something that has happened. You may punish yourself through displaced anger. For example, you may be very angry towards a person or about a situation. But you are unable to tell the person how you are feeling or sort the situation out.