



It's Not Just About The Cut

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▶ What this is:

PHSE lesson to use on or around National Self-Harm Awareness Day

▶ Introduction

Say that today is a different kind of lesson and that the topic may be difficult for some people. Let the class know they need to maintain respect for everyone else in the room at all times. Say this is not a space for disclosing personal information.

Explain the purpose of this lesson is to help self-harm be a talked about issue in a safe way. Encourage them to approach this topic without reflecting too much on their own experience. This is not an appropriate environment for personal or group therapy.

Ask the class what comes to their minds when they hear the words self-harm?

Take some ideas and suggest that before coming to any conclusions you want to allow everyone to be involved in this process. To do this they will be working together to create an image of a self-harmer.

▶ Sketch a self-harmer

Get the class into groups, give them A3 sheets of plain paper and pens and ask them to create an image between them that represents someone who self-harms, writing anything on the image which helps explain their sketch. Give them plenty of time to create and talk, and then ask each group to feedback to the rest of the class.

▶ Discuss

Ask them what they think about their creations, and whether they accurately represent everyone who might be affected by self-harm?

Latest research suggests 1 in 4 young people have self-harmed, and it can affect boys just as much as girls. There is no one 'type' of person who struggles with self-harm, whatever the stereotypes are that do exist.

There are all sorts of reasons why people choose to self-harm but most of the reasons can be grouped into 4 main categories:

Anger and Frustration-	Harming due to internalising anger in on yourself rather than being able to express it in other ways.
Low self-worth-	Harming because you feel you are not good enough.
Distraction-	Harming to distract yourself from the situation in life you are struggling with.
Control-	Harming to control how you feel in a situation that is perhaps spiraling out of your control.

▶ **Debate your rage**

Say that you are going to focus on anger and frustration as a trigger for self-harm and to do this you are going to play a game to help them become aware of what makes them angry. The game is played in groups of 4/5 and involves a game board and slips of paper containing scenarios that might lead to anger or frustration. They take it in turns to pick up and read scenarios and decide by placing their slip on the board to what degree this causes them frustration or anger. It is helpful for young people to be able to talk about this and understand their anger and how similar/different they are to others.

Download the game from schoolswork.co.uk

(<http://www.schoolswork.co.uk/resource toolkit/entry/debate-your-rage/>). Further instructions are on the website.

▶ **Film (Optional)**

There is a short film available on the DVD 'Talking About Self-Harm' which addresses the issue of anger and self-harm. It is a powerful portrayal of one boy's struggle with his feelings and could be a great tool to use in this lesson with students 14 and over. For your copy of the DVD (which includes 4 short films and full lesson plans and presentations, visit www.schoolswork.co.uk/shop).

▶ **Alternatives**

Explain that anger doesn't have to be a bad emotion. In fact it can often be helpful, particularly if you or someone you know is in danger, it is just about how you manage and channel your anger. Ask the class what might be some other ways to handle anger or frustration without hurting yourself or other people. Ask them to come up with some ideas in their groups.

Share the ideas with the class, and have a list of your own as a backup (there are some ideas for you on schoolswork.co.uk - simply search for 'alternatives to harming'). Write these up on a board or display them on a screen so that each person can clearly see these and take them in. You might want to ask them to write them down to keep with them.

▶ **Closing**

Explain that in the moment it may seem like the only option, but most young people who self-harm say that they wished they had never started and that they could now think of something they could have done instead of harming. One of the biggest regrets for those who have self-harmed are the scars that it leaves. Self-harm is not just about the cut, there are also people who stop eating, pull their hair, scratch their skin, burn themselves and many other things, but most of these activities will leave some sort of scar. Here is a one girl's experience: "The problem is that I still feel like I am unable to truly embrace myself, because my body is covered in scars. I still carry a lot of shame. I feel a lot of anxiety about how other people will react to my scars, as I know that to the majority of people, self-injury is unfathomable. It is incredibly distressful because I feel like self-injury is not a part of who I am anymore, and I want to be able to embrace myself completely." (anonymous quote on <http://galadarling.com>).

It's not just about the cut. It's also not just about the pull, burn or scratch. It's about the damage this does to you. Be aware of the potential future regrets, be aware of your emotions and how they affect you. There are alternatives and there are places you can go for support. www.selfharm.co.uk is a site designed for young people and is a safe place to go online for help.

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