

**SUB TOPIC THEME:
SELF HARM**

LESSON OBJECTIVE:

At some point in a student's life it is very likely that they will or someone they know will struggle with a form of self-harm. The object of this lesson is to help students come up with tangible alternatives to self-harm and to remind students of God's love for them.



SET UP INFO:

Supplies Needed:

1. No technical equipment needed for this small group session.
2. Make sure to print out copies of the Student Response sheet at least a day in advance.
3. Bring Bibles so students will be able to look up different Scriptures referenced in this small group session.
4. A heart for helping teens move toward spiritual and emotional transformation

Instructive Prep:

Self-harm is nothing new; most of your students will be familiar with the different forms of self-harm that we talk about in this session. (Cutting, burning, eating disorders, piercings, tattoos and suicide to name a few) One of the crazy things about self-harm – lots of people know about it, but few people talk about it. Which makes this small group session even more important because maybe in the end you may find that nobody in your group struggles with any form of self-harm, but now your students are prepared when they do come across a friend that is hurting or when they find themselves struggling.

There are three goals of this session: to open up a place for good conversation between students and leaders; to bring about more awareness and alternate solutions; and, to remind the students of God's love for us found in Scripture.

The progression of these studies is four-fold: learn, feel, do and what next. The goals for students are to learn something new, connect at an emotional level to some degree, and participate in doing something during the study. Finally, the "what next" section focuses on a change in attitude and/or behavior, which you will find in the challenge of the Life Application section. Remember, the movement is toward spiritual and emotional transformation in student's lives, so the application section based on God's truth is really the crux of the time together! Have fun and lead well..

INTRO:

Self-harm can be a touchy topic. My guess is that most of you don't spend hours upon hours talking about self-harm and that you probably spend more time taking about crushes, sports, the new friend you met, who did what over the summer or the game last night. You may even have a group of friends you can dive deep into conversation with. Maybe you and your friends can talk about the hurt a friend caused you, the loss of a brother or sister, breakup of a marriage or the pain of saying good-bye to friends of your past, but you probably don't spend lots of time talking about how you or your friend may find relief from life by causing yourself physical harm. It's a startling thing to talk about in a group, but more and more students are struggling with different forms of self-harm today and it's something we should spend more time talking about so that when we find ourselves in a similar situation we know what to do or at least have a little more guidance than right now.

INTRO STORY:

As I pulled up to youth group in my green family minivan I looked across the church grounds. There were students everywhere, many of them good friends of mine, others friends of my little sisters and others new faces to meet. I loved Sunday nights. Every Sunday after youth group people were invited back to my house and we all hung out while my Mom made us pizza and we messed around outside. Years later, there is still a hole in my yard from different things we blew up.

As I walked up I spotted one of my friends, Lizzy. We were close, really close; she knew many of my secrets and at this point we had spent many hours racing around town in our family minivans. We were Juniors now, Juniors with driver's licenses, and we loved it.

This particular evening one of our favorite leaders was speaking, so as the game of kickball wrapped up we all hurried inside. This Sunday he talked about the Fruits of the Spirit and how living a fruitful life sometimes costs us, but the Fruits of the Spirit are sweet and when we got to experience things like love, peace and joy, it was all worth it.

The teaching time let out so Lizzy and I headed over to the small groups. As we walked I could tell something was wrong; she wasn't as energetic as she usually was and she walked a little slower than I was used to. Usually, I had to keep up with her, but today was different. I tried talking to her about the game earlier, but her answers were half-hearted and her eyes looked sad. I was about to ask her what was up when our other friend ran up to us. I ignored the problem and we walked into our small group. I told myself I would ask her about it after group, but when group got out I forgot and she disappeared.

While we went to different schools, usually I would see her during the week a few times; but every time I called her, her phone went to voicemail. Weird. I texted her to see what was up but she never responded. Sunday, I told myself, but Sunday she was not there either.

