

# DANTE'S STORY



## OVERVIEW:

*Negative thoughts become a world of despair for a high school football star, whose struggles with identity and an overbearing father challenge him to accept support from peers and from himself.*

“I was wondering if I might be able to talk to someone.”

## EPISODE ONE - DANTE'S DILEMMA



### ISSUES TACKLED In this episode:

- LGBTQ+ coming out
- Living with depression and mental illness
- Rebuilding after experiencing trauma
- Fear of disappointing your parents

To his friends and father, Bruce, Dante is a popular high school football player on track for college and a “respectable” career. Behind closed doors, however, he hides a long-repressed identity and a passion for art. Now with graduation on the horizon, a lifetime of living up to his father’s rigid expectations causes Dante to dwell in negative thoughts and traumatic memories. Torn between the life he wants and the life he thinks he’s supposed to lead, Dante tries to bury that secret part of himself for good – by destroying his art. Before he can, however, some unexpected support helps him gain the confidence to accept his passion and himself.

### Thought Questions:

When he is painting, Dante seems happy and content, and there is a genuine smile on his face. What puts a smile on your face? What do you like to do when you are feeling hurt or sad? If you can’t think of anything, what is something you used to like to do when you were younger?

### Discussion Questions:

Why do you think Dante might have lied about not liking art class to his friends? What could you do to help your friends be honest with you about their feelings?

### Resources:

- Crisis Text Line: 741741
- NAMI.org
- 24/7 National Suicide Hotline: 988
- ParentGuidance.org

**These stories are worth telling.**



# DANTE'S STORY

## EPISODE ONE (continued)

### DANTE'S DILEMMA

#### **Journal Entry:**

Is there someone in your life that has helped you when you were in a tough spot? Write about this experience and think about other people you could go to when you are struggling in the future.

#### **Good Listener Group Activity:**

Dante's dad's listening strategy is not effective when his son is talking to him. Make a list of the top ten most important ways someone can show you that they are listening. How can you implement these things when you are listening to others? Discuss as a class the following:

- Why is being a good listener hard sometimes?
- What does it look like to be a good listener?
- What does it feel like when you are talking to someone that is a good listener?

#### **Family Engagement:**

Understanding the difference between your reality vs. your teen's reality is important. As an adult mentor in your teen's life, it can be hard to do. If your teen is texting a friend, you might think they are ignoring their responsibilities such as homework or chores. If you get upset without checking in, you may miss an opportunity to connect.

Rather than saying "Get going on your chores and homework or else I am going to take away your phone." You could instead say "I am feeling worried that you are going to run out of time to do your homework or chores. What is your plan to accomplish everything on your plate tonight? Can your conversation with your friend wait or is it urgent?"

This will give your teen the ability to make choices. Your teen may share that their friend just broke off their first relationship and needs some extra support and then you can help your teen prioritize.

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“If you ever want to talk to someone, people are there for you.”

## EPISODE TWO - COACHING DANTE



After being teased by his teammates after the big game, Dante gets overwhelmed by his negative thoughts, driving him to punch a mirror in the locker room. Seeing the situation, Coach Nelson asks Dante into his office. Rather than chastise him for his behavior, however, Coach Nelson offers Dante validation and understanding. He tells Dante a personal story about his struggle to accept his son Scott – echoing Dante’s own conflicts with his father, Bruce. Dante finds an unexpected ally in his coach and in Scott, now a mental wellness supporter who happily meets with Dante to offer him advice.

### ISSUES TACKLED In this episode:

- LGBTQ+ coming out
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- Fear of disappointing your parents

### Thought Questions:

1. Have you ever had people bully you? Take a moment to reflect on bullying.
2. Have you ever said or done something you wish you would not have?
3. Have you seen someone be bullied?
4. Have you ever been bullied?
5. What is your stance on bullying?

### Discussion Questions:

Why do you think bullying is so hurtful? What can you do to watch out for those who are being bullied? Discuss with your class.

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# DANTE'S STORY

## EPISODE TWO (continued)

### COACHING DANTE



### Journal Entry:

Do you hear your negative voice in your head when you are sad? What does it say to you? Write down these things and for each sentence, write another sentence explaining why these things are not true—even if you have trouble believing it, write down as much as you can.



### Bullying Thermometer Group Activity:

As a whole group ask your students to name different types of bullying. For example: harassment, teasing, name-calling, making a threat, practical jokes, mean comments online, hitting, sarcasm, etc.

Once your whole group has listed various types of bullying ask them to break up into smaller groups and rank them from cool to hot on a bullying thermometer. Hot being the most harmful forms of bullying on the thermometer and cool being the least harmful.

Have each small group present out to the whole group and explain their reasoning. This activity highlights the many ways teens are bullied. End the session by talking about how all forms of bullying are hurtful and something you may think is funny might be extremely hurtful to another person.



