

Lesson 1: Knife Safety

Summary

Students learn that a knife is a tool, not a toy, and that safe use begins before any carving starts. This lesson introduces handling, passing, carrying, opening/closing, storage, spacing, body position, and controlled cutting habits, giving students the routines they will use throughout the unit. Because minor injuries are a realistic part of learning, the goal is to help students avoid serious harm while developing the awareness, control, and responsibility needed to use tools safely.



Standards and Objectives

Content Standards

Health. Learning to safely use a carving knife supports the National Health Education Standard 7: Demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and avoid or reduce health risks, as students apply injury prevention strategies and responsible decision-making in a hands-on tool-use setting.

Lesson Objectives

- Students can distinguish between tools and toys and explain why a knife is a tool.
- Students can demonstrate safe knife handling and follow all class safety rules.
- Students can identify the parts of a knife and explain their functions.

Social & Emotional Objectives

Self Regulation. Knife work can strengthen an adolescent's ability to self regulate. Their movements must be focused and deliberate. They're in a position where they are being trusted to use a potentially dangerous object, and they must make choices worthy of that trust.

Supplies

Per Student

- Locking Blade Knife
- *Adventure Journal*

Per Group

Per Class

Learning Plan Snapshot

Duration

Lesson Flow

Materials

Opening

3 min

Part 1. Lesson Objectives

Adventure Journal, "Lesson 1: Knife Safety," p. 4

5 min

Part 2. Relevance

—

10 min

Part 3. Toys v. Tools

—

Lesson

15 min

Part 4. Parts of a Knife and Knife Types

Adventure Journal, "Parts of a Knife," pp. 5-6

20 min

Part 5. Rules of Safe Knife Use

Adventure Journal, "Knife Safety Rules," p. 2

Groups

-- min

Part 6. Group Formation and Supplies

Adventure Journal, "Lesson 1: Knife Safety," p. 4

Activity

15 min

Part 7. Activity: Open and Close a Locking Blade Knife

- Locking Blade Knife

Assessment

10 min

Part 8. Assessment

Adventure Journal, "Knife Safety Check," p. 7

Reflection

5 min

Part 9. Reflection

Adventure Journal, "Lesson 1: Knife Safety," p. 4

Common Student Misconceptions

“A knife is basically just a toy.” A knife is a tool designed for a specific purpose and must be treated with responsibility and self-control.

“I already know how to use a knife safely.” Safe knife use requires deliberate habits, attention, and practice, even for experienced users.

“If I’m careful most of the time, that’s good enough.” Knife safety requires consistent safe behavior because a single careless moment can cause an injury.

“It takes a lot of force to unlock and close a folding knife.” Many locking mechanisms disengage with very little pressure, so students should use slow, controlled movements.

Student Safety

WARNING!



Are there safety concerns about giving knives to a classroom full of teens? Absolutely. Knife use in class must be structured, supervised, and non-negotiable in terms of safety.

If you are using folding knives with locking mechanisms, ensure every student can safely disengage the lock and close the knife with slow, controlled movements before beginning carving activities.

Opening

~ 5 min

Part 1. Lesson Objectives

Write the following on the board, then have students write it in their *Adventure Journal*:

1. I can distinguish between tools and toys and explain why a knife is a tool.
2. I can demonstrate safe knife handling and follow all class safety rules.
3. I can identify the parts of a knife and explain their functions.

Part 2. Relevance



Question: Who has used a knife in their life?



Question: Why are knives an important tool?

Guide students toward discussing behaviors rather than individuals to prevent the conversation from becoming a tattle-tale situation. Encourage self-reflection, discussion of group patterns, and identification of safer choices so the focus remains on improvement and responsibility.



Lesson

~ 45 min

Part 3. Toys v. Tools

The goal here is to help students appreciate that tools are useful for accomplishing tasks, but can be dangerous if misused. Toys are entertainment and are usually safe to play with. In this class, we will only be using knives as a tool, not a toy.

“Knives are tools,
not toys.”

