

Learning Objectives

- * To understand what self-injury is (knowledge)
- * To practice how to help support someone who is self injuring (skills)
- * To challenge misconceptions surrounding self-injury, and to discuss routes to find help and support (attitudes / values)

Total Time
45 mins
+15mins
extension
activities

Teacher's Notes

- * **This topic, and Sally's letter in particular, may be upsetting for some students. Remember there are likely to be students in your class who self injure or know someone who does.**
- * **Samaritans STRONGLY RECOMMEND that due to the sensitivity of this topic you do not attempt to teach this lesson without having done Lesson 1 – Emotional Health Awareness.**

Ground rules: Please read this statement out at the beginning of the lesson: "In this lesson we will be covering some sensitive issues. You may be affected personally by the topic that we are discussing today, or you may know someone else who is. Please be respectful and thoughtful of others, and treat the subject responsibly. If you would like to talk to someone after the lesson, you can go to ... (please either give the contact person in the school, for example a school counsellor, or an outside number, for example Samaritans). NB a contact within school would be preferable in the first instance at least.

Resources

- * Photocopies of Worksheet 1: Sally's letter – enough for each student (alternatively just read out the letter and lead a discussion)
- * Photocopies of Worksheet 2: Understanding Self-Injury – enough for each student to take home
- * Supporting statement cards. Photocopied onto card and cut out. (laminated if you have the time and resources)
- * [optional] Photocopies of Worksheet 3: Understanding Self-Injury Quiz – enough for each student

Introduction

We have been learning about emotional health and how feelings, thoughts and actions interact. We know we can promote our own emotional health and build up our resilience to cope with difficult times. But sometimes pressures can be too great and lead to emotional health problems. Today's topic is about understanding self-injury and how to support someone who is self-injuring.

Brainstorm on the board

- * What is self-injury? What do you know about it?
- * Do you know any other words for it?
 - self harm
 - cutting
- * What are the different ways people self injure?
 - punching a wall
 - pulling your hair out
 - cutting the body
 - putting yourself in danger
 - burning yourself
 - eating or drinking drugs or chemicals

Definition: Self-harm (self-injury) is when someone deliberately hurts or injures him or herself.

Time
5 mins



Starter Exercise

Read out Sally's Letter and lead a discussion of student's reactions. Handout photocopies of the letter on Worksheet 1 if you prefer.

- * Now you have read the letter, how do you think that Sally is feeling?
- * What underlying issues are going on in her life?
- * Do you think that she is attention seeking?
- * Could she be suicidal?
- * If you asked Sally about the marks on her wrists do you think she'd tell you?
- * If you asked Sally about her parents splitting up do you think she'd like to talk about that?

Explain: Self-Injury is a way of coping with pressure people feel inside. Often they prefer to talk about whatever is causing the pain than about the injury. Sometimes someone may feel very low and be thinking about suicide. If you think someone may be suicidal don't ignore it, ask them how they're feeling. If you need to, tell someone you are worried.

Time
10 mins



Core Activities:

Supporting someone who self injures

Students now know what self-injury is and why people do it. This section is aimed at learning how to support someone who self injures.

Use the teacher's 'supporting statement' cards. First explain the activity, then allow individual students to choose a card either from your hand, or from a selection of cards placed face down on the table. This activity is based on Sally's case study that we looked at previously. Thinking a bit more about Sally, what might you say to her if she was your friend? We have a series of possible responses.

Let a student pick one and read it out. Discuss - Is this a good thing to say to Sally and why?

- * Eughh! That's gross.
 - + You've acknowledged the cutting
 - You are letting your feelings get in the way and are making Sally feel worse
- * Oh no, you should go to a doctor or the school counsellor knows about this stuff.
 - + You're letting them know where there is support
 - It might sound like you're saying, Talk to someone else - not me!
- * You're crazy, cutting yourself like that. Just pull yourself together and stop doing it.
 - + You've acknowledged the cutting
 - Is she really crazy? Is it really that easy just to stop?
- * You wanna be careful, those cuts will get infected you know.
 - + You've acknowledged the cutting.
 - You're avoiding the issue. Better to ask how she's feeling.
- * If you tell me what's wrong, I swear I won't tell anyone
 - + You are encouraging her to talk about what's going on. You let her know she can trust you.
 - Some of what she says may be upsetting. You may worry this is serious and want to tell someone.
- * How are you feeling?
 - + You are encouraging her to talk about what's going on
 - "I feel fine". She may not be ready to talk, let her know you will be there if she wants to.

Summarise: There is no right or wrong way to let someone know you care. Just remember:

DON'T: Ignore it or stop talking to her.

DO: ask them how they're feeling, let them know you'll be there for them, talk when they're ready to talk, tell someone you trust if you need to.

20 mins





Optional Extension Activities

15 mins



Why do people self injure? - Pairs work based on Sally's letter

Hand out the quiz. Let them fill in the answers in pairs for 5 mins. Then take feedback.

1. People who self injure are attention seeking.
False: People are trying to cope with pain or pressure they are feeling
2. People who self injure use it as a way of releasing pressure and feelings.
True. People say the physical pain releases some of the emotional pressure.
3. It is easy to stop injuring yourself.
False: People often injure themselves because it is the only way they can find to cope. Only by working through the underlying feelings can the pressure be taken away, and people are able to stop self injuring.
4. People who self injure are usually feeling suicidal.
Mostly false: Self-Injury is a way of dealing with pain or strong feelings, not an attempt at suicide. However it is true that people who self injure may be at greater risk of attempting suicide at some stage.
5. People who hurt themselves hide it from others.
Mostly true: They may do as they feel self conscious or don't want others to find out, though not always the case.
6. People who injure themselves are selfish.
False: People who self injure are often trying to cope with a lot of internal emotional pressure.
7. Self-Injury is a cry for help.
Mostly false: Not necessarily. Self-Injury is a person's chosen way of coping, even whilst they are working through problems or difficult emotions. However, if someone is self-injuring, ask if they want to talk about it.



