

DANNY'S STORY

OVERVIEW:

After a life-changing accident, a teen boy learns to rely on his network of supporters to adjust to his new normal.

“Your life is not over, it’s just beginning.”

EPISODE ONE - OVER AND DOUBT



After a life-changing accident, sixteen-year-old Danny is struggling to take on new physical and mental challenges. His family is well-meaning and awkward, kids at school stare at his scars and prosthetic arm, and his girlfriend thinks they need time apart. He still wakes up with nightmares about the night of the fire, and as he tells Lynn, his occupational therapist, his negative thoughts are making him feel broken and hopeless. He shrugs off her suggestion to talk to a mental health therapist, but Lynn’s validation and support help Danny see that his differences should not define who he is or what he can do with his life.

ISSUES TACKLED In this episode:

- Dealing with negative thoughts
- Living with depression and mental illness
- Rebuilding after experiencing trauma
- Fear of disappointing your parents

Thought Questions:

What does Lynn, Danny’s Occupational Therapist, say when Danny says he is writing all of his dark thoughts? Is this an effective strategy? Why or why not? Plan a regular time to write down your own thoughts.

Discussion Questions:

Laura, Mike, and Tony aren’t mean to Danny, but they don’t put a lot of effort into talking to him and helping him. What could you do to watch out for people around you that may be struggling? What would you have done differently if you had been in their shoes? Discuss as a class.

Resources:

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

These stories are worth telling.



DANNY'S STORY

EPISODE ONE (continued)

OVER AND DOUBT

Journal Entry:

It is hard for Danny to love himself now that he is different from how he used to be. Is it ever hard for you to love yourself? Remember that your differences are what make you unique and special. Write a love note to yourself, including all the things that make you unique. If you can't think of anything, ask someone you love to tell you what they love about you, and write that down.

New Normal Group Activity:

As a group brainstorm situations when students have needed to work towards a new normal. Some ideas might include a death in their family, divorce, someone getting ill, etc. Once you have a list, put students in groups of two or three. Gather old magazines and books. Have students look for imagery that represents a change in life or a “new normal.” Have each group create a visual using the imagery they found.

The visuals should show how change can bring growth and inspire others to feel more comfortable when they come to a point in their life when it's time for a “new normal.”

Family Engagement:

Expectation setting can be very helpful when your family is experiencing change. Your family is always growing, changing, and evolving. If you notice your teen may be struggling with change, work together to outline expectations and create a family plan.

Here are some examples of times in which expectation setting might be helpful:

- A death in the family
- Divorce
- Someone getting ill
- Moving

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After a life-changing accident, a teen boy learns to rely on his network of supporters to adjust to his new normal.

“Keep track of your victories, not just your setbacks.”

EPISODE TWO - DANNY MEETS DANNY



Still getting used to his prosthetic arm, Danny's morning routine leaves him frustrated and irritable. His mom's over-helpfulness at breakfast adds to his irritation, and when he accidentally breaks a glass, his composure shatters with it. Danny's negative thoughts take over, causing him to smash up his room until his little brother Angel bursts in and begs him to stop. Later, Lynn suggests that making a safety plan can help Danny cope with his negative thoughts, and that sharing his experiences with his peers might be a helpful alternative to keeping his feelings bottled up. Still haunted by that morning's incident, Danny is eager to try anything to find relief.

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Thought Question:

Music is one of the things that Danny can easily turn on to make him feel better. What are some easy things you can do when you are feeling down to help you feel better?

Discussion Question:

What can you do to make your class a safe place for people to express themselves? Discuss ways you can make your class a safe and non-stressful environment.

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DANNY'S STORY

EPISODE TWO (continued)

DANNY MEETS DANNY

Journal Entry:

Why do you think it would be a good idea to make a list of things that make you happy and bring you peace? Make a list of the things that make you happy and bring you peace and put it on your phone or in a place where you will see it often. Whenever you have negative thoughts, look at the list and pick something that you can do in the moment.

Victory Bucket Group Activity:

Create a Victory Bucket in your class. Set a stack of sticky notes and a few pens next to the bucket. Share with your class that this is a place for them to toss in their victories. Maybe they got a good grade on a test, made it to school on time every morning this week, or did a great presentation in history class.

Read the victories out loud at the end of each week.

Family Engagement:

Keeping track of small wins can have a huge impact on your teen's mental health. Celebrating small wins helps keep us motivated.