 **Question:** What is the difference between a toy and a tool?

A key idea in this lesson is helping students clearly distinguish between toys and tools. *Toys are used for entertainment, experimentation, or play*, while *tools are used with purpose* to accomplish a specific task. In class, the knife must always be treated as a tool. To convey this, give clear examples and non-examples: carving a tent stake or preparing materials is tool use; flipping, tossing, pretending to fight, or using it to impress others is toy-like behavior and not acceptable. Framing the knife this way helps students understand that they are being trusted with responsibility, and that their actions must match that trust.

 **Question:** What is an example of a tool?

Examples of tools include a knife, saw, and hammer, while non-examples include toys like a fidget spinner, toy sword, or rubber ball.

Knife Uses

 **Question:** How do people use knives?

- Carving wood (e.g., tent stakes, utensils)
- Cutting cordage or rope
- Preparing food (slicing, peeling)
- Shaping materials for shelter building
- Processing natural materials (e.g., shaving tinder for fire)

Knife Dangers

 **Question:** When might a knife be dangerous?

- Cuts or lacerations to hands and fingers
- Deep puncture wounds from slips or loss of control
- Injuries to legs or body from cutting toward oneself
- Hitting others due to lack of awareness or spacing
- Fingers caught when closing a folding knife



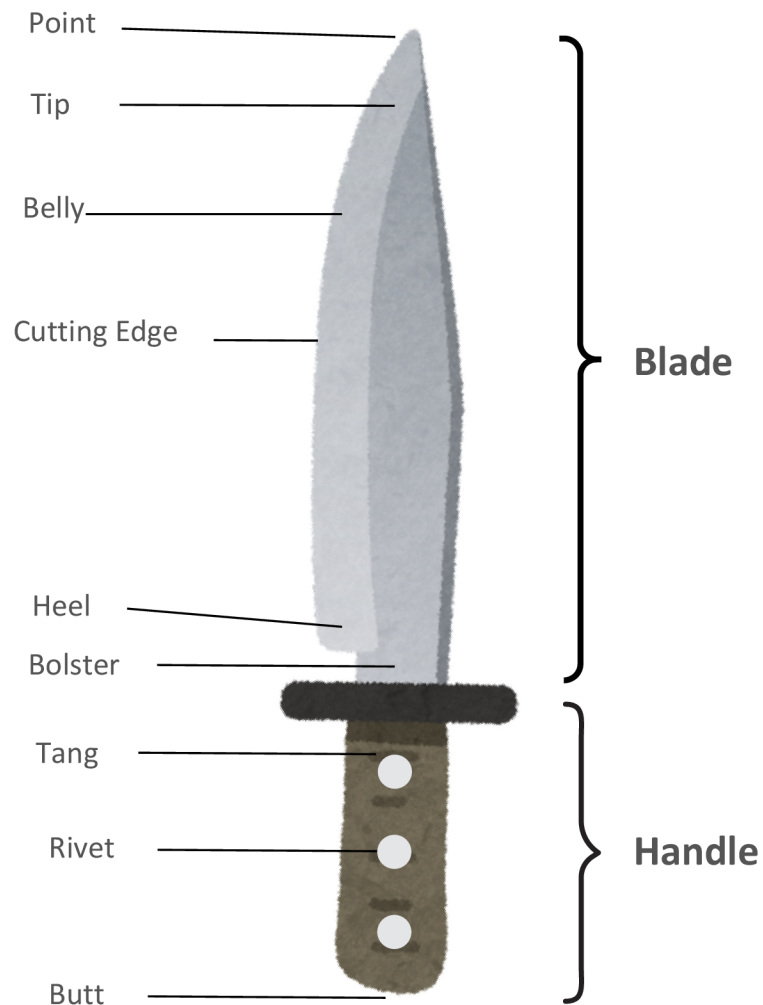
Transition

Students will continue practicing the idea that a knife is a tool, not a toy. The next section goes into the specific parts of a knife and how they can be used as a tool.

