

## SELF HARM SIGNS AND RISK FACTORS CHECKLIST

This checklist is designed to determine behaviours that may indicate a patient is engaging in some form of **self harm**. The results must be interpreted in the context of an individual's circumstances and as such should be used only in combination with a comprehensive medical and clinical assessment. It is **NOT** a stand-alone diagnostic tool.

### Psychological signs

- Obvious changes in mood
- Changes in sleeping and eating patterns
- Losing interest and pleasure in activities they once enjoyed
- Withdrawal from and poor communication with friends and family
- Hiding or washing their own clothes and avoiding situations where exposure of arm and legs is required (e.g. swimming)
- Problems in social or intimate relationships
- Strange excuses provided for injuries
- Problems with work, school, social or family life

### Physical signs

- Unexplained injuries, such as scratches, cuts or burn marks
- Unexplained physical complaints such as headaches or stomach pains
- Wearing clothes that cover up arms and legs, even in hot weather

### Risk factors

- History of self-harm and/or previous suicide attempt
- Mental or substance use disorders, especially depression
- Physical illness: terminal, painful or debilitating illness
- Family history of suicide, substance abuse and/or other psychiatric disorders
- History of sexual, physical or emotional abuse
- Socially isolated or living alone
- Bereavement in childhood
- Family disturbances
- Unemployment, change in occupational or financial status
- Rejection by a significant person (e.g. relationship breakup)
- Recent discharge from a psychiatric facility

If a patient's presentation meets **1 or more criteria** from **each of the above categories**, there is an increased chance that they are engaging in self-harm behaviours. In this case, it is important to complete a **thorough suicide risk assessment** at the time of your consultation.

It is also recommended that they be referred to a psychologist for a more comprehensive assessment. To book an appointment with a psychologist, contact Strategic Psychology at [strategicpsychology.com.au](http://strategicpsychology.com.au).

#### References:

Hawton, K., & James, A. (2005). Suicide and deliberate self harm in young people. *British Medical Journal*, 330(7496), 891-894.  
Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists. (2009). *Self-harm: Australian treatment guide for consumers and carers*. Melbourne: Author.