

Who We Are

Now What Do We Do? Scenarios for Problem Solving

Teacher Notes

Problem solving scenarios allow students to grapple with issues and engage them in discussion while they build their literacy skills. Students can think about these scenarios individually and then discuss them in pairs or small groups.

These scenarios are designed as spring boards for discussion of problems that students encounter. For rich discussions to occur among the groups, you will need to make sure that students get a chance to talk about the facts of the situation before they discuss what actions to take. Please encourage your students to think about what is happening in each story, why it is happening, if the situation is fair or not, and what action they might take. Also encourage students to think about the kinds of assistance that is available (or should be) to help teenagers deal with challenges related to bullying, suicide or veiled racism.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SCENARIOS

Let students know that one of the things they'll be dealing with in the Survival Guide is to find ways to help other teenagers. On the one hand, they'll show them where places are to have fun. On the other hand, they'll help younger kids who have problems deal with some of these problems. They'll give advice and list some of the services where kids can get help. They might even offer some Survival Tips for Teens.

To start the session, ask the students what some of the problems are that kids in Surrey face (or review previous discussion). Introduce the idea that there is a fair amount of violence in middle schools and high school and kids often don't know what to do. One of the things the Survival Guide can do, is to offer some strategies to younger kids who are having a hard time.

Discuss the case of the younger brother and the bullies below and move the group through some of the steps. These include: getting the facts straight; doing some vocabulary work; brainstorming ideas on what can be done; discussing options and consequences; a "quick write" exercise and stating your opinion (and justifying it).

Note: It's hard for me to tell which ones of these scenarios might resonate with the kids more, the Bully or the Suicide and whether it will break down by gender. Just in case, I also wrote up a third scenario, having to do with immigrants and racism. It's at the end of the file. The activities would pretty much be the same as for the suicide scenario.

Please feel free to go off on discussions if a topic seems hot or exchange your own scenario for one of the one's I have outlined. I tried to keep the activities generic enough so they can easily be adapted to other challenges.

THE BULLIES

Your little brother, Connor, comes home all bloody and bruised. He kicks the chair, yells at your Mum, and swears a blue streak. It turns out that he got beaten up by a bunch of kids on the way home from school. The kids are bigger and have a tough reputation, but your little brother also has a bit of a mouth on him and always fights back. Connor asks you to help him out, since you are even bigger than the kids who beat him up.

What do you do?

Discussion (large group; pairs; small group)

1. **Getting the story straight:** What's going on here? What are the facts? Is this an isolated problem? Does this just happen to younger kids or to older kids as well? How do these fights generally start? Do they only happen to boys or are girls involved as well? What do the schools do to prevent kids from getting beaten up? What other kinds of violence are kids exposed to?
2. **Words, words, words:** What are words associated with violence? (battery; assault; victim; perpetrator)
3. **Brainstorming:** What are different ways of handling the Connor situation?

4. **Options and consequences:** In your group, pick several different options, discuss them and lay out what might happen as a consequence for each.
5. **Quick Write:** Retell the story of Connor and his big brother. Write an ending to the story.
6. **Best Option under the circumstances:**
As a whole class, discuss options and vote on what you think Connor's brother should do.

I'M SO MISERABLE, I COULD KILL MYSELF

Your friend Amanda used to be a cheerful person who liked to party and have fun. Lately, she's been very depressed, however, and she barely leaves the house. She comes to school late and leaves early; she sleeps all day, and she barely acknowledges you when you try to talk with her. When you ask her why she doesn't come to a Saturday party, she just shrugs and says "I don't feel like it". When you tell her that friends are asking about her, she says: "I don't even care." You notice that she has cigarette burns on the back of her hands. But when you mention them, she says: "Oh, that. I just wanted to see how much it would hurt."

After you talk for a bit, she mentions that her girlfriends make fun of her clothes, a boy she likes won't even recognize her existence, and her parents are always fighting. In addition, her brother was killed in a car crash a year ago, and in a couple of days, it is the anniversary of his death.

Finally she confides that she's been taking tranquilizers from her mother's medicine cabinet and she's is thinking about suicide. She makes you swear that you won't tell a soul about her plan. You are very worried that she might try to kill herself, but you always heard that people who talk about committing suicide, don't actually do it. Besides, you promised, and are now sworn to secrecy. You don't want to betray her trust.

