

Self-Harm Role Play Exercise – Takes 30 minutes approx.

For years 9 and above

1. Ask pupils to get into pairs and to label themselves 'A' and 'B'.
2. Explain that they will be doing a role play exercise (they are each playing themselves in an imaginary scenario):

Person A – They are engaging in some form of self-harming behaviour (it does not have to be cutting, self-harm is anything which causes physical or psychological damage but gives temporary respite from difficult feelings e.g. drinking to excess with intention of getting 'wasted', taking drugs to get 'out of it', deliberately getting into fights you know you can't win, punching walls, even staying in an abusive relationship or friendship).

Ask them what two or three things would need to happen to them for them to potentially turn to a form of self-harming behaviour as a coping strategy. For example – someone they love dies, they no longer have that person to talk about the things that are worrying them and then they have a friendship difficulty at school and no one to turn to. Or their parent loses their job and puts pressure on them to contribute, so they get a Saturday job but that means they don't have enough time to study and start feeling anxious about exams.

Person B – They are a concerned friend. They know something is wrong with Person A, but they don't know what it is.

3. Tools for having a conversation -

Show video 'Empathy -v- Sympathy' by Brene Brown

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw&t=4s>

Open questions – Ask them to list some questions which don't have a 'yes' or 'no' answer e.g. 'what does that feel like?', 'how long have you felt this way?', 'is there anything I can do to help?'.

4. Rules for the role play –

Person B is trying to get person A to open up and disclose what is going on with them.

Person A doesn't want to tell. Give them five minutes to try and have the conversation.

5. Feedback –

How did that feel for each party (they are likely to say 'awkward', 'invasive', 'difficult')? Bear in mind sometimes these conversations are incredibly difficult – but that doesn't mean we should avoid them.

6. Getting used to silence – Sometimes someone needs you to just sit with them, but in an increasingly frantic world, we are often uncomfortable with silence.

- Ask them all to close their eyes.
- Say you are going to time exactly one minute on your watch or phone.

- WITHOUT COUNTING IN THEIR HEAD, they need to raise their hand when they think one minute has gone past.

It will feel like an eternity. Ask them to practice sitting in silence and not doing anything for a minute each day – it's important to be comfortable with awkward silence.

7. Boundaries –

Emphasise that, as a friend, it is not our job or within our capabilities to fix each others' mental health problems. We can only listen without judgment and refer to further sources of support and advice.

If they want to research safely on mental health, they'll find a list of organisations here:

<https://www.natashadevon.com/advice-support>