

# the invisible riptide

Building Mental Wellness - Together

## Discussion Guide and Activities - Cancer

Discussion Points and Activities using *The Invisible Riptide* for children who have experienced cancer in their lives or their loved ones.

1. We all have emotional riptides, meaning our feelings can overwhelm us.
  - What do you think your riptide looks like? Draw it! What feelings are in it?
  - How do you feel them in your body, and why do you think we have feelings?
  - Has your riptide changed since you (or your loved one) was diagnosed with cancer?
2. Stella talks about how all feelings are OK and are part of being human.
  - How can feelings be both helpful and unhelpful?
  - Can you have more than one feeling at a time?
3. Stella learned about **emotional safety**: being able to identify, express, and work through emotions and have people respect your boundaries.
  - How does it feel when you express your emotions and feel heard?
  - Ask your family what helps them feel emotionally safe. We can learn a lot from others. How have the people in your life helped you when your emotions felt big?
4. Sometimes it's hard to identify or even talk about your feelings. Writing or drawing are excellent ways to also share your feelings. Here are some ideas.
  - Write down feelings and hand it to a parent, a teacher or other trusted adult.
  - Text your thoughts and feelings, instead of saying it aloud.
  - Journal, draw, or color to sort out your thoughts and feelings.
  - Make a playlist or share a song that helps express your feelings.
5. Stella becomes more aware of the Invisible Riptide when the Coronavirus pandemic started, because there has been much change, uncertainty and loss. Cancer also involves a lot of change and uncertainty.
  - Have you noticed an invisible riptide in your body more since the cancer diagnosis?
  - Are there some changes you've liked? Which changes have been the hardest?
6. Stella feels brave and excited to get help from a "feelings doctor" or therapist (Ms. Tina). She teaches Stella it's OK to share her feelings. If we don't show trusted adults our inside, they don't know how to help us best. Even one safe relationship can help our brain calm and change for the better. How cool is that?
  - How do you feel when asking for help? Comfortable? Embarrassed? Relieved?
  - Brainstorm ideas with your family that will help you feel comfortable expressing yourself.
  - How do you want your brain to change so that it works best for you?



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7. The book talks about feeling the emotional riptide of this around us and how it affects us.
  - Give examples of how emotions can be contagious.
  - What situations can make your riptide smaller, or what situations can make it bigger?
  - Draw the people in your life and the emotions that surround them.
8. "Balance and connection are the core of health. We feel and function best when our body's systems are in balance with friends, family, community and nature" (Perry and Winfrey, *What Happened to You*, pg. 48). This is why Stella chanted, "people need people."
  - How does your riptide react, what feelings do you have, when you don't feel balanced?
  - What makes you feel balanced?
9. Stella wants people to lean on one another. When you know you are not alone in our feelings, you feel more capable of having them. Stella has good friends, and everyone brings something different. No one has it all or can be all that you need.
  - Who makes up your community, and what communities are you involved in?
  - Explore different strengths and weaknesses in the people around you.
  - Why is it good to have different friends and not just one best friend?
10. When you know you are not alone in your feelings, you feel more able to have them. That's because of **co-regulation** - a big fancy word that means we can catch calm from others. Some ways you can catch some calm include getting a hug, sitting in silence with someone you love, telling someone you just want to talk and don't want any advice or suggestions, sitting together and coloring, or throwing a ball to each other.
  - Identify an adult figure who makes you feel emotionally safe at home and school.
  - What is it about that person or what does that person do to help you feel safe?
11. Stella liked dancing, especially to help her calm her body and her feelings.
  - What are some rhythmic activities you enjoy?
  - What ways do you like to get your energy and wiggles out?
12. Our brain is sort of like a muscle. We have to strengthen the calm parts when we are calm so that they work better when needed. Basically, our brain has to get used to feeling calm to use it.
  - Explore ways to strengthen the calm part of your brain: use apps (Calm, BrainTap app, Insight Timer), short, guided meditations, yoga poses, or blowing bubbles.
  - Make a list with your family with things that help people calm down. Notice that calming activities can be different for different people (some want space vs. distance or stillness vs. movement). Your own needs may even change depending on the situation! Knowing what you need and what your friends and family need allows you to be more supportive.



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