### Family Engagement:

**Help your child be a positive role model.** There are often three parties to bullying: the victim, the perpetrator, and the bystander. Even if children are not victims of bullying, they can prevent bullying by being inclusive, respectful, and kind to their peers. If they witness bullying, they can stick up for the victim, offer support, or question bullying behaviors of their peers. Talk about this with your teen. Share with your teen that it is always a good idea to reach out to trusted adult for support when they are being bullied or when they witness bullying.

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“You know it’s okay to feel like that, it’s progress.”

## EPISODE THREE - DANTE'S DECISION



### ISSUES TACKLED In this episode:

- LGBTQ+ coming out
- Living with depression and mental illness
- Rebuilding after experiencing trauma
- Fear of disappointing your parents

After gaining some needed validation and growing more comfortable with his identity, Dante decides to quit the football team and pursue art. One problem: he hasn't told his dad. His friend Eric is sympathetic to his plight, but when mixed signals at Eric's house result in a humiliating exchange, Dante spirals back into negative thinking. This time, however, Dante has a mentor in Scott, Coach Nelson's son. With Scott's support, Dante finds he can cope with the negative voice in his head and take on challenges like the misunderstanding with Eric and sharing his identity and dreams with his dad.

### Thought Questions:

1. Do you ever feel like you are completely alone in what you are struggling with?
2. Why do you think this might be false?
3. How would it make you feel to share your story with the people around you? Would it be easy or hard?
4. What could you do to make it easier?

### Discussion Questions:

What are ways that you can support the people around you who you think might be struggling? Discuss with your class.

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# DANTE'S STORY

## EPISODE THREE (continued)

### DANTE'S DECISION



### Journal Entry:

What are some of the things you struggle with? Have you ever talked to anyone about what you are struggling with? What would you want to tell them? Write down a list of people you could talk to and what kind of things you would be comfortable telling them about.



### "I Am, But I Am Not..." Activity:

"I Am, But I Am Not" is an inclusion group activity that is great for teens and pre-teens. This activity breaks down misconceptions and stereotypes by allowing individuals to report on how they identify themselves and address the stereotypes behind these identifying factors.

Sit in a circle. Ask teens to think about something that describes their identity and a stereotype that does not describe them.

Examples include: "I am from New York, but I am not a Yankees Fan." "I am a shy person, but I am not afraid to meet new people."



### Family Engagement:

Raising children to have an inclusive attitude can involve the work of parents, families, & communities. Here are some ideas to teach your teen to have an inclusive mindset.

1. Model inclusive behavior by saying hello to neighbors and people of all backgrounds.
2. Focus on compassion. Teach your child to be aware of other kids or teens that may feel left out. Talk about inclusive strategies to include them.
3. Explain differences, don't ignore them. Share the importance of understanding differences and the importance of being accepting of differences.

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“For a long time, I felt like I had to be this person that other people expected me to be. Strong, masculine...straight.”

## EPISODE FOUR - DANTE'S STORY



### ISSUES TACKLED In this episode:

- LGBTQ+ coming out
- Living with depression and mental illness
- Rebuilding after experiencing trauma
- Fear of disappointing your parents

Months of progress have given Dante the confidence to share about his struggles with negative thinking at a mental health fair organized by Scott. Dante recounts the confrontation that erupted when he told his father that he quit football, and how painting became a coping skill that helps him deal with his negative thoughts. Unknown to Dante, the event has an unexpected attendee – his father. While at the fair, Bruce hears Dante's story and cannot help but be proud of his son. Meeting up with Dante after his talk, Bruce reconciles with Dante.

## Thought Questions:

1. What was one thing that Dante did in his recovery that you could try doing in your own life? Ex. talking to a mentor like Scott, doing something you love more often, etc.
2. What do you think would help you the most?

## Discussion Questions:

Throughout these episodes, what things did you notice helped Dante the most in his recovery? Discuss as a class.

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# DANTE'S STORY

## EPISODE FOUR (continued)

### DANTE'S STORY



### Journal Entry:

What does Dante do when he is talking at the festival and the voice in his head tries to get him to stop? What does he say about the voice? What do you think you can do to accept and cope with the negative voice in your head?



### Our Prompts Group Activity:

Sharing personal stories can be hard for teens. Something that can help is sharing stories from prompts that they come up with. Have each student create a writing prompt for the class. This prompt should in some way help us get to know the people in the class. Find a place to display all the prompts. Over three days have students do a free write based on a different writing prompt from one of their classmates. Have students share their favorite personal story in a small group of three to four other students.

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### Family Engagement:

Finding the thing that brings relaxation to your teen might not be easy. Ask your teen when they feel most relaxed. Some families keep a list of ways to relax on the refrigerator or family calendar. You could even have a relaxation nook in your house. It's wonderful when you can find ways to relax together such as a family movie night, game night, or family vacation.

Here are some relaxation ideas:

- Listen to music.
- Watch a movie.
- Taking personal space.
- Movement and exercise.
- Weekly family rituals. For example, Monday night dinner.



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