Lesson

Part 4. Parts of a Knife and Knife Types

Parts of a Knife



Point. The point of the knife is used for piercing and making precise cuts, such as starting a cut in wood or detail work when carving. Emphasize to the students that it should not be used as a screwdriver or crowbar because prying or twisting can snap the tip or cause the blade to slip and injure the user.

Belly. The term "belly of a knife" refers to the curved, sharpened portion of the blade's edge, typically used for slicing and chopping. It's the part of the blade that curves away from the spine and towards the tip.

Cutting Edge The cutting edge is the sharpened part of the blade used for slicing and cutting, and on some knives it may be serrated to better grip and cut through tough materials.

Heel. The heel of a knife is the rear part of the blade, closest to the handle. The heel is the widest and strongest part of the blade, opposite the tip, and is often used for heavier cutting tasks. The heel is a strong part of the blade, providing leverage for cutting through tough or thick materials.

Bolster. The bolster is the thick section between the blade and handle that improves strength, balance, and hand protection.

Tang. A knife tang is the part of the blade that extends into the handle, connecting the blade to the handle and providing structural support.

Rivet. Rivets attach the handle to the tang.

Butt. The butt of the knife is the end of the handle, and it can be used for light tapping or striking tasks, though it should not be used for heavy pounding to avoid damaging the knife.

Lesson

Review the parts of the knife with the students. In order to get them thinking about knife use, I ask them what various parts of the knife could be used for.



Question: When might you use the _____ part of the knife?



Definition: *Baton.* In the context of knife use, particularly in bushcraft and survival, a baton is a thick, club-like stick of wood used as a mallet to strike the spine of a fixed-blade knife. This technique, called batoning, is used to drive the knife through wood to split it, serving as a substitute for a hatchet or axe to create kindling, cut logs, or access dry wood from the center of damp timber.



Definition: *Serrated.* Serrated means having or denoting a jagged edge; sawlike.



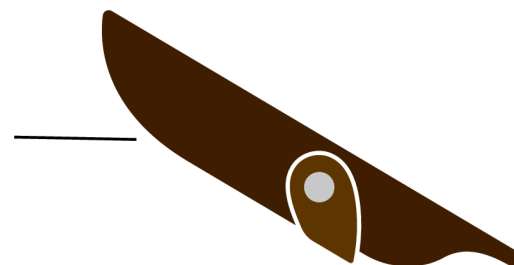
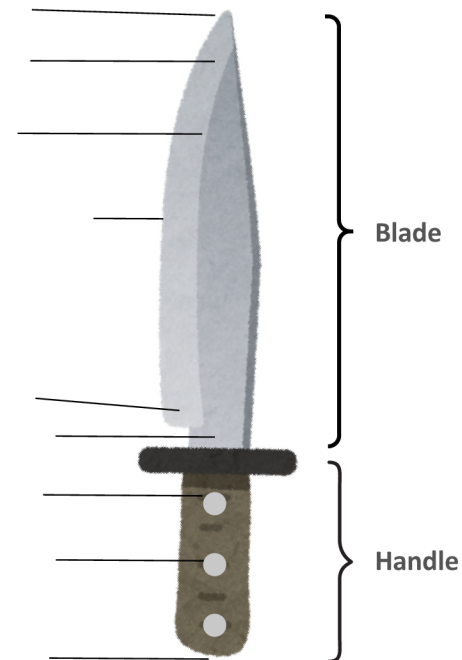
Transition

Now that students understand the individual parts of a knife, it's time to show how those parts are combined in different ways depending on the type of knife, resulting in tools designed for specific tasks and uses.



Adventure Journal – “Parts of a Knife,” p. 5

Parts of a Knife



Lesson



Adventure Journal – “Knife Types,” p. 6

Knife Types

Teaching students about the different types of knives helps them understand how each design is intended to function, allowing them to choose the right tool for a task and avoid unsafe uses that increase the risk of injury.

Clay Hayes has an excellent YouTube channel for all things outdoor survival. In this video, he explains in depth about knife and tool choices and how to sharpen a blade.

