

EMILY'S STORY



OVERVIEW:

Driven to escape an abusive situation at home, a teen struggles with the false choice between her own wellbeing and her mother's happiness.

"Tell someone, tell anyone."

EPISODE ONE - FIRST ESCAPE



ISSUES TACKLED In this episode:

- Facing and reporting sexual abuse
- Living with depression and mental illness
- Rebuilding after experiencing trauma
- Dealing with negative thoughts

A painful secret has been haunting Emily for months. She's managed to keep it from her mom, but now mom's going out of town for the weekend, and Emily will be left alone with Brandon, her mom's fiancé. She can't talk about what happened with Brandon, but she can't stay home with him either. Feeling trapped and hopeless, Emily tells her mom she's going to her friend Shayla's house and hastily leaves, unsure how she can ever come back.

Thought Questions:

1. Have you ever experienced thoughts that something that is happening to you is your fault?
2. How do you think you can combat these feelings?

Discussion Question:

One thing that would really help Emily is if her mom was more perceptive to her feelings. What can you do to be more perceptive to the feelings of the people around you, specifically in your school? Discuss with your classmates.

Resources:

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



EMILY'S STORY

EPISODE ONE (continued)

FIRST ESCAPE



Journal Entry:

What is Emily's negative voice telling her? Why are the negative thoughts not accurate? Make a list of things that your negative voice has told you, and then write a few sentences about why these things are false.



Philosophical Chairs Group Activity:

Teens have tons of ideas that they need to be allowed to workout. Have teens write down a statement that someone could respond to by saying I agree, or I disagree.

Put chairs on two sides of the class. Tell students they can choose the statement, and if they agree with the statement to sit on one side of the room and if they disagree with the statement to sit on the other side of the room.

Work through the students' statements. Then put the chairs in a circle and have a class discussion around how to best talk about topics that you are worried you might have a different opinion on.



Family Engagement:

Sometimes tough topics need to be talked about. Talking through the challenges of life is one way you can help your teen communicate about trauma when it occurs. Model talking about these topics. This strengthens your teen's ability to think, solve problems and communicate.

Encourage open communication and talk about how you will be there to listen nonjudgmentally. It's important to have some one-on-one time, if possible, to give your child the space they need to really communicate

Have a listening plan. For example, if your child has something they need to tell you, give them choices on how to communicate. Tell them they could write you a note, tell you at dinner, or text you.

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These stories are worth telling.



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"Do you want to talk about anything?"

EPISODE TWO - SAFE PLACE TO LAND



Emily and Shayla hang out in Shayla's room, and Shayla can tell something is wrong. Carla, Shayla's mom, offers to let Emily stay the night, and advises Shayla to listen and be supportive. Emily feels isolated by her situation and her negative thoughts, but even though she's not ready to open up to her friend about what's going on, Shayla is there for her, and helps Emily remember that she is worthy of love.

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Thought Questions:

1. Why do you think Emily is more able to show emotions with her friend than with her mother?
2. How can you be better at noticing your emotions and the emotions of those around you?

Discussion Question:

Shayla is a very good friend to Emily. What are the characteristics that make her such a good friend? Make a list as a class and discuss what you can do to be better friends with each other.

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EMILY'S STORY

EPISODE TWO (continued)

SAFE PLACE TO LAND

Journal Entry:

Shayla is able to be very open with her mother about what she notices Emily going through. Do you know of anyone who is struggling right now? Why might talking to an adult about it help? If this is true for you, come up with a plan to talk to a trusted adult.

Fishbowl Improv Group Activity:

Two students sit facing each other in the center of the room; the remaining students sit in a circle around them. The two central students have a conversation based on a predetermined topic. This allows peers to model having difficult conversation with each other or an adult. Here are some ideas:

- A listening friend & someone dealing with a drinking
- A listening friend & someone with suicidal thoughts
- A listening friend & someone whose parents are separating

Have the person that is assigned as the friend start the conversation by asking, "Do you need to talk?"

Family Engagement:

You have probably heard of family counseling, but have you heard of parent counseling? Parent counseling services can provide knowledge, guidance, emotional support and tools to add to your parenting toolbox.