As another week rolled by, I made it a point to call her Saturday and tell her I

would see her tomorrow at youth group. I missed her and she needed to be there. It had been too long. Lizzy did make it that Sunday and she looked worse than before. This time I didn't wait till the end to talk to her. I found her during the game and told her I had to tell her something. She looked like she was trying to find a way out, but seeing no other option she followed me to the church steps. I didn't really know what to say. I finally had her in front of me, but I didn't know what was wrong...so I just asked. She told me nothing was wrong, she was just tired...somehow I wasn't buying it.

I took her hands in mine, looked her in the eye and told her I was there for her. I wanted to help her if she needed anything, but couldn't do anything if she didn't tell me what was up. I didn't understand; we had shared everything these past few years.

Lizzy struggled to get her arms away from me, like my touch hurt her or something. I was hurt. What was going on with her? When I looked down at her arms I noticed fresh cuts on her forearm and above that "F***ED UP" carved into her arm...

It was one of the first times someone close to me struggled with self-harm and it was one of the hardest things I have had to deal with. Over the next six months to a year, Lizzy's cutting got worse, she started not eating and when she ate, she would throw up. She started drinking and smoking weed in excess. Numerous times her parents called me looking for her. She would lie to them and tell them she was hanging out with me because I was the "good friend," when really she was out partying. Things finally reached their peak when her parents couldn't find her yet again. They called me looking for her and 48 hours later the police found her in the back of a parking lot in a white conversion van passed out with two older guys she barely knew.

Following those events, her parents sent her to rehab. It was the only thing they could think of to do, but even years later I wonder if Lizzy could have been helped sooner if only someone had known how to help. Maybe if I had known how to help her.

During this small group session, we don't want to give you any answers. Each situation is different, but what we want to do is give you a chance to talk to one another. What are different options you can come up with? If one of you was or is struggling, what would you want your friends to do? It's a tough topic to talk about, but take it from me, it's a lot tougher to walk through alone and blindfolded.

A thought for the friend. Often times we want to yell at our friends, "Don't you get it! What you're doing is silly! Don't you know you are loved!" But what I have found best, is to approach my friend in love and walk beside them as they struggle. We can't shield them from the things that will come their way. We can't fix anyone or the struggles life has thrown their way, it's a tough lesson to learn, but one important to remember. The best thing you can do is be there, be their prayer warrior and again, walk next to them, figure it out together, slowly as life comes at them.

A thought for those struggling with self-harm. Maybe for you, you want to yell at your friend, "Just leave me alone! It's my life; let me deal the way I want to! You don't get it!" or maybe you want to whisper, "Come back to me, I need your help. I just don't know what to do anymore..." Know that your friends want to be there for you; let them. Know that God created us as social beings, we need each other. Your past may never change, but

the way you deal with it can be different. Climbing up from the pit you find yourself in may seem impossible, but take it one day at a time. Things will get better. Know how beautiful you are, how loved you are and know that your life has barely begun. Allow God to work; let him take you to the places he desires for you to be. The journey may be slow and painful at times, but well worth it.

Here are some things that I suggest after going through this time of my life with Lizzy and other friends. Just to get the ball rolling. Take what I suggest and run with it. My hope is that by beginning conversations like this with your friends here, when issues, struggles or hurts come up, you will feel comfortable enough to talk to each other about this.

*Don't be fooled, both males and females struggle with different forms of self-harm.

My Suggestions:

- Talk to one another when tough things come up.
- Hit the gym, work your anger/pain out.
- Find a healthy outlet for your anger/pain such as crafts, writing, exercise, or some new activity.
- Get outside and find small things to take joy in.
- Be honest with your feelings.
- Ask for help.
- Leave dangerous situations. (People or places that put you in dangerous places emotionally.)
- Find a counselor/ mentor
- Weekly check-ins as a group of friends. Where conversation goes deeper than sports or boys.

