DISCUSSION GUIDE

Is Anyone Listening?

the figureheads
How it Began…

A question. That’s how this project began. I work for a small, parent-run, non-profit organization serving families that include children with mental, emotional or behavioral disorders. We were meeting with a marketing firm to discuss how we could better promote our organization. Then they asked the question. If money were no object, what would you do? My answer had nothing to do with promoting the work of our organization. “I’d attempt to change people’s attitudes toward children with mental health needs and their families.”

It was outlandish, outrageous, out of the question. Certainly a small group of parents with limited financial resources couldn’t do that. That’s what I believed. A few months later, some of our staff were sitting around our conference table at the end of a work day, lamenting how anti-stigma campaigns hadn’t really seemed to change society’s perception of kids who have mental health disorders. We reflected back on our meeting with the marketing firm. Then, out of the blue, another question. What if we could do something? Before we left that day, we had outlined the concept of this project. We’re not sure if it will work, but we know one thing: It’s time for the next question.

Is Anyone Listening?

HUGH DAVIS - WISCONSIN FAMILY TIES

THE PARTNERS

Wisconsin Family Ties is a statewide not-for-profit organization run by families for families that include children and adolescents who have mental, emotional or behavioral disorders. It is the only resource and support agency of its kind in Wisconsin. Wisconsin Family Ties provides information, training, support and advocacy.

Department of Public Instruction serves as the constitutional office for K-12 public schools in the state of Wisconsin. Dr. Tony Evers is the duly elected superintendent of the department.

The Mental Health Awareness Unit was developed by a statewide team of school and community mental health leaders under the leadership of Jon W. Hisgen, Health and Physical Education Consultant at the Department of Public Instruction. This nine lesson unit is now in its second edition.

The Figureheads are an award-winning musical act turned non-profit organization using original positive hip-hop music to engage youth and educators, from pre-kindergarten through high-school. Their work develops critical thinking and collaborative skills that result in a greater desire to learn and relate.

For more information about Figureheads or to book them for a performance at your school, please visit www.figureheadsinc.org or call 414.520.3275.

THE PROJECT

In 2007, Wisconsin Family Ties commissioned the Figureheads to write five songs about children’s mental health. The resulting CD, “Is Anyone Listening?,” includes five songs: Kaleidoscope, Misconceptions, Beauty Marks, More to the Story and Do What.

In 2011, Wisconsin Family Ties and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) partnered to distribute the Mental Illness Awareness curriculum and Is Anyone Listening? CD and Discussion Guide to all public school districts and private schools in Wisconsin.

This discussion guide is intended to help teachers connect the songs on the Is Anyone Listening? CD with DPI’s Mental Health Units of Instruction.
DISCUSSION GUIDE

MISCONCEPTIONS
(Track #2 on CD)

Connect this song with Lesson 1 titled “Recognizing and Changing Misconceptions”.

After you play the song “Misconceptions” or view the video (go to http://isanyonelistening.org and click on Misconceptions under “Jump to a Song” on the far right of the page), have the students in teams of three or four create a list of labels linked to mental illness that are mentioned in the song or video. After class discussion on these labels each team will put together a list that has at least one misconception, how people responded to this misconception in the past, and how they might respond today to get rid of this misconception. Use page 5 and 6 of the curriculum to guide the development of the list and then discuss each of the lists with the real facts surrounding mental illness. You can follow up with the data part of the lesson.

GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
1. Write down as many labels of mental illness that you can think of. What are the advantages and disadvantages of labels?
2. What would happen if there were no labels?

ELEMENTARY:
1. Think of a time when someone thought or said things about you that you knew were untrue. How did it make you feel and what did you do as a result?
2. What might you say to someone who was thinking or saying untrue things about you?

MIDDLE SCHOOL:
1. Explain a time when your first judgment about someone was different than after you got to know that person.
2. Why do you think we sometimes make these kinds of quick judgments about people?

HIGH SCHOOL:
1. What are some examples of labels people might use against another person?
2. What labels do you think people might use to describe you? How would you feel about these labels?

ADULT AUDIENCE:
1. What comes to mind when you hear labels like EBD, ADHD, LD, etc.?
2. How do you think these labels affect a person throughout their lifetime in such places as school, work, home, with friends, etc.?

BEAUTY MARKS
(Track #3 on CD)

Connect this song with Lesson 3 titled “The Good, Bad, and Ugly of Mental Illness in the Media”.

After you play the song “Beauty Marks,” have a general discussion of how people can make negative experiences positive using the spectrum disorder autism as the issue. Follow up this discussion with Lesson 3 to discuss how the media portrays mental illness today.

GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
1. What comes to mind when you think of beauty marks?
2. How is suffering with a mental illness, or being associated with a person with a mental illness considered a beauty mark?
3. What is the real “beauty” in a beauty mark as it relates to the song?

ELEMENTARY:
1. What is beauty?
2. Have you ever thought something was beautiful that others did not? What was the difference?

MIDDLE SCHOOL:
1. What kind of beauty do people show? What makes them beautiful to you?
2. What happens when people don’t show that beauty?