Reflect and Discuss

5 mins



Closing Questions

- * How has this lesson changed your understanding of self-injury?
- * If you thought a friend might be injuring themselves, do you feel more confident that you could speak to them about it?
- * Would you know where to go for support?

Summary

5 mins



Everyone goes through difficult times in their lives and everyone has different ways of coping. It is important to support people and listen to what they have to say. If anyone wants to talk through the issues that have arisen in the lesson they can speak to (named member of staff).

Hand out Worksheet 2 if you haven't already. It is essential that students take this sheet home with them, as it has all the contact websites and phone numbers on it that they may need to refer to.

WORKSHEET

Understanding Self-injury: Worksheet 1 - Letter from Sally

Dear Chris

I always thought it was just mad people who cut themselves but I've been cutting myself for nearly a year and it's getting worse and I really need help.

I am sixteen and I just can't cope. My Mum and Dad split up two years ago and I still cry myself to sleep. I get so bitter and angry with them both, it's so selfish. They don't think of anybody but themselves. Because I am miserable I don't have any friends and I just eat and eat but I don't care. Nobody else cares what I look like so why should I? Sometimes I feel like my whole body is under pressure and that it's going to explode. I am angry and sad and I don't know what to do.

I started cutting by accident. I found a razor blade in the bathroom and I took it into my bedroom and started to slash a photograph of Helen, she used to be Mum's best friend till she ran off with my Dad. I cut my finger and the blood started to ooze it was almost as though some of the anger oozed away with it.

I don't cut deep, just into the skin so the blood shows and runs along the grooves. I usually cut my wrists so I have to wear a long sleeved shirt so people can't see. Sometimes I cut the top of my legs and my stomach but wrists are better.

I'm scared someone will really notice my wrists and have me put in a mental home but the pain and the blood help me to take my mind off things. It's hard to describe what it feels like but it's almost exciting.

I know I have to stop it but I don't know how. Please help me, there's nobody I can talk to and it sometimes feels like no-one would notice if I just died.

Sally

[NB: This is not a real letter but it is based on the sorts of letters sent to Samaritans correspondence branch.]

Discussion Questions

- ✿ Now you have read the letter, how do you think that Sally is feeling?
- ✿ What underlying issues are going on in her life?
- ✿ Do you think that she is attention seeking?
- ✿ Could she be suicidal?
- ✿ If you asked Sally about the marks on her wrists do you think she'd tell you?
- ✿ If you asked Sally about her parents splitting up do you think she'd like to talk about that?

WORKSHEET

Understanding Self-injury: Worksheet 2 - Understanding Self-injury

Self-Injury is

"It's like screaming without opening my mouth."

"The words used to echo in my mind, over and over, you're stupid, you're useless."

"It's a way of taking control when I can't get it any other way."

SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND SUPPORT FOR SELF-INJURY

LifeSIGNS – <http://www.lifesigns.org.uk>

The not-for-profit site's aim is to raise awareness and provide information about self-injury/self harm. Includes harm reduction techniques, and a free monthly newsletter to anyone affected by self-injury.

Samaritans – <http://www.samaritans.org.uk/>

Confidential support for anyone who is worried, upset or confused - as well as anyone feeling suicidal.

Tel: 08457 90 90 90 (in the UK) or Tel: 1850 60 90 90 (Republic of Ireland)

Email: jo@samaritans.org. Write to: Chris, PO Box 90 90, Stirling, FK8 2SA

NHS Direct – Tel: 0845 46 47

Staffed by NHS nurses, the helpline provides health and medical advice.

BBC TV and Radio 1 – <http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/mental>

Information on emotional health, coping techniques, mental health problems and more.
www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/online/health. Useful information in the Mind and Health section.

Self Harm – <http://www.selfharm.org.uk>

For young people, friends and family.

Child line – <http://www.childline.org.uk>

24-hour help line for children, teenagers, and parents. Tel:0800 111111



WORKSHEET

(optional exercise)

Understanding Self-injury: Worksheet 3 - Understanding Self-injury Quiz

Don't worry about getting the 'wrong' answer. Just answer each question as best you can, and then we will discuss it all together.

1. People who self injure are attention seeking

True False Don't know

2. People who self injure use it as a way of releasing pressure and feelings

True False Don't know

3. It is easy to stop injuring yourself

True False Don't know

4. People who self injure are feeling suicidal

True False Don't know

5. People who injure themselves hide it from others

True False Don't know

6. People who self injure are selfish

True False Don't know

TEACHER'S SUPPORTING STATEMENTS

Understanding Self-injury: Teacher's Supporting Statements

Cut out these cards for the core activity.

Eughh!
That's gross.

You wanna be
careful, those cuts
will get infected
you know.

Oh no, you should go
to a doctor or the
school counsellor
knows about this sort
of stuff.

If you tell me what's
wrong I swear I
won't tell anyone.

You're crazy,
cutting yourself like
that. Just pull
yourself together
and stop doing it.

How are
you feeling?