LESSON 12

Self-Harm

Ages 12–15

Lesson 12. Self-Harm

Ages

12–15

Learning Objectives

Cadets and JCRs will be able to:

- Recognize self-harm (Activity 1).
- Develop healthy coping strategies for dealing with stress (Activity 2).
- Demonstrate how to help yourself or a friend (Activity 3).
- Develop a personal safety plan (Activities 1, 2, and 3).

Facilitators have three activities from which to choose in the body of this lesson. Each activity ranges from 15–20 minutes in length. Time required for the introduction is 10–15 minutes, and time required for the conclusion is 5 minutes.

Learning Tools and Materials

If audiovisual equipment is not available, handouts could be produced from the slides, or the information could be displayed on a flip chart or white board.

Slide deck:

- Kids Help Phone
- Community Resources
- Self-Harm
- Ways Youth Self-Harm
- Look, Listen, Link, Live©

Handouts:

- Support Circles
- Safety Plan
- Myth or Fact? Cards
- Sophie's Story

Lesson Preparation

Introduction

- Set up audiovisual equipment and cue slides (or alternative way to display information):
  - Kids Help Phone; and
  - Community Resources.
- Print required number of copies of handouts:
  - Support Circles; and
  - Safety Plan.

Activity 1. Myths and Facts about Self-Harm

- Set up audiovisual equipment and cue slides (or alternative way to display information):
  - Self-Harm; and
  - Ways Youth Self-Harm.
- Gather flip chart paper for each group.
- Gather felt markers for each group.
- Prepare or gather a set of Myth or Fact? Cards for each group.

Activity 2. Healthy Coping Strategies

- Set up audiovisual equipment and cue slides (or alternative way to display information):
  - Self-Harm; and
  - Ways Youth Self-Harm.
- Prepare a piece of flip chart paper displaying the following question written at the top: “What are your stressors?” Post the piece of flip chart paper at the front of the room.
- Gather one piece of unlined 8.5 inch by 11 inch paper for each participant.
- Ensure each participant has a pen or pencil.
- Gather flip chart paper for each group.
- Gather felt markers for each group.

Activity 3. Look, Listen, Link, Live©: How to Help a Friend

- Set up audiovisual equipment and cue slides (or alternative way to display information):
  - Self-Harm;
  - Ways Youth Self-Harm; and
  - Look, Listen, Link, Live©.
- Print required number of copies of handouts:
  - Sophie’s Story.

Conclusion

- Set up audiovisual equipment and cue slides (or alternative way to display information):
  - Kids Help Phone; and
  - Community Resources.

Introduction

Estimated Time

10–15 minutes

Review the following safety guidelines at the start of the lesson:

- Participate as you feel comfortable.
- Maintain confidentiality when discussing someone else's experiences.
- Listen when others are speaking.
- If you are uncomfortable with the topic or discussion, you have permission to leave the room for a break. An adult will check up on you.

Today, we are going to talk about when people hurt themselves on purpose. We call this "self-harm".

The intention of this lesson is not to have you share the stories of others, but rather to give you some important information so that you may choose to get help, or to help a friend. As youth, your safety and well-being are very important to us.

We want you to know that issues that may seem too big to handle, or like they will never go away, CAN be managed with support.

Participants must have a Support Circles or Safety Plan filled out at the start of this lesson.

1. Distribute a copy of the Support Circles or Safety Plan handout to any participants who did not fill one out prior to the lesson. Have them fill in the required sections.
2. If the participants filled out a Support Circles or Safety Plan handout already, ask them to revisit the section in which they recorded safe people to talk to. Are these the same people they would talk to if they were using self-harming behaviours? Allow them time to record any changes.
3. If you are using self-harming behaviours, or if you know someone who is, there are people who can help. Youth can reach out to adults they can count on and trust. Some examples are: caregivers, such as parents, grandparents, foster parents, aunts, or uncles; elders; cadet and JCR leaders; and school personnel, including guidance counsellors. Another important resource is the Kids Help Phone.
   - Display the Kids Help Phone content, using the presentation slides or the alternative method you have prepared.
   - Display the Community Resources content, using the presentation slide or the alternative method you have prepared.
4. We are going to do an activity to look at self-harm.