If possible, join a parent counseling class and if you feel you may benefit from one-on-one help, know that is available as well. Parenting counseling can be especially helpful for parents that are dealing with:

- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Physical or mental health issues
- Recent death in the family
- Separating or getting divorced

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"This is not your fault, Emily."

EPISODE THREE - AN OPEN DOOR



ISSUES TACKLED In this episode:

- Facing and reporting sexual abuse
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- Dealing with negative thoughts

It was a relief to stay with Shayla for a night, but with a seemingly impossible situation waiting at home, Emily finds herself wandering the streets with nowhere to go. She ignores her mom's calls, but she can't ignore her negative thoughts. Waiting for a bus to take her anywhere else, she is surprised to hear her name called – Carla, Shayla's mom, offers her a ride home. With Carla's encouragement, Emily lets herself believe she has another option: telling a trusted person about the abuse she's experienced at home.

Thought Questions:

1. What lies is Emily's negative voice telling her about what her mom would want her to do?
2. What finally helps her realize that these voices are not telling her the truth?

Discussion Question:

How can you help others around you know how important it is to speak up when they are being abused? Discuss as a class.

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EMILY'S STORY

EPISODE THREE (continued)

AN OPEN DOOR

Journal Entry:

Emily is so brave to allow Carla to come help her talk to her mother. Are you going through anything right now that you are scared to tell someone about? What can you do to be brave and get help from someone?

Find a Moment to Talk Activity:

If you suspect your friend is struggling with abuse or mental health difficulties, you may bring it up with them and let them know you are there for them. Brainstorm as a group. What are ways one can engage in this type of conversation. Think about meeting your friend at a place they are comfortable or even invite your friend to do something.

- Ask a friend to go to coffee.
- Ask a friend to play your favorite sport.
- Be vulnerable yourself and share about your own struggles, if you feel comfortable doing so.

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Family Engagement:

Prepare and expect awkward conversations to come up. Keep in mind you don't always have to dive right in and it's often a good idea to share about yourself first. Here are some conversation starters to try with your teen:

- “Seems like something is up. I am here to listen if you want to talk about what’s going on.”
- “I have noticed you seem a little down lately. What’s going on?”
- “How are you? It’s been awhile since we talked.”



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"I'm trying to remind myself that people do want to support me and listen."

EPISODE FOUR - A NEW BEGINNING



ISSUES TACKLED In this episode:

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Emily and her mom are decorating their new apartment, Emily is doing virtual therapy, and their shared trauma moves further into the past each day. So why does Emily still feel haunted by negative thoughts? She never saw her mom's fiancé again after disclosing the abuse, but the feelings of guilt and hopelessness stuck around. With the encouragement of her new support group, though, Emily is finding that sharing her feelings through photography is a strong coping skill – one that keeps her self-worth and the love of her mom and her friends in focus.

Thought Questions:

1. Why might it help other people for you to be willing to share your story?
2. What can you do to share your story with those around you?

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think Emily's negative voice keeps talking to her, even when she is trying to get help?
2. What finally helps that negative voice go away?
3. What can you do to help your negative go away? Discuss as a class.

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EMILY'S STORY

EPISODE FOUR (continued)

A NEW BEGINNING

Journal Entry:

When Emily picks up the mug, she starts experiencing a flashback, which is a symptom of PTSD. This shows that just getting out of a bad situation does not help someone heal completely. If you have gone through something challenging, what can you do to get help? Write down some ideas and talk to a trusted adult.

Letting Go Activity:

After a traumatic experience or event, it is often hard to see the good or the positive. It can be helpful to be prompted to make a list of positives. Here are some prompts that might help:

- Make a list: Five things I love about me are...
- Make a list: Three anxious thoughts. Then, physically throw that list in the trash.
- Make a list: I am awesome because...
- Make a list: A few of my favorite things are...
- Make a list: My safe people are...

Family Engagement:

If your teen has experienced trauma, it is important to have an awareness of trauma sensitive strategies. Trauma is often life changing in some ways. Here are three ways to create trust:

1. Be warm, respectful, and non-threatening.
2. Listen openly and do not judge.
3. Talk in a private area.

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