

KYLE'S STORY



OVERVIEW:

When a teen boy becomes the victim of widespread bullying at school, he turns to alcohol to drown out the painful feelings and his own negative voice.

“Hey, you never checked in. Are you okay?”

EPISODE ONE - BOTTLED UP



ISSUES TACKLED In this episode:

- Substance Abuse
- Living with depression and mental illness
- Rebuilding after experiencing trauma
- Fear of disappointing your parents

With the crowd roaring and the game on the line, 16-year-old soccer player Kyle is in position to make the winning goal – but misses his kick and falls flat on his face. On the ride home, disgust from his teammates and bullying on social media begin to blow up his phone, leading Kyle down a dark road of shame, paranoia, and negative thoughts. He finds that alcohol helps him forget about the bullying and drowns out the voice in his head, though he soon learns that drinking to cope only leads to more problems.



Thought Questions:

In this story, drinking alcohol makes the negative voice in Kyle's head go away.

1. What happens to activate the negative voice again?
2. Why do you think that drinking might be an ineffective solution to Kyle's problem with his negative voice?



Discussion Questions:

What could Jessie have done to make the situation better when Jason started teasing Kyle about tripping over the ball? How can you be active in stopping the bullying around you? Discuss as a class.

Resources:

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



KYLE'S STORY

EPISODE ONE (continued)

BOTTLED UP

Journal Entry:

Why do you think cyberbullying might be worse than in-person bullying? What do you think you should do when you experience cyberbullying or notice that another person is experiencing it? Write down some ideas.

Can You Relate? Group Activity:

Put students in groups of two or three. Which parts of this episode can you relate to? Here are some guiding questions:

- Have you questioned your self-worth?
- Have you experienced negative voice/thoughts?
- What are some things we can do when we question our self-worth or experience negative thoughts?

Family Engagement:

At some point your teen may ask you if you smoked, drank, or partied. As parents and guardians this can knock us off our feet. We may want to say, 'you are too young for that' or 'let's talk about it later'. But research shows that it is better to talk about it when kids ask and to be honest with your responses.

If parents and guardians do not engage in these types of conversations kids often hear the opposite of what you want them to hear.

- "Don't ask Dad questions about drugs."
- It's uncomfortable to talk about certain subjects with my parents."

Parents can keep lines of communication open by treating teens with respect, refraining from judgment, and practicing appropriate mutual sharing.

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"It's okay. Now, tell me about it."

EPISODE TWO - A LIGHT IN THE DARK



Kyle wakes up after a night of drinking to find that he made a fool of himself at a friend's party. Now the social media bullying he'd been running from is on a whole new level, and his negative thoughts tell him he'll never live it down. Kyle hides his pain from his father, Mario, and sneaks out of the house to drink, but he can still hear that voice telling him that it will never get better. Deep in despair, a childhood memory helps Kyle find optimism, and prompts him to return home and open up to his dad about what he's going through.

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Thought Questions:

1. Who might you be able to go to if you are having suicidal thoughts?
2. Why do you think it might be dangerous to keep these thoughts to yourself?

Discussion Question:

What can your class do to prevent cyberbullying?
Discuss as a class and come up with a plan.

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KYLE'S STORY

EPISODE TWO (continued)

A LIGHT IN THE DARK

Journal Entry:

In this episode, Kyle is being seriously cyberbullied, which causes him to think about ending his life, but he doesn't want to tell anyone. This is an unsafe secret, or a secret that, if kept, will hurt the person that is keeping it and those around him. Make a list of safe secrets (surprise party, gift) and a list of unsafe secrets (bullying, thoughts of suicide, unkind comments, etc.). Are you keeping any of these unsafe secrets? If so, make a plan to talk about them with a trusted adult.

Know How to Report Group Activity:

With your class explore the safety centers built into apps like TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat. It's a good idea to survey your group to see what social apps are being used. It's important that teens know where to go to block or report any offensive material or people, they come across online. This could be done as a class or as an individual assignment.

Family Engagement:

It can be difficult for your teen to tell you if they're being cyberbullied. They can be concerned that getting you involved will worsen the situation. Talk to your teen about cyberbullying and make a plan about what to do before it happens.

Social media companies and cell phone providers take bullying seriously and have advice and guidelines for keeping kids safe found at the following links. Find out what apps your teen is using. Research the safeguards in place. Empower your teen to block phone numbers or followers and teach them how to report bullying. Reassure your teen that reporting is kept anonymous.