Activity 1
Myths and Facts about Self-Harm

Estimated Time

15–20 minutes

1. We are going to do an activity find out what you know about self-harm.

   Divide the participants into small groups (four or fewer participants per group). Distribute a piece of flip chart paper and felt markers to each group. Have each group write the following questions on their piece of flip chart paper:

   a. How do youth self-harm?
   b. Why do youth self-harm?

2. Give each group time to brainstorm answers to both questions. Then, go around the room and have each group share their answers to the first question: “How do youth self-harm?”

3. Display the Self-Harm content, using the presentation slide or the alternative method you have prepared.

Self-Harm

“Self-harm” is when a person tries to hurt themselves on purpose. It is a coping strategy used to deal with intense emotions.

4. Display the Ways Youth Self-Harm content, using the presentation slide or the alternative method you have prepared.

Ways Youth Self-Harm

Common ways that youth harm themselves include:

- cutting themselves;
- scratching themselves;
- biting themselves;
- burning their skin;
- hitting their head against a wall;
- pulling out their own hair; and
- picking at sores on their skin.

5. Have each group share their answers to the second question: “Why do youth self-harm?”

6. Adolescence is a time of change and challenges. Your bodies, the way you think, and your emotions are all changing. One of the biggest challenges during this time is trying to figure out who you are, while at the same time experiencing different pressures and expectations from others.

   What are some things that can cause you and your friends to feel stress or pressure?

Possible answers may include:

- school;
- parents;
- siblings;
- violence in the home;
- peer pressure;
- bullying or harassment;
- fights with friends;
- cyberbullying;
- exploring gender identity or sexual orientation;
- dating relationships;
- breakups;
- illness or death in the family;
- physical health problems; and
- mental health struggles, such as depression or anxiety.

All the pressures and issues that we listed can cause youth to feel overwhelmed and have intense feelings that are difficult to handle. Sometimes youth self-harm to get relief from the painful feelings and the stress or pressure that caused them.

7. To help raise awareness and allow us to talk more openly about this important issue, we are going to explore some myths about self-harm and the facts about self-harm.

8. Distribute a set of Myth or Fact? Cards to each group.

Each card displays a statement. Within your group, you need to discuss and decide whether the statement on the card is a myth or a fact.

Have them read statement (a) and discuss within their group whether the statement is a myth or a fact. Then, have each group share their answer and the reason for their conclusion. Use the following speaking notes to supplement the discussion with any points that may have been missed. Repeat this process for each card / statement until you have completed them all.

a. Self-harming behaviours are not common. MYTH or FACT?

   MYTH: Self-harming is more common than we think. Research in this area tells us that almost two out of every ten youth aged 14–21 had hurt themselves on purpose at one time or another. That is about 20 percent of youth. It is just that nobody is talking about it because of the shame surrounding it.

b. Self-harm is attention-seeking behaviour used to manipulate others. MYTH or FACT?

   MYTH: Youth who self-harm are not seeking attention. Most people feel embarrassed and ashamed and want to keep their self-harming behaviours a secret. For some, it can be a way of letting others know they need help.

c. Only girls use self-harming behaviours. MYTH or FACT?

   MYTH: Self-harming behaviours are not restricted to girls or to youth. People who

use self-harming behaviours may be any gender or any age.

d. People who self-harm are suicidal. MYTH or FACT?

   MYTH: Self-harm is a way of coping with stress or painful feelings. It does not mean the person wants to die. Self-harm is an attempt to survive and feel better, whereas suicide is a permanent end to life.

e. People who use self-harming behaviours have a mental illness. MYTH or FACT?

   MYTH: Not everyone who self-harms has a mental illness. However, self-harm can be an indicator of a mental health problem such as depression, eating disorders, or borderline personality disorder. The most important thing is that people get help and treatment.

f. It is possible to stop self-harming. MYTH or FACT?

   FACT: Help is available. There are different treatments and supports available to help youth stop self-harming. One way is helping youth communicate better so they can handle conflicts and get support from others, instead of using self-harm. Another way is helping youth find better ways to deal with stressful situations. Other treatments include professional help from a doctor, mental health counsellor, or psychologist.

