

SHADOWLESS MIND

Discussion and drawing / writing exercises

Before you start doing the exercises with your students

Watch the film in its entirety and familiarize yourself with the exercises. The footage may encourage young people to discuss even difficult topics. There are links on the varjotomieli.fi website, which may be helpful in steering the discussion.

Before watching the film (15 minutes)

Today we are going to deal with mental health and substance abuse problems. What types of mental health problems are you aware of?

[Listen to all the answers and correct any misconceptions. On the varjotomieli.fi website, there are also tips and advice on how to discuss mental health problems with young people.]

Anyone's mind can become ill, just as anyone can become physically ill. When our minds are healthy, we are able to complete our daily routines and obligations, face our daily challenges and be aware of our own abilities. It is normal to feel tired and down from time to time or return to make sure you did not leave the oven on. This said, healthy people are able to function in their daily lives. In other words, tiredness or the need to make sure that the oven has been turned off do not prevent them from carrying out normal tasks.

However, sometimes the mind becomes ill. For many, it is not as easy to tell another person about mental health problems as it is to tell about a broken foot. Why is this?

One explanation may be the fact that, for a long a time, even doctors did not understand the reasons behind mental health problems. We still do not know all the reasons or mechanisms behind mental health issues, but that does not actually make a difference. Whatever the reasons, we can focus on health and resources instead of problems.

VIDEO (duration 28 minutes)

Discussion

[You can go through each point or only pick the ones you want. Alternatively, you can make your students write right away without a joint discussion. This said, it is important to discuss the film at some point. This can also be done after writing or drawing.]

- Let us start by coming up with a suitable name for the boy.

[Listen to all the suggestions and help the participants to choose one together, e.g., by voting. From now on, use this name to refer to the boy.]

- Who belong to [boy's name]'s family?

- What is the situation like in [boy's name]'s family?

Let us think about the scene where the boy stormed out of the classroom. What do you think he would reply to the following questions?

- What would you have wanted your friend to do?
- What would you have wanted your teacher to do?
- What would you have wanted your classmates to do?

The boy's friend had undoubtedly noticed that something was not right. However, bringing this up may have felt difficult. The following advice could have been helpful to [boy's name]'s friend:

1. Everyone is in a bad mood from time to time and wants to spend time alone, but if the situation continues, bring it up as soon as possible.
2. Talk to your friend casually, make an eye contact and smile. Try to ask if your observations are correct. Talk to your friend when no one else is listening. You can say, e.g.,: "I've noticed lately that you haven't been your normal self and that you seem down." You can also ask if you can help somehow. If (s)he does not want to tell you, suggest that (s)he talks to someone else.
3. Suggest that (s)he talks to, e.g., the homeroom teacher, school nurse, school social worker or a teacher (s)he especially likes. Ask if it would be ok, if you went to talk to someone on behalf of your friend or came with him/her.

4. Try not to act behind your friend's back. Nonetheless, if nothing else works, go and talk to the school social worker, school nurse or another adult. Make sure your friend's situation is taken seriously and things move forward.

[Hang the instructions on the classroom wall where everyone can reread these tips later whenever necessary.]

The boy managed to tell his friend about his situation by sending the "Truth" snap. Let us think about what his friend could do when he received the message. What kinds of thoughts come to your mind when you think about what you would do in a corresponding situation?

[Steer the discussion towards the fact that it would be important to tell an adult.]

Who are the kinds of adults that you could talk to about your friend's situation?

[Mother, father, teacher, school social worker, school principal, cleaner, special needs teacher, etc.]

Now that we have discussed the story and exchanged some ideas:
What kinds of thoughts does [boy's name]'s story provoke?
Which moment in the film made the biggest impact on you? Why?
What could you do if you had to face a similar situation in your life?
How could you support a friend who was going through something similar to what [boy's name] went through?
What did we learn from the story?

[Repeat at this point that no one should have to carry a secret like [boy's name]'s and no one needs to overcome these difficulties alone, help is always available, and even if it feels like no one else is going through the same, there are several young people experiencing similar challenges in their lives. One in four minors lives in a family with mental health or substance abuse problems.]

Writing or drawing (at home or in class)

Objective: To give young people the opportunity to express their feelings on paper by writing or drawing, or even both, if the exercises are being carried out in school under the guidance of a teacher.

Write about your thoughts concerning the story in the film. You can write about the process and what you thought about it or ponder on [boy's name]'s situation and the feelings that it raised.

Draw a picture related to the Shadowless Mind story. It may be the boy's mental landscape in a particular situation or a concrete scene in the film that made an impact on you. It may also be a personal feeling or experience that comes to your mind.