

Unimaginable
Student
COMPANION GUIDE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

From the Producer

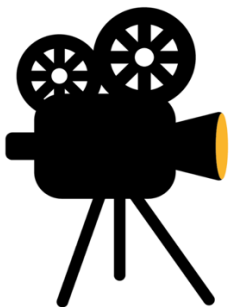
Episode Synopsis

Lesson Overview

Guiding Questions

Fact Sheet

Resource Materials



the
glowmedia
project

Mental health education for a new generation

FROM THE PRODUCER

Dear Students,

It's been four years since the world shut down due to Covid-19. ***Unimaginable*** is a short (15 minute) documentary about the effects of the pandemic on teen mental health. Why show this film now? Teens and young adults are experiencing an epidemic of depression and anxiety. The pandemic didn't cause this, but it heightened the effects of what was already happening in our society.

In watching this film you will be prompted to remember your own life during that difficult time. Students will gain insight into how the subjects of this documentary coped. How did you cope with the isolation? Did you learn anything about yourself during the period of lockdown?

This guide includes resource materials and information about situational depression, as well as the guiding questions and assignments you will experience in the classroom. It is our hope that discussion may continue in the home in addition to the classroom.

Sincerely,

Trish Glowacki
Executive Director, the glowmedia project
Executive Producer, ***Unimaginable***
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EPISODE SYNOPSIS

Unimaginable: Amidst an unprecedented pandemic, teenagers faced a staggering rise in mental health issues and a precarious, uncertain future. This uplifting documentary provides surprising insights into the creative coping mechanisms of three socioeconomically and racially disparate teens during this period of isolation.

LESSON OVERVIEW

Objective:

Students will be able to reflect on their own experience during the Covid-19 pandemic and explore ways they can apply what they learned moving forward.

Essential Questions:

1. How did Covid-19 impact you?
2. What coping strategies and tools did you use?
3. What can you take from what you learned during the pandemic that will be helpful to you in the future?

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Accompanies the Extension Activities

1. At the beginning of the film, the students refer to their experiences in the pandemic as being filled with loss. Many of us lost things during the pandemic - for example, activities we used to enjoy, celebrations and rituals like graduations, proms, performances, and sports games that didn't happen. Some of us actually lost people close to us who died of COVID-19.
 - a. Can you articulate your own sense of loss and for what/whom throughout the pandemic?
 - b. How do you think your experiences are similar or different to the students in the film and other people you know?

2. Grief is a completely natural response to the losses we have all experienced during the pandemic. While grief is often associated with death, we also grieve the loss of rituals, people we lose contact with, experiences etc. For example, given the prolonged and sudden lockdown, as well as the delayed return to familiar routines, you may grieve the loss of a sports season, school play, prom, time spent with friends, etc.
 - a. As the situation, which first felt like it might be for a short time, continued to be ongoing, do you think you allowed yourself to grieve those losses? Why or why not?
 - b. What does grief mean to you?
 - c. How can we support ourselves and each other in times of grief?

3. All three students highlighted in the film reference feeling very negative emotions at times, often to the point of extreme stress and overwhelm. In each case, the students found an outlet that helped them cope with those emotions. For Kylie it was singing, poetry, and music. For Anna it was baking. For Carolina it was painting. These activities may help to distract, achieve mastery, channel emotions, or provide an outlet that benefits others. Each student had a different response.
 - a. Have you ever felt negative emotions to the point of overwhelm? What kinds of experiences or circumstances caused you to feel that way?
 - b. What activities or techniques help you to cope with and relieve that stress?
 - c. Is there anything you saw one of the other students do that sounds like something that might help you? Why or why not?

4. Carolina says, "I want to write, read etc., but I'm so unmotivated." She feels unmotivated despite having goals and genuinely wanting to do things. Kylie says "I was unmotivated and didn't do anything" when speaking of her classes.
 - a. Have you or someone you know ever felt unmotivated despite having goals you want to achieve?