 **Video:** *The KNIVES I use for BUSHCRAFT, SURVIVAL, & HUNTING / Knife Sharpening TIPS (YouTube)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4V3X4I891Y>

One option for talking about the different knife types is classroom discussion having students discern the strengths and weaknesses of various tools. It's helpful to have examples of each.

Stone Tools

Strengths

- Extremely sharp edge – Materials like obsidian can be sharper than many steel blades because they fracture to a microscopic edge.
- Made from natural materials
- Lightweight – Often lighter than metal knives of similar size.
- Non-corrosive – Stone does not rust.

Weaknesses

- Brittle – They can snap, chip, or shatter easily.
- Short edge life – Edges dull or chip faster compared to quality steel.
- Limited versatility – Not suitable for batoning, prying, or high-force applications.
- Difficult to repair safely – Resharpening requires flintknapping skills.

Knife Types

Stone Tools

Strengths

Weaknesses



Fixed Blade

Strengths

Weaknesses



Folding Blade

Strengths

Weaknesses



Multi-Tool

Strengths

Weaknesses



Lesson

Fixed Blade v. Folding Blade

A fixed blade knife is a single piece of metal with no moving parts, making it strong and reliable for heavy-duty tasks like chopping wood. A locking knife folds for compact carry and uses a mechanical lock for safety, but it is generally less durable than a fixed blade.

Fixed Blade Knives

Strengths

- Strong and durable – The solid, non-folding construction makes it stronger than most folding knives.
- Reliable – No moving parts means less chance of mechanical failure.
- Easy to clean and maintain – Especially important in outdoor or field settings.
- Better for heavy-duty tasks – Handles carving, splitting, and controlled force more safely than many folding knives.
- Good grip stability – Often designed with ergonomic handles for controlled use.

Weaknesses

- Less portable – Requires a sheath and is bulkier to carry than a folding knife.
- More visible – Harder to conceal or transport discreetly.
- May be restricted in some settings – School or public policies may limit carry.



Folding Blade Knives

Strengths

- Compact and portable – Folds into the handle, making it easy to carry safely in a pocket.
- Convenient storage – The blade is enclosed when closed, reducing accidental contact.
- Lightweight – Generally lighter and less bulky than fixed blades.
- Versatile everyday tool – Useful for light carving, cutting cordage, and small tasks.

Weaknesses

- Weaker than fixed blades – The pivot point creates a structural weak spot.
- Moving parts can fail – Locks and hinges can wear out or become clogged with debris.
- Harder to clean thoroughly – Dirt and moisture can collect in the folding mechanism.
- Risk of accidental closure – The blade can fold onto the fingers if the lock is misused.



Lesson

Multi-Tool

Strengths

- Versatile – Combines multiple tools (knife, pliers, screwdrivers, etc.) in one compact device.
- Portable – Folds into a small, easy-to-carry form.
- Convenient for quick fixes – Useful for minor repairs and adjustments without carrying a full toolkit.

Weaknesses

- Less specialized – Individual tools are usually smaller and less effective than full-sized versions.
- Mechanical complexity – Multiple moving parts can loosen, wear out, or become clogged.
- Limited strength – Not ideal for heavy-duty tasks compared to dedicated tools.



Bushcraft and Survival Knives

Bushcraft and survival knives are designed with different priorities, even though both are used in outdoor settings. Bushcraft knives are typically simpler and more precise, made for controlled tasks like carving, shaping wood, and crafting tools. Survival knives, on the other hand, are built to be more versatile and durable, capable of handling a wider range of tasks such as cutting, prying, and processing materials in demanding situations. Understanding this distinction helps students see how tool design matches purpose and why choosing the right knife matters.

This is a video about survival knives and some modifications to the knife:

 **Video:** *Bushcraft Knife Skills!* (YouTube)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XmJxVFLAZtU>

This video compares survival and bushcraft knives and explains how different designs match different outdoor tasks.

 **Video:** *Survival vs Bushcraft Knives. What is the Difference?* (YouTube)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17JboOxcr6M>



Transition

Students now understand that different knife designs are built for different purposes. The next section focuses on the safety expectations required to use these tools responsibly in class.

