**Appendix 2**

# Links between self harm and suicide

In the majority of cases self-harm appears to be a way of coping rather than an attempt at ending life. It may be an attempt to communicate with others, to influence or to secure help or care from others, or a way of obtaining relief from a difficult or overwhelming situation or emotional state. In these circumstances, somewhat paradoxically, the purpose of the self-harming behaviour is to preserve life, although this can be a difficult concept for practitioners to understand.

A small minority of young people who repeatedly self-harm may go on to attempt suicide, although this may not what they intend to do and death can occur accidentally. The difference between self-harm and suicide is not always clear, however. Self-harm is a common precursor to suicide for the relatively small numbers of young people who make deliberate attempts to end their lives and so repeated incidents of self-harm should be considered a risk factor when assessing the risk of suicide.

In their separate forms, self-harm and suicide generally differ in terms of the intent that lies behind the behaviours.

Practitioners should feel able to communicate with young people about their self-harming behaviours. It is important to gather information about self-harm and the young person's thought processes associated with the behaviours in order to start to understand the risks; either of serious risk to the young person's health or wellbeing, of the risk of death by misadventure, or the risk of intentional suicide.

Please follow the NSCP Guidance 5.21 on self-harm.