9. Ask the participants the following discussion questions:

   a. What are the signs that a person may be self-harming?

      Possible answers could include:
      - small linear cuts on the forearm, the upper arm, or sometimes the legs;
      - words carved into the skin;
      - unexplained cuts, scratches, bite marks, or burns that start to appear regularly;
      - mood changes, like anxiety or depression;
      - changes in school performance, relationships, and communication; or
      - struggling to handle day-to-day stresses.

   b. What are some ways we can reduce the shame around self-harm, so youth feel more comfortable asking for help?

      Possible answers could include:
      - Talk about this openly in school and at cadet / JCR training activities.
      - Do not make youth feel ashamed for using self-harm as a coping mechanism.
      - Teach youth strategies for dealing with stress, so they can have alternatives to self-harm.

Myth or Fact? Cards

a.	Self-harming behaviours are not common.
b.	Self-harm is attention-seeking behaviour used to manipulate others.
c.	Only girls use self-harming behaviours.
d.	People who self-harm are suicidal.
e.	People who use self-harming behaviours have a mental illness.
f.	It is possible to stop self-harming.

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Activity 2
Healthy Coping Strategies

Estimated Time

15–20 minutes

1. Has anyone ever felt stressed or overwhelmed before?

   Give the participants time to answer.

2. Stress is something that happens to all of us. We are going to look at the different stressors in your lives and how you can practice self-care and healthy ways to cope with stress.

3. Distribute one piece of unlined 8.5 inch by 11 inch paper to each participant. Referring to the piece of flip chart paper you posted at the front of the room displaying the question, “What are your stressors?”, have the participants work individually to write down examples of stressors in their lives.

4. Go around the room, and ask for volunteers to share one stressor from their list.

   Possible answers could include:
   - school;
   - exams;
   - bullying at school;
   - fighting with parents;
   - suicide of a friend or a family member;
   - having no money; or
   - a break-up with a dating partner.

5. Stress from events such as experiencing violence in the home; chronic bullying or harassment at school; ending a relationship with someone you love; conflict with friends or family; having a serious illness; or losing a friend to suicide can lead people to use unhealthy coping strategies to deal with the overwhelming emotions.

6. Display the Self-Harm content, using the presentation slide or the alternative method you have prepared.

Self-Harm

“Self-harm” is when a person tries to hurt themselves on purpose. It is a coping strategy used to deal with intense emotions.

A person inflicts self-harm to temporarily turn their emotional pain into physical pain. People often say that hurting themselves gives them an immediate sense of relief.

This is also called “non-suicidal self-harm”, as in most cases, youth do this without trying to commit suicide.

7. Display the Ways Youth Self-Harm content, using the presentation slide or the alternative method you have prepared.

Ways Youth Self-Harm

Common ways that youth harm themselves include:

- cutting themselves;
- scratching themselves;
- biting themselves;
- burning their skin;
- hitting their head against a wall;
- pulling out their own hair; and
- picking at sores on their skin.

8. The relief provided by self-harming behaviours is often short, and the overwhelming feelings generally come back.

9. Divide the participants into small groups (four or fewer participants per group). Distribute one piece of flip chart paper and felt markers to each group.

10. I want to talk about healthy coping strategies. When we get stressed, our different feelings and emotions can be scary and overwhelming. I want you to brainstorm healthy things a person can do to deal with feelings of anxiety and stress instead of using self-harming behaviours.

    Allow the groups time to brainstorm and record their healthy copying strategies on the flip chart paper.

11. Go around the room, and ask for groups to share examples from their lists. Use the following list of possible answers to supplement the discussion with any points that may have been missed.

    Possible answers could include:

    - Talk to a friend or a trusted adult to get support.
    - Do breathing exercises.
    - Spend time with friends and family.
    - Spend time on the land hunting, fishing, and camping.
    - Play sports.
    - Spend time with pets.
    - Sew or bead.
    - Exercise or hike.
    - Journal.
    - Listen to music.
    - Take a warm bath or shower.
    - Light scented candles.
    - Eat your favourite healthy foods.
    - Yell into a pillow.
    - Rip paper into tiny pieces.
    - Play video games.
    - Read a good book.
    - Look at funny memes.
    - Call Kids Help Phone to talk to a counsellor.

