

Mental Health

Peer Supports

- Many individuals who are experiencing struggles with their mental health may not wish to engage with standard mental health treatment programming. Peer Support services are an alternative to clinical or medical-model mental health services, where an individual can engage with supports on their own terms, and without fear of stigma or coercion.
- **Self-Injurious Behaviors**
 - Individuals engaging in self-injurious behaviors (e.g. cutting, burning, etc.) may depend on these behaviors to cope with other feelings that they are experiencing. Similar to other behaviors such as substance use, due to shame and stigma individuals utilizing self-harm may be reluctant to reach out for help in identifying healthier ways to cope. Even when individuals *do* reach out, the development of coping skills can take a long period of time during which they continue to face the harms associated with their current coping techniques.
 - Harm Reduction acknowledges that self-harming behaviors are used to serve a purpose, acknowledges those purposes, and attempts to find less harmful ways to address them. For example, an individual may find that the pain of holding an ice cube in their hand, or snapping a rubber band on their wrist, may serve the same need as a more injurious behavior such as cutting or burning themselves. Or an individual may learn that more effective wound-care techniques can prevent infection. Harm Reduction addresses an individual's behaviors from a focus of reducing the level of risks and harms associated with the behaviors. From this point, an individual may find some immediate reduction of harm while they continue to build healthier coping strategies.
- **Medication Management**
 - Many individuals are reluctant to take medications (psychiatric or otherwise) and their reasons are often multifaceted. Harm Reduction acknowledges an individual's desire to improve their health and wellbeing, while also minimizing the harms they encounter. Rather than acting as the authority who "knows what is best", Harm Reduction supports the individual in their efforts to improve their health, and supports the individual's right to guide the process by exploring their options and interests. From this perspective, it is easier to join with the individual in exploring various ways that they may wish to manage their mental health needs. For example, an individual may wish to engage with Peer Support services to seek advice from individuals who have lived or living experience with their same mental health struggles. Or an individual may be interested in speaking to a different psychiatrist, or trying an alternative medication regimen than the one they are concerned about.
- **Eating Disorders**
 - [Harm Reduction for Eating Disorders \(video\)](#)

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