Lesson

Part 5. Rules of Safe Knife Use

Before entrusting teens with a knife, explicit instruction in knife safety—paired with a signed parent permission form as required in the course syllabus—helps ensure students understand expectations and responsibilities for safe use.



Adventure Journal “Knife Safety Rules” page 2

1. Tool, Not a Toy

Repeat this often. This one saying can emphasize all the other expectations for knife use in your class.



Demonstrate: Show them what it looks like to carve away from the body, including away from fingers.

3. Close the Knife While Walking

If students are using folding knives, require them to close the knife while moving.

4. Maintain “Blood Circle”

Show them how the length of the arm can form a radius.



Demonstrate: Show them how to pass a knife handle first.

6. Let Teacher Know of Any Injuries

Assure them that they are not in trouble if they get an injury. You’ll likely have students cut their fingers. Encourage them to tell you immediately.

Knife Safety Rules

1. A knife is a tool, not a toy.

In this class, knives are always used as a tool and not a toy. Only use the tool for its purpose, cutting, and not as a screwdriver or pry bar. Keep your tool clean.

2. Always cut away from your body.

Find a way to make your cut away from yourself.

3. Close the knife or put it in a sheath when walking.

If you are walking with the knife, it should be closed.

4. Maintain a “Blood Circle.”

While using the knife, always have an arm's length between you and anyone else.

5. Pass the knife handle first, or close it.

If you are passing a knife to another, either pass it handle first or close it. Don't try and catch a falling knife.

6. Let teacher know immediately of any accidents.

Accidents happen. Let an adult know quickly if there's an injury.

Lesson

“Triangle of Death”

In knife safety instruction, the term “triangle of death” originates as an informal teaching aid used in outdoor education and scouting programs to describe the triangular area between the user’s knees and lap where a slipping blade is most likely to cause serious injury to the femoral artery, reinforcing the practice of cutting away from the body and keeping this zone clear while using a knife.



“Blood Circle”

In knife safety instruction, the term “blood circle” comes from early scouting and outdoor education programs as a vivid way to describe the arm-and-blade radius around a user that must remain clear of people and obstacles to prevent accidental injury while cutting or carving.



This is a video about safe knife use for children. You may want to include some of these rules in your setting.

 **Video:** *14 Knife Safety Tips for Kids, Scouts and the Rest of Us* (YouTube)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ks8pVWR_-Zg

Group
~ 5 min

Part 6. Group Formation and Supplies

Have students write the following in their *Adventure Journals*:

- Who will I work with?
- What is my role in the team?



Adventure Journal – “Lesson 1: Knife Safety,” p. 4

This is an individual activity. Each student will need a locking blade knife.



- Supplies:**
- Locking Blade Knife (1 per student)
 - Signed parent permission forms (as required in course syllabus)



Team & Supplies

Who is on my team?

What supplies will we need?



Demonstrate: Show the students how little effort is required to close the knife. Emphasize that if they're using more than a little pressure, they're closing the knife incorrectly and should come talk to you.

Activity

~ 5 min

Part 7. Activity: Open and Close a Locking Blade Knife

Purpose

Before students use a folding blade knife to carve a simple tent stake in the next lesson, they must first learn how to safely open, close, and pass the knife to another person; understanding how the locking mechanism works helps prevent common hand and finger injuries caused by improper handling.

