



Ryan's Story

The Lesson Plan

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Grade Level: 6 – 12, Higher Education

Subject(s):

Health

Interdisciplinary

Social Studies

Education

Psychology

Duration: Two 30-40 minute sessions

Description: This lesson concentrates on the topics of bullying, cyber bullying (bullying on the Internet), teen depression and suicide. The key element of the lesson is a DVD featuring John Halligan sharing the story of his 13 year old son he lost to suicide. The video opens with powerful interview clips with John and his wife emotionally describing the day of Ryan's death. The video then transitions to one of John's presentations at a middle school/high school assembly where he talks about his search to find answers, justice, and closure.

The power of John's presentation is that it unfolds in such a dramatic way. John does not lecture children; he simply expresses his deepest emotions regarding this tragedy and its aftermath. Students will learn very powerful, lifelong lessons about the real emotional pain bullying inflicts on the victim, as well as their family and friends.

Overall Goals:

1. Modify the bully's behavior, give hope and direction to the bullied, and enlighten the bystanders about the enabling role they play.
2. Have every student appreciate the magnitude of Ryan's emotional pain, and to understand that this type of torment can be far more damaging than physical pain.
3. Make students aware that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem that inflicts severe emotional pain on the family and friends they leave behind.
4. For those experiencing emotional pain, to realize that it is likely a temporary stage of adolescence and that there are adults who can be trusted to help them cope during these difficult time.
5. Achieve a commitment from individuals and the school community as a whole to become more caring and compassionate toward one another, and to no longer standby and tolerate physical and emotional abuse.
6. Identify non-violent, non-confrontational ways to respond to and prevent bullying.

Student will acquire the knowledge or skills to:

1. Define bullying.
2. Identify the three roles in bullying – 1) the bully 2) the bullied, and 3) the bystander
3. Articulate how bullying can lead to tragic consequences.
4. Understand that suicide is often a result of an illness called depression.
5. Appreciate the importance of reporting to school officials any knowledge that a fellow student is contemplating suicide and that this should supersede any friendship or promise of confidentiality.
6. Never give up when emotionally down and to never be too proud, embarrassed, or afraid to ask for help.

Materials:

- DVD titled Ryan's Story (provided)
- Audio/Visual Equipment (required)

Procedure:

DAY ONE

The video is intended to unfold as a dramatic story so we recommend no introduction as to what the lesson is about. Let the video slowly reveal that.

PLAY SEGMENT 1 which contains the chapters:

- October 7, 2003
- An Adorable Little Guy
- The Meanness Switch.

Then PAUSE the DVD and ASK the following to motivate discussion:

- What do you think drove Ryan to such a desperate act as suicide?
- What does the word "bullying" mean to you?
- Do boys and girls bully the same way?
- Why do kids become meaner toward one another in middle-school?
- What satisfaction does a bully get? Is he or she an emotionally strong person or do they have weaknesses or vulnerabilities that make them bully?
- Who are the typical targets of bullies and why?
- How do students feel when they see someone being bullied?
- Why don't bystanders go to the aid of the bullied?
- Why do bystanders often laugh and encourage the bully even though they are not really bad people?
- What are the pros and cons of asking adults for help if you are being bullied?

PLAY SEGMENT 2 containing the chapters:

- Fighting Back
- The Lesson
- The Internet Safety Rules

Then PAUSE the DVD and ASK the following to motivate discussion:

- Did Mr Halligan and Ryan settle on the right plan?
- Are there other less violent methods you could take and could they be more effective?
- Does sticking up for oneself and fighting the bully, physically or intellectually, always solve the problem?
- Do you think Ryan's decision to become friends with the bully was a good one?
- What did you think of Mr. Halligan's Internet safety rules? Were they adequate?
- If you were a parent, what would be your rules for using of the computer?

Homework:

Option 1

Have students select a famous, well-respected, successful person, past or present, who could have conceivably been bullied and write an essay explaining why and how they might have overcome this adversity. For example, FDR and JFK because they had physical disabilities, Lincoln for his extraordinary height and thinness, Einstein for his brains and eccentric appearance, and John Candy for his weight. Note any characteristics we ridicule as adolescents, yet admire in adulthood.

After the assignment, share some famous people who have said they were bullied as kids:

- Tom Cruise, actor.
Bullied about a learning disability.
- Mel Gibson, actor, director, producer.
Taunted for being chubby and because of his American accent (moved from U.S. to Australia)
- Tiger Woods, professional golfer
Ridiculed for his mixed race (Caucasian, Black, American Indian, and Asian) and a severe stuttering problem.
- Bill Clinton, U.S. President
Bullied for being overweight.
- Tyra Banks, actress, super model, talk show host
Picked on for being tall and skinny (at one point: 5'11" and 125 lbs). Called names like Olive Oyl, Lightbulb Head, and Fivehead, because her large forehead.
- Steven Spielberg, screenwriter, producer, director
Picked on for being Jewish and socially awkward. He refers to his school years as "Hell on Earth."

Option 2

Ask the students to pretend they were parents of middle school and high school age students and have them to describe what their Internet safety rules would be and why. If they feel no rules should exist, ask them to explain why.

DAY TWO

PLAY SEGMENT 3 which contains one chapter: Unraveling the Mystery. Then PAUSE the DVD and ASK the following to motivate a discussion:

- Do you think bullying is worse when done on the Internet. Why?
- Is it easier to be mean on the computer than in person? Why?
- Which is worse: Physical or emotional bullying? Why?
- Is depression something that kids can and should overcome on their own?
- Why don't students seek help from parents or other adults?
- If a friend confides in you that he or she is contemplating suicide, what should you do as a friend? Even if you don't think they're serious, should you act as though they are?
- Have you ever felt a situation was hopeless and unlikely to end? What was the outcome? What lesson does that teach you about suicide?

PLAY SEGMENT 4 containing the chapters:

- I Don't Believe You're A Mean Person
- I Refuse To Believe You Are That Heartless
- Don't Ever Give Up
- The Power of the Bystander
- Memories of Ryan.

PAUSE the DVD and ASK the following to motivate discussion:

- What are your thoughts about how Mr. Halligan dealt with the girl bully?
- What are your thoughts about how Mr. Halligan dealt with the boy bully?
- Do you think bystanders have the power to stop bullies and why?

Homework: Have students write an essay about what they derived from Ryan's story, particularly things that have changed the way they think.

SUGGESTED READINGS:

[Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do \(Understanding Children's Worlds\)](#) by Dan Olweus

[The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander: From Preschool to High School--How Parents and Teachers Can Help Break the Cycle of Violence](#) by Barbara Coloroso

[The Bully Free Classroom: Over 100 Tips and Strategies for Teachers K-8](#) by Allan L., Ph.D. Beane

[Schools Where Everyone Belongs](#) by Stan Davis

[Cyber Bullying](#) by Robin Kolwalski, Ph.D., Susan P. Limber, Ph.D. and Patricia W. Agatston, Ph.D.