12. As youth, your safety and well-being are very important to us.

We want you to know that issues that may seem too big to handle, or like they will never go away, CAN be managed with support. Remember: you do not have to handle this on your own. Reach out to a safe adult whom you trust.

Activity 3
Look, Listen, Link, Live©: How to Help a Friend

Estimated Time

15–20 minutes

1. We know that youth reach out to their peers for help before they will talk to an adult. We want to give you information so you can support a friend or peer if they come to you for help with self-harming behaviours.

2. Display the Self-Harm content, using the presentation slide or the alternative method you have prepared.

Self-Harm

"Self-harm" is when a person tries to hurt themselves on purpose. It is a coping strategy used to deal with intense emotions.

A person inflicts self-harm to temporarily turn their emotional pain into physical pain. People often say that hurting themselves gives them an immediate sense of relief.

This is also called "non-suicidal self-harm", as in most cases, youth do this without trying to commit suicide.

3. Display the Ways Youth Self-Harm content, using the presentation slide or the alternative method you have prepared.

Ways Youth Self-Harm

Common ways that youth harm themselves include:

- cutting themselves;
- scratching themselves;
- biting themselves;
- burning their skin;
- hitting their head against a wall;
- pulling out their own hair; and
- picking at sores on their skin.

4. Display the Look, Listen, Link, Live© content, using the presentation slides or the alternative method that you have prepared.

This is a four-step model that we use to help a friend.

Briefly go over the steps.

STEP 1: LOOK. Look for signs of stress. Are they acting different than before? Are they: sad, anxious, angry, alone all the time, drinking or using drugs, taking big risks, or hurting themselves on purpose to cope with intense emotions?

STEP 2: LISTEN. Ask them: “Are you okay?” or, “Can I help you?”

- Be calm: Talk in a calm and caring voice and be prepared to listen. Be honest, and do not feel you have to try and be an expert. Do not be upset if they are not ready to talk. You are a caring friend, and that is what is important.
- Be open: When asking someone if you can help, be open to listening to the person’s experience. Do not make the person feel guilty or ashamed for using self-harm as a coping strategy. Listen to them, and then offer to link them to someone who can help.

STEP 3: LINK. Let them know there are people who can help. Encourage them to talk to a trusted adult, or offer to go with them to talk to someone who can help.

STEP 4: LIVE. Take care of yourself, and find healthy ways to cope. Helping a friend through a difficult situation can take a physical and emotional toll.

5. We are going to look at an example of a young person who is self-harming, and then apply the Look, Listen, Link, Live© concept.

You may distribute copies of the scenario (Sophie’s Story) to allow the participants to follow along, or you may put the scenario on a presentation slide.

6. Read the scenario out loud.

Sophie has been dating Steve for two years. They are inseparable. Sophie cannot imagine her life without Steve. Sophie lost her mom last year, and Steve has been her biggest support person.

Sophie found out that Steve has been cheating on her and lying to her. Sophie is devastated, and she ends the relationship.

Sophie suffers in silence and tries to deal with family and school issues as well as the hurt from the breakup. She begins to develop anxiety, and she is struggling to deal with all the intense emotions that keep coming up. She starts cutting herself to deal with the stress.

Cutting is the only thing that brings Sophie relief from all her intense, painful feelings. Sophie feels ashamed about cutting herself. She does not want anyone to find out she is self-harming, so she has been avoiding her friends.

You are friends with Sophie, and you know about the breakup. You know how upset she is and that she has been avoiding you. Sophie has not been coming to cadet / JCR training activities, so you drop by her house one day. You notice that Sophie’s forearms have scratches and cuts all over them.

7. Have the participants turn to the person beside them and brainstorm STEP 1: LOOK.

What are the signs that Sophie is feeling stressed and may be self-harming?

Give the pairs time to discuss. Then, ask for volunteers to share their responses.

Possible answers may include:

- Sophie is devastated about the breakup with Steve.
- Steve was an important support in her life, and she feels very alone.
- She is having anxiety.
- She is avoiding hanging out with friends.
- You see scratches and cuts on her arms.

8. Have the participants find another partner. Then have them brainstorm STEP 2: LISTEN.

   What can you say to Sophie?