Discussion: Getting the Facts Straight

1. What exactly is the problem?
2. What's Amanda's story? Does she have reasons to be depressed?
3. What all is going on in her life?
4. Amanda has cigarette burns on her hands, what is that all about?
5. What is the dilemma that you, as Amanda's friend are now facing?
6. What do you know about teen suicide? Is it a problem in Surrey?
7. Why do kids consider suicide? What are some of the reasons?
8. Do you know anyone who has talked about committing suicide. Do you want to share that story?
9. Is there help available in Surrey for kids who feel suicidal?

Words, Words, Words:

Here are some of the feelings associated with suicide and depression. Which ones do you know?

Word for the Feeling	Meaning	Related Word	How to remember the word
Depressed	Feeling low and sad	Depression	When you are depressed you feel like the weight of the world is pressing down on you

Alienated			
Suicidal			"-cide", means to kill, as in "homicide", to murder another person
Hostile toward family			
Self-abusive			
Apathetic			"The problem with this world is that there is too much apathy. But who cares"

Discuss with a Partner: What Can You Do?

TASK: There you are, Amanda's friends. What are some of the things you could do in this situation. Brainstorm as many ideas as you can. Don't worry if they seem far-fetched or silly. Write your ideas below.

We could

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

Discuss your ideas with the rest of the class.

Options and Consequences

It is often a good idea, to think about the results or consequences before deciding on a particular course of action, that is, before deciding what to do.

TASK: Work in a small group. Discuss some of the option and then talk about what might happen as the result of the action, the consequence. Select a person for the following roles:

1. **Group leader:** Explains the task and keeps people on track
2. **Writer:** Writes down options and consequences
3. **Reporter:** Reports the ideas from the group back to the whole group
4. **Group members:** Discuss ideas and add information when the reporter speaks for the group.

Option What Amanda's friends could do	Consequences What could happen as a result.
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

5.	
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Discuss and Evaluate

The world is full of good ideas and opinions. Nearly always some ideas are better than others if you think about the consequences. Compare the options the class has generated. Which solution do you think is best? Why?

1. Which solution would be the easiest one in the short run? Why?
2. Which makes most sense in the long run?
3. What can be done to prevent these kinds of problems?

Portfolio: Write it Down:

Task: Select one of the three writing topics below and write for at least 10 minutes. Use the space below to jot down some ideas.

Portfolio: Put your name on the essay along with the date. Write DRAFT on top of the page. Save your draft in your portfolio.

Write it Down:

What to Do About Amanda: A Personal Opinion

You are Amanda's friend. Explain Amanda's story one more time and then tell what you would do and why.

Write it Down:

A Friend in Trouble

**Have you had a friend who has been in trouble?
What happened? And what did you do (or
wanted to do) to help?**

Write what happened and what you did.

Write it Down:

Teenage Suicide: What Needs to Be Done

Write a paragraph or two on how communities such as Surrey should handle suicide. What services should be provided? What help should be available to young people who are depressed?

Write it Down:

Dear Amanda,

Write a letter to Amanda. Explain that you know how she feels and offer her your friendship and some hope.

OUR RECOMMENDATION: What might be the best way to handle the "Amanda" situation? List what you think are the best options and vote by secret ballot. Tally the results.

FOLLOW-UP:

Reading and Discussion: (Article may need to be adapted)

"Teenage Suicide: Identification, Intervention and Prevention" (ERIC Digests On-line)

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed266338.html

1. True/False Test On Teenage Suicide, based on the ERIC Digest above
2. Students review and critique brochure written for teenagers (if appropriate brochure or flyer is available)
3. Group Develops Tips And Hint For Helping A Friend Who Is Depressed (*Audience: Younger Teens*)

OTHER POSSIBLE SCENARIOS:

You Talk Funny

You are an immigrant kid. In the school you go to, there's a lot of racism and you hear a lot of ugly comments about immigrants. But some kids are ok. Still, they do make jokes sometimes, making a remark when they see someone who looks different or sounds different, though they are not really mean. You'd like to be friends, although some of their behavior bothers you.

What do you do?