- b. Why is it important to accept and forgive yourself for this feeling (as it can be a common response to stress), rather than just blame yourself or add to your negative emotions?
 - c. What have you used to find motivation to move forward?)

- 5. Psychologist Lisa D'Amour says "when we have uncomfortable emotions, the healthiest thing we can do is talk about our feelings with the people we love. Doing so is actually how we can protect our mental health."
 - a. During the pandemic, everyone has been experiencing loss and isolation in different ways all at the same time. Has that made it more or less difficult for you to talk about your own feelings to those you care about?
 - b. In what ways has the pandemic experience caused you to isolate yourself from others?
 - c. In what ways has the pandemic made you more proactive in reaching out?

- 6. The students mentioned early on that they thought the lockdown would only be two weeks. Carolina even said she was "happy the pandemic happened to give me a break." However, as two weeks turned into months and then carried into the following school year, their responses changed.
 - a. What were your dominant feelings and behaviors at the start of the pandemic?
 - b. How did your feelings and behaviors change as the fall of 2020 started?
 - c. How do you feel now?

- 7. Social relationships are vital for our health. "I miss my friends" was a common quote from the students interviewed.
 - a. What do you prioritize in your relationships?
 - b. Has the pandemic changed the way you identify your own needs from relationships with your friends, family, teachers, etc.?
 - c. Has the pandemic changed the ways in which you conduct your relationships? If so, how?

- 8. During the pandemic, the online world became the environment for the majority of our relationships and experiences. In many ways, we were more connected than ever before. However, many people reported heightened senses of loneliness and isolation.
 - a. How do you think online tools for classes, social connection, and entertainment had a positive impact during the pandemic?
 - b. Has your relationship with digital tools, including social media, changed throughout the pandemic? (For example: more time online, more time offline, more or fewer social media outlets, consuming lots of digital content at once across multiple devices.) Why or why not?

9. Carolina said she has a tattoo that says “Remember you must die”, to remind herself that she isn’t immortal and needs to make the most of the time she has. Her plan is to also get a matching tattoo on the other arm that says “Remember to live.”
 - a. Which of these phrases do you find more motivating and why?
 - b. Do you think it is important to make the most of each day?
 - c. How do you go about setting goals so that you can feel successful without feeling overwhelmed?

10. Looking back over the pandemic, the students all referenced areas of growth such as being less judgmental, valuing their freedom, and valuing their relationships in more profound ways.
 - a. What have you learned about yourself in going through the pandemic?
 - b. Have your values changed in terms of how you spend your time?
 - c. When you’re 30 looking back on this time in your life, what positive things do you think you will have learned?

FACT SHEET

CDC Data for Adolescent Mental Health Effects of the Pandemic

- During March–October 2020, among all emergency department (ED) visits, the proportion of mental health-related visits increased by **31%** among US adolescents aged 12–17 years, compared with 2019.
- During this same period in 2020, the number of ED visits for eating disorders among adolescent females doubled.
- There was a 22% spike in ED trips for potential suicides by children aged 12 to 17 in summer 2020 compared to 2019. This number rose to 39% in spring of 2021.
- In 2021, more than a third (37%) of high school students reported they experienced poor mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic, and 44% reported they persistently felt sad or hopeless during the past year.

HELPFUL ONLINE RESOURCES

The 988 Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals in the United States.

<https://988lifeline.org>

Teen Line is an anonymous, nonjudgmental space for youth. Through our hotline, teens can access personal peer-to-peer support from highly trained teens supervised by adult mental health professionals. Our work extends to providing outreach and support to schools and other youth organizations.

<https://www.teenline.org>

Teen Talk provides a free, anonymous, safe space for teens to request support from trained peers and learn from others with similar experiences.

<https://www.teentalkapp.org>

Office of the Surgeon General's Report on Teen Mental Health

<https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/youth-mental-health/index.html#:~:text=Since%20the%20pandemic%20began%2C%20rates,youth%2C%20and%20other%20marginalized%20communities.>