Your local authorities are also a resource for you. If your teen is being threatened, it's time to go the police.

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“Everyone struggles with self-doubt.”

EPISODE THREE - SHARED HISTORY



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After Kyle shares his story about being bullied and how he drinks to silence his negative thoughts with his dad, it's Mario's turn to share a painful part of his life with his son. His years after military service were a constant struggle with PTSD, alcoholism, and negative thinking, which Mario had hoped to shield Kyle from. Now Mario realizes that he didn't need to be a perfect role model for Kyle – he just needed to be someone he could talk to.

Thought Questions:

1. Why did Kyle's dad, Mario, decide to see a therapist?
2. What did the therapist do to help him?

Discussion Question:

What did Kyle's dad say about alcohol abuse? What happened every time he drank? Why do you think it is a good idea to avoid alcohol when you are experiencing negativity? Discuss as a class.

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KYLE'S STORY

EPISODE THREE (continued)

SHARED HISTORY

Journal Entry:

Like Mario tells Kyle, everyone's struggles are valid, even if they may seem smaller than someone else's. What could you do to remind yourself of this when you begin to compare yourself to others? Write down some ideas in your journal.

Normalize Mental Health Activity:

Affirmations have proven to be helpful in building student confidence and improving mental health. Explain to the group that affirmations are positive statements that can help you to challenge and overcome self-sabotaging negative thoughts.

The more we repeat the affirmation the more we tend to believe it's true. The same can be said for negative thoughts. For the next week as students walk into your classroom have them share with you an affirmation. Here are some ideas:

- "I am good at math."
- "I am enough."
- "I am beautiful."

Family Engagement:

Sometimes teens and adults reject the idea of therapy or counseling. It's a good idea to normalize therapy and counseling before your family needs it.

1. Talk to your family doctor about a recommendation for a family counselor.
2. Lead by example and visit a counselor when your own mental health issues arise.
3. Introduce the family counselor to your teen.
4. Give your teen ownership of the therapy process.

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"I was ashamed of not getting better, even after seeing a therapist..."

EPISODE FOUR - KEEP TALKING



Kyle is hanging with friends, doing better in school, and exuding confidence – at least, that's what he tells Mario. In truth, the bullying at school still goes on, and despite talking regularly to a therapist, Kyle is still tormented by his own negative thoughts. Ashamed that he's not getting better, Kyle begins to spiral back to misery. When he opens up to his friend Jessie about what he's going through, her support helps him feel less alone. On their ride home, Kyle comes clean to his dad, and realizes that he can be honest about his struggles, and that his father will always be there to listen.

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Thought Questions:

1. What happens when Kyle is willing to open up and talk to Jessie?
2. Who are some people that you might be willing to open up and talk to?

Discussion Questions:

The main key to Kyle's healing is his willingness to put down the phone and focus on other things. Why do you think that might be the case? Discuss the following questions as a class:

1. What can you do to make other people a bigger part of your life?
2. What can we do to make our phones less a part of our lives?

These stories are worth telling.

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KYLE'S STORY

EPISODE FOUR (continued)

A NEW BEGINNING

Journal Entry:

What can you do when a negative voice starts talking to you? What things can you do to combat that voice? Write down some thoughts in your journal.

Mind Mapping Group Activity:

Talk to your class about sudden signs of cyberbullying. Ask your class to do a mind mapping brainstorm on your class whiteboard. First, think of signs someone might be getting cyberbullied. Then think of ways they can help if they or a friend are dealing with cyberbullying.

Some sudden signs of cyberbullying include someone: suddenly avoiding or overusing their phone social media or gaming sites or seems upset, withdrawn or angry after being online or receiving messages or if someone is secretive about their online activities.

Family Engagement:

Supporting someone who is having suicidal ideation can feel like a huge responsibility. It could be a parent worried about their teen or a teen worried about their parent or someone worried about a friend. Sometimes people who have a loved one dealing with suicidal thoughts can feel like they need to monitor that person constantly. This is a job that is too big for any one person to manage.

Your family may have a fire safety plan. Create a similar family safety plan in case of mental health crisis. This plan might include ideas about what to do when someone you know is dealing with depression, anxiety, or suicidal ideation. Here are some ideas you might add to your family plan:

- Feel empowered: acknowledge the issue
- Find an adult you can share with, parent or school counselor
- Empower teen to make an annual appointment with their primary care doc and talk about these feelings.

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