   Give the pairs time to discuss. Then, ask for volunteers to share their responses.

   Possible answers may include:

   - Ask Sophie if she is okay or if you can do anything to help.
   - Let her know that you are there to support her and help her, and that you want her to feel better.
   - Listen to Sophie, and let her talk as much as she needs.
   - Listen without making judgments or acting disgusted or alarmed if she talks about cutting and hurting herself.
   - Let her know that she is important, and that there are people who can help. Ask her if she would be willing to talk to an adult whom she trusts about what she is going through. Let her know you will go with her to talk to someone and support her.

9. Have the participants change partners again. Then have them brainstorm STEP 3: LINK.

   Whom can you link Sophie with for help?

   Give the pairs time to discuss. Then, ask for volunteers to share their responses.

   Possible answers may include:

   - a trusted adult: a cadet or JCR leader, a teacher, a mental health counsellor, a doctor, a parent, a grandparent, etc.
   - Kids Help Phone; or
   - a community help line.

10. Have the participants change partners again. Then have them brainstorm STEP 4: LIVE.

    What are some healthy coping strategies that you can share with Sophie to help her feel better? What can you do to take care of yourself?

    Give the pairs time to discuss. Then, ask for volunteers to share their responses.

    Possible answers could include:

    - Write down your feelings in a journal.
    - Play your favorite sport or exercise.
    - Watch videos.
    - Go to a movie.
    - Get outside and hunt or hike, and enjoy the outdoors.
    - Get creative and bead, sew, write poetry, or play music.
    - Eat healthy.

- Spend time with a pet.
- Yell into a pillow.
- Talk to friends and family to help work through your feelings about the situation.
- Invite Sophie out to do something that will help relieve her stress, like playing video games, exercising, or playing a sport.

Conclusion

Estimated Time

5 minutes

- “Self-harm” is a coping strategy used to deal with stress and intense emotions.

It is important to know that issues that seem too big to handle, or like they will never go away, CAN be managed with support.

- Refer the participants to their Support Circles and Safety Plans where they identified safe people they trust and would talk to. Encourage them to keep their Safety Plan in a safe place that is easy to access.
- If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed and using self-harming behaviours, there are people who can help. Youth can reach out to adults they can count on and trust. Some examples are: caregivers (such as parents, grandparents, foster parents, aunts or uncles), cadet / JCR leaders, and / or school guidance counsellors. Another important resource is the Kids Help Phone.
- Display the Kids Help Phone content, using the presentation slides or the alternative method you have prepared.
- Display the Community Resources content, using the presentation slide or the alternative method you have prepared.

To conclude this lesson, conduct a self-care activity. Possible activities could include:

- Share some appropriate inspirational or funny videos or memes.
- Play some music.
- Do a breathing or grounding activity.
- Allow participants time to journal or draw.
- Play a game.

Sophie's Story

Sophie has been dating Steve for two years. They are inseparable. Sophie cannot imagine her life without Steve. Sophie lost her mom last year, and Steve has been her biggest support person.

Sophie found out that Steve has been cheating on her and lying to her. Sophie is devastated, and she ends the relationship.

Sophie suffers in silence and tries to deal with family and school issues as well as the hurt from the breakup. She begins to develop anxiety, and she is struggling to deal with all the intense emotions that keep coming up. She starts cutting herself to deal with the stress.

Cutting is the only thing that brings Sophie relief from all her intense, painful feelings. Sophie feels ashamed about cutting herself. She does not want anyone to find out she is self-harming, so she has been avoiding her friends.

You are friends with Sophie, and you know about the breakup. You know how upset she is and that she has been avoiding you. Sophie has not been coming to cadet / JCR training activities, so you drop by her house one day. You notice that Sophie's forearms have scratches and cuts all over them.

Using the Look, Listen, Link, Live© model, answer the following questions:

- STEP 1: LOOK. What are the signs that Sophie is feeling stressed and may be self-harming?
- STEP 2: LISTEN. What can you say to Sophie?
- STEP 3: LINK. Where would you link Sophie for help and support?
- STEP 4: LIVE. What are some healthy coping strategies that you can share with Sophie to help her feel better? What can you do to take care of yourself?

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