

# the invisible riptide

Building Mental Wellness - Together

## General Discussion Guide and Activities

Discussion Points and Activities using *The Invisible Riptide*

1. We all have our own emotional riptides, meaning our feelings can overwhelm us.
  - What do you think your own 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?
2. Stella talks about how all feelings are OK and part of being human.
  - How can feelings be both helpful and unhelpful?
  - Can you have more than one feeling at a time?
  - What messages are your feelings giving you?
3. Stella learned about **emotional safety**, that means being able to identify, express, and work through emotions as well as having people respect your boundaries.
  - How does it feel when you express your emotions and feel heard?
  - Talk with your family about what helps you feel emotionally safe. Kids greatly benefit from hearing adults' personal examples and modeling appropriate boundaries.
4. Sometimes it's hard to identify or even talk about your feelings.
  - Write down feelings or worries and hand them to a parent, a teacher or other trusted adult.
  - Text your feelings or words instead of saying it aloud.
  - Journal, draw, or color to sort out your thoughts and feelings.
5. Stella becomes more aware of the Invisible Riptide when the Coronavirus pandemic started because there has been much change, uncertainty, and loss.
  - Have you noticed whirly, swirly feelings or an invisible riptide in your body more since the pandemic started? Or maybe when something else in your life happened.
  - What are the feelings in your invisible riptide?
  - Which changes did you like about the pandemic and which 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 Invisible Riptide* book talks about feeling the emotional riptide around us and how we can feel it and it can affect us.
  - Give examples of how emotions can be contagious - that is, how you can catch other people's feelings.
  - What situations can make your riptide smaller or what situations can make it bigger?
  - What situations make your riptide smaller? What situations can make it bigger?
  - Who helps make your riptide smaller? Who might make your riptide bigger?
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.**"
  - What parts feel out of balance or out of control? What makes you feel balanced?
  - How does your riptide react when you don't have balance or don't feel balanced?
9. Stella wants people to lean on one another. When we know we are not alone in our feelings, we 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. Stella wants people to lean on one another. 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 parts that help us to feel calmer when we are actually calm so that those parts work better when needed. Basically, our brain has to get used to feeling the 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 of 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.

