

# Cutting the Strands of the Web of Life

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**What Is It?** A visual, interactive activity to illustrate the global threats to the web of life.

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## Why Do it?

- To explain what the web of life is (the support systems for all life on earth), and how we are all dependent on the health of the web of life.
  - To demonstrate the role of living beings (the spider) to maintain and repair the web of life.
  - To experience the impact of the ecological crisis on the web of life in a visual and visceral way.
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**Time:** 30 minutes – 45 minutes

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## Materials needed:

- Ball of yarn or other inexpensive string
  - 1 or 2 pairs of scissors
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## Directions:

1. Have participants form a standing circle.
2. Choose a volunteer, and ask that volunteer to stand outside of the circle for the beginning part.
3. Ask participants:  
*Have you ever heard of the term “web of life”?*
4. Read:  
*The web of life is all of the support systems that allow life on earth to survive. This includes the elements of the natural world – the sun, the water, the air. It can also be the soil, the land. Some also believe that Spirit, or spiritual beings / gods / energies, are also an important part of the web of life that makes life on earth possible.*
5. Have one person start with the beginning of the ball of yarn or string. Instruct them to pass the yarn or string to another person in the circle, that is not to their immediate left or right, calling out their name first. Whoever they pass to should hold on to the part of the yarn that reaches them, then pass the ball on to someone else while holding on to their piece of the yarn. Create a web of yarn by continuing to have participants pass the string around, *We are going to illustrate that web of life.*

until everyone has gotten the ball of yarn.

6. Explain:

*This web we've created will represent that web of life that keeps life on earth alive.*

*And like any other real life spider web, our web will have a spider. And [Name of Volunteer] will be our spider.*

*In an actual spider web, the spider not only benefits from and depends on the web to eat and live, but the web also depends on the spider. The spider upkeep and maintains the health of the web. In the web of life, the 'spider' is life itself. Living beings – from humans to plants to microorganisms – are the very things that help upkeep and maintain earth and its support systems. Without the spider taking care of its web, the web would be destroyed. Similarly, Without living beings and the things they do to tend to the earth, the earth's systems would no longer function in its current balanced state.*

7. Ask everyone to lift the web up to just above their heads. And ask the volunteer to head under the web to the middle of the circle.

8. Have participants cheer or snap fingers to welcome the spider to the web.

9. Pick up your scissors and explain: The web of life overtime has found its balance. But today, there are significant threats to the web. For example, the Amazon rain forest in South America is being clear cut everyday in order to access the

minerals in the land and the timber from the trees. Slashing at the rain forest – which are like the lungs of the earth – is like cutting at the strands of the web of life.

10. Make a cut in a random place inside the web.

11. Ask participants:

*In a spider's web, what happens when a strand is broken? (answer: the spider feels the break, moves along the web, and repairs the break)*

12. Have the 'spider' (the volunteer in the middle) go to the broken piece in the yarn, and repair (tie back together) the yarn.

13. Explain:

*This is what living beings do when there are threats to the web of life – we use natural processes to repair the damage done.*

*But what happens if those threats come at a faster rate?*

14. Next, using the scissors, move around the circle, continuously cutting various parts of the web created by the yarn. Start at a pace slow enough that spider is able to keep up for the first couple of cuts. Get increasingly faster to a point where the spider can't keep up any longer. With each cut, name a different threat to the web of life. See appendix below for some examples of threats you can name. Try to mix it up between global threats and local threats. This has been most effective when the local threats are examples that are very familiar to the participants of the group. Have the 'spider' try their best to move and repair the cuts as you go.



It helps to have the other participants cheering for the spider.

If you have a co-facilitator, you can both do the cutting of the strands, taking turns to cut and name a threat.

15. Once the web is clearly destroyed, and the spider is clearly having a hard time keeping up, stop cutting.
16. Process with participants:  
*What just happened?*
17. If it would draw more out from the participants, ask:  
*How did you feel in your body as you saw the strands getting cut, and the spider trying to repair the web?*
18. Ask the ‘spider’:  
*How was your experience trying to repair the web of life?*

19. Explain:

*Right now, we are slashing at the web of life with all of these threats that you heard, and more. Our current economy, driven by profit and not care for people or the planet, is literally destroying our ability to keep life on earth alive. Just like our spider, earth and its living beings are not able to respond to all of the threats fast enough to maintain the web of life.*

*We have to transition out of the current economy, and put a stop to these threats. We have to take the scissors away. We must support the spider and the web of life by transitioning into an economy that regenerates the balance of systems on earth, and that protects our people and the planet.*



**APPENDIX: SAMPLE THREATS**

<b>GLOBAL THREATS</b>	<b>LOCAL THREATS</b>
Rising global temperatures causing rising sea levels and unpredictable weather patterns	Polluting facility in an urban center, blocks from where people live (can specifically name: incinerator, oil refinery, landfill, power plant, etc)
Alberta Tar Sands development – destroying native land and livelihoods for dirty oil	Polluting and not caring for local water resources (e.g. paving over local streams, dirty dumping in rivers, fracking pollution in farm water)
Mining development in third world countries (can name specific mining operations)	Mining in local regions (name specific places and companies)
Catastrophic forest fires caused by severe drought and erosion.	Extreme freezing temperatures during the Winter, or extreme heat during the Summer.
Industrial agriculture depleting massive amounts of soil nutrients and displacing people from their land.	Gentrification of a neighborhood or city (name specific places or development projects)
Extinction of whole species and languages.	Paving over public parks or farms