Keep a list of small wins on your family's fridge in your kitchen. Tell your family when we hit 50 small wins as a family, we will go out for ice cream or another family activity.

A small win could be when your teen makes their bed without being asked, gets to school on time, or helps a younger sibling with their homework.

Enjoy celebrating the little things that build greater confidence.

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"I am at the end of my list, and I need help."

EPISODE THREE - DAN MAKES A PLAN



Watching Angel shoot hoops at the park, Danny summons the courage to ignore his negative thoughts and play a game of 'one on one' with his brother. After their game, Danny feels normal for the first time in months, but later, on his way to physical therapy, a couple of guys on the street mock his prosthetic arm. Danny quickly spirals into self-loathing and regret, remembering the relationships and activities that will never be the same again. Though he is in despair, Danny uses his safety plan to help himself cope, and when he finally arrives at Lynn's office, he asks her for the name of the therapist she had suggested.

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Thought Question:

When Danny starts playing basketball, it isn't as bad as he thought it would be, and he actually has fun. What is something that you can do this week that might be a bit scary for you but is worth doing?

Discussion Question:

Why do you think it might be important to see a therapist when you are struggling? As a class, talk about the role of therapists and how they can be helpful. Perhaps invite the school psychologist or social worker to be part of the discussion.

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DANNY'S STORY

EPISODE THREE (continued)

DAN MAKES A PLAN

Journal Entry:

From the list of things you wrote down from the last episode about what you like to do when you are having negative thoughts, pick four that you can write down on a piece of paper that you can always carry with you or add them as a memo on your phone.

Positive Self-Talk Games Activity:

Put students into groups. Assign each group a board game. Have students play the board games. Challenge students to be mindful not let themselves participate in negative self-talk in their heads while playing the game.

Every time students think of saying something negative to themselves like “I’m going to lose this game, or I got a bad hand of cards” ask them to turn it into a positive statement instead.

Family Engagement:

Research tells us there are certain activating events for teens that can lead to depression. Activating events can come at any time in life. As the adult in your child’s life, here are some events that can happen that might activate depression in your teen:

- A parent with depression
- Traumatic life change
- Changing relationships
- Being bullied
- Chronic illness
- Puberty

Remember when your teen is dealing with depression or anxiety, there is help available. Most teens can start to feel better with treatment. If you don’t know where to start, reach out to your child’s pediatrician or school counselor for resources.

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“My life is going to be full of ‘new normals,’ and you know what? I’m here for it.”

EPISODE FOUR - THE OPENING



Danny feels increasingly comfortable sharing about his experience after his accident on social media, and in a story, recounts the harrowing challenge that his new therapist put him up to talking honestly with his friends and family. Reconnecting with Angel, his mom, and his best friends, Danny builds a support system to help him cope with the negative thoughts that have haunted his recovery. He still has changes to adjust to, and his relationships help him remember that he's the same person he was before and that his new “normal” is what he makes it.

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Thought Question:

Why do you think that Danny is now more willing to be teased, and even refer to himself as a cyborg?

Discussion Question:

One of the main themes of this episode has been communication. In what ways can you communicate your thoughts to your friends, family, and teachers in a way that is stress free? For example, you could have a class communication box where students can put in comments about how they are feeling so that the teacher can understand and try to help.

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DANNY'S STORY

EPISODE FOUR (continued)

THE OPENING

Journal Entry:

In these episodes, we have seen both the negatives and positives of social media? What do you think about social media? How do you think we should use social media to help instead of harm? Write down some ideas in your journal.

Crack a Smile Group Activity:

Students should be in groups of two. The goal of the activity is to try and make their partner smile. Then participants should change roles.

This activity models for students how to reach out or talk to a peer that might be sad or depressed. A smile goes a long way!

Family Engagement:

Teens often get a bad rap. Some parents approach raising teens with the idea that they are going to get into trouble or be irresponsible. If you have negative expectations for your teen, it will likely become self-fulfilling prophecy.

Focus on your child's strengths, talents, and interests. Remember you are raising the same child you nurtured when they were little.

There may be challenging moments during their teen years, just as there were challenges at other phases of development. Learn to enjoy this phase of parenting by spending time together. Though they may not show it, your teen craves your love, attention, and approval the same way they did when they were small. Chances are they still love many of the same things. Use your knowledge of the child they were to appreciate the teen and young adult they are becoming.

Sometimes enjoying the things that you always enjoyed together is the perfect way to stay connected or reconnect.

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