Timing

Approximately 15 minutes

 **Video:** *How to Open and Close Tactical Knives* (YouTube)

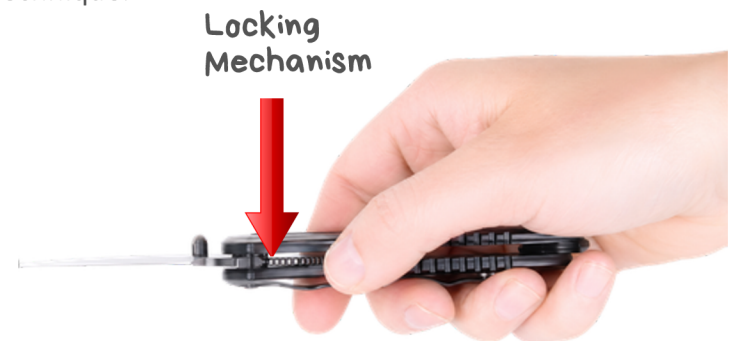
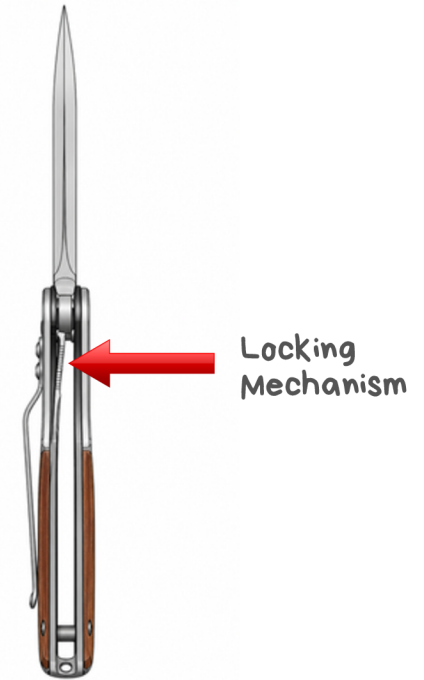
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZYj0xHn9jMI>

Instructions

1. Review that students may only handle knives after parent permission forms have been submitted.
2. Demonstrate how to safely open the knife while keeping fingers clear of the blade path.
3. Demonstrate how the locking mechanism functions and how to disengage it.
4. Emphasize that it takes very little pressure to close a knife and that forcing the blade can result in injury.
5. Model safe knife closing technique, ensuring fingers are never placed in the blade's path.
6. Demonstrate how to safely hand a knife to another person by:
 - Closing the blade before passing it, or
 - Offering the knife handle-first with the blade pointed down and away if open (only when instructed).
7. Have students practice opening and closing their knives slowly under supervision.
8. Have students practice safely handing the knife to a partner using the demonstrated technique.

Guiding Questions

1. Where should your fingers be when opening or closing a locking blade knife?
2. Why should you never force a knife closed?
3. What is the safest way to hand a knife to another person?
4. Why is it important to understand the locking mechanism before using the knife for carving?



Assessment

~ 5 min

Part 8. Assessment



Adventure Journal – “Knife Safety Check,” p. 9

True or False?

1. True. A sharp knife requires less effort and therefore greater control than a dull knife.
2. True. In this class, always cut away from your body. That includes your hands.
3. False. Knife are cutting tools and can break or injure you if used as a screwdriver or crowbar.
4. False. Close the knife before walking with it.
5. True. Catching a falling knife can cut you.
6. False. Treat your tool responsibly and keep it clean.
7. False. Pass a knife handle first.
8. True. You can be injured if a folding knife isn't locked.

“Triangle of Death”

The term “Triangle of Death” is meant to help people remember how dangerous it is to cut near one's femoral arteries along the inside of their legs.



“Blood Circle”

The term “Blood Circle” is a way to remember to stay at least an arm's length from others when using a knife.



KNIFE SAFETY CHECK

True or False?

1. ___ A sharp knife is safer than a dull knife.
2. ___ Always cut away from your body.
3. ___ It is a good idea to use a knife as a screwdriver.
4. ___ It is acceptable to walk around with an open or unsheathed knife.
5. ___ If you drop a knife, don't try to grab it. Just let it fall.
6. ___ If your knife gets dirty, do not clean it.
7. ___ It is best to pass a knife to someone blade first.
8. ___ Make sure the locking mechanism is working before using a locking blade.

“Triangle of Death”

Draw the “Triangle of Death.”

Why is it called the “Triangle of Death”?



“Blood Circle”

Draw the “Blood Circle.”

Why is that distance important?



Open and Close a Knife

I can open and close a locking blade knife.

Reflection

~ 5 min

Part 9. Reflection

Have students answer the following questions in their Adventure Journal:

1. What worked well?
2. What worked poorly?
3. What skills or resources would I like for my next attempt?