INTRODUCTION QUESTIONS:

1. What is one of your favorite ways to release energy? (gym, journaling, singing, walking outside, etc.)
2. When is a time you felt super overwhelmed? Who did you talk to?

PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

These questions are designed to stimulate conversation in the group. The goal of this section is to get students talking and sharing with one another. The more they are able to talk, (hopefully) the more prepared they will be when they find themselves in tough circumstances because it is something they have thought about before.

1. If you were really struggling, how would you want a friend to approach you? Why that way?
2. What are different things you would suggest to someone who is hurting? Have different things helped you when you were hurting?
3. What Scripture comes to mind when you think about God and his love for you? What Scripture encourages you when you are feeling discouraged?
4. Have you or have you known someone who struggled with self-harm? What did you do? How did you feel? Where are you/they now?
5. Where do you think God is during the valleys of our life? Where has he been for you?
6. When is it time to inform an adult or authority figure about your friend who is struggling?
7. Write your own questions: _____

CENTRAL BIBLE PASSAGE

The Scriptures that follow address some of the questions asked in the Personal Reflection Questions, but the Scriptures found here are not the only ones that talk about these tough things. Use these verses as a springboard into deeper discussion or even as a reminder of other verses.

PSALM 23

The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt for 430 years! Their lives were very, very hard, and many a generation had been enslaved to make Egyptian life better. As God's people, he finally provided a way for them to leave as well as a promise to take care of them, eventually leading them to a "Promised Land." Even in the midst of this miraculous deliverance, they still had remorse about the old place of slavery as opposed to the new place of their own that God had promised them. Listen to their story of rescue from bondage and their reaction to a PCS move for a whole nation!

1 The LORD is my shepherd;
I have everything I need.
2 He lets me rest in fields of green grass
and leads me to quiet pools of fresh water.
3 He gives me new strength.
He guides me in the right paths,
as he has promised.
4 Even if I go through the deepest darkness,
I will not be afraid, LORD,
for you are with me.
Your shepherd's rod and staff protect me.
5 You prepare a banquet for me,
where all my enemies can see me;
you welcome me as an honored guest
and fill my cup to the brim.
6 I know that your goodness and love will be with me all my life;
and your house will be my home as long as I live.

JAMES 1:5-6

We all encounter tough situations; the good news is God offers us his wisdom for when those things come up.

But if any of you lack wisdom, you should pray to God, who will give it to you; because God gives generously and graciously to all. But when you pray, you must believe and not doubt at all. Whoever doubts is like a wave in the sea that is driven and blown about by the wind.

ISAIAH 41:10

Again, we see that God is with us. This is his promise to you!

Do not be afraid—I am with you!
I am your God—let nothing terrify you!
I will make you strong and help you;
I will protect you and save you.

LIFE APPLICATION:

1. How do these verses make you feel? Do they resonate truth for you? Do you have a hard time believing them? Are they encouraging? Do you know someone who could use these scriptural truths?
2. Memorize Isaiah 41:10. When we commit to memory God's word, it comes back to encourage us when we need it most.
3. Make two lists, one of different ways you can release energy in a healthy way and a second of people you trust, people you can talk to when hurting or feeling down. These are hopefully people you can call even when you PCS again.
4. Think back on the things we talked about. What do you want to be sure to remember in the future from this conversation? Write it down with your lists.

STUDENT RESPONSES:

1. What is one of your favorite ways to release energy? (gym, journaling, singing, walking outside, etc.)
2. When is a time you felt super overwhelmed? Who did you talk to?

Notes and Thoughts from conversation:

3. Which Scripture verses really stuck out to you? What about them stuck out?
4. Make sure to memorize Isaiah 41:10,.Are there other verses you want to memorize?
5. List three or more new ways for you to release energy and three people you feel you can always talk to.
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
6. What are some things you have learned after this conversation, things that surprised you? What will you be sure to do when you find yourself or a friend struggling?
7. When do you decide it is time to tell an adult or authority figure about your struggling friend?