HIGH SCHOOL:
1. Please describe a time when you felt that you were faced with a negative experience that became positive.
2. What kind of sacrifices does a child with autism have to make?

ADULT AUDIENCE:
1. What beauty can come from suffering?
2. What does it mean to let go of trying to fix a situation and accept the reality of it?

MORE TO THE STORY
(Track #4 on CD)

Connect this song with Lesson 4 titled “May MONK Be With You”.

After you play the song “More to the Story,” have one to two groups of three answer one of the questions below. After presenting their answers the team will develop a poster or visual that will tell others about either how to get fellow students to reduce stigma in their school or ways to communicate with family members who may have one member with mental illness. Follow up with the viewing and discussion of the MONK vignette DVD.
GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
1. Why do you think some people believe parents may contribute to their child’s mental illness?
2. After listening to the song, describe how you could change the way you communicate to parents of children with a mental illness?

ELEMENTARY:
1. How do your parents show you that they love you and want the best for you?
2. How are you different than your brothers or sisters, if you have them?

MIDDLE SCHOOL:
1. How does a middle school student feel when he/she is harassed or bullied?
2. Why do you think parents are blamed when they have a child that has an emotional or behavioral challenge?

HIGH SCHOOL:
1. How can students help to break the chain of stigma related to mental illness?
2. How do you think your brain is wired that makes you unique?

ADULT AUDIENCE:
1. When speaking to other significant adults about reducing stigma what does the following sentence mean? “I need a helping hand from you and not an anesthesia.”
2. Why do many parents feel guilty about having a child with an emotional or behavioral challenge?

KALEIDOSCOPE
(Track #1 on CD)
Connect this song with Lesson 6 titled “The Biggest Winner: Reducing Stigma”

Play the song and in groups of three or four have the students answer the questions based on the lyrics they just heard. Give them a print copy of the lyrics to help guide the discussion (15 minutes). Emphasize what stigma is, how it gets started, and ways students or families can reduce stigma. Now read Juanita’s story in the curriculum and discuss the story as it relates to stigma and ways to reduce stigma.

GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
1. What does it mean to “unbind the lies that keep our hands tied” when it comes to viewing people with mental illness?
2. What is the “surprise” inside the kaleidoscope of mental illness?

ELEMENTARY STUDENTS:
1. What do you think makes you special?
2. Why do you think some people make fun of those who do things different than others?

MIDDLE SCHOOL:
1. What does the statement in the song “caterpillar with some hard to see potential” mean to you?
2. When thinking about the song, what does the statement “keep on going with what is inside you” mean to someone who might be having trouble making friends?

HIGH SCHOOL:
1. What does it mean to “reverse the aversion” when being with others?
2. Pick out three references from the song that refer to how others treat people with mental and emotional challenges.

ADULT AUDIENCE:
1. How can families help reduce stigma if they have a kaleidoscope surprise?
2. What does the term “I can’t hide imperfection as good as you” mean to someone that might have a mental illness?

DO WHAT
(Track #5 on CD)
Connect this song with Lesson 7 titled “Taking Action: Practicing the Skill of Helping Someone with Mental Illness”.

After listening to the song and discussing the questions, practice the ACT(T) acronym in lesson 7. When you have completed the lesson it is time to put together a stigma reduction strategy for the class. It could include school announcements, visuals, a powerpoint or Prezi (a cloud-based presentation software and storytelling tool), or taking bits and pieces from all of the songs on “Is Anyone Listening?” and creating an Audacity (a free audio editor for recording, slicing and mixing audio) to play during lunch.

GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
1. Describe how peer pressure contributes to stigma attached to mental illness.
2. Why do people have trouble talking with people with mental illness?

ELEMENTARY:
1. What are some things you do to help others in your home or at school?
2. Why does helping others make you feel good?

MIDDLE SCHOOL:
1. How can you help others that are not as fortunate as you?
2. Why is it easier for some middle school students to ridicule others than to help others?

HIGH SCHOOL:
1. Compare types of things are contagious. Point out both bad things that can be contagious as well good things.
2. What does “catch a vision for the times” mean with respect to stigma?

ADULT AUDIENCE:
1. What are actions we can take in the community to reduce stigma?
2. Create a title for your community initiative to fight stigma.
THE LYRICS
Is Anyone Listening?

MISCONCEPTIONS

CHORUS
What do I do with all these misconceptions
A thousand eyes looking in my direction
My every move coming under inspection
Should I give up now or keep on steppin
What do I do with all these misconceptions
A thousand eyes looking in my direction
Will I ever just be accepted or
Will they always keep me guessin

V.1
Another day another lost cause that’s how it is
When it’s me against the world and I’m just a kid
With more letters to my name than a doctor
EBD – ADHD – any I forgot, sir?
No I don’t need your pity
And all your half-hearted attempts to connect with me
I’m sorry, one part of me really appreciates it
And yet another part of me hates it
But what I hate more is feeling so isolated
Like nobody knows what I go through, like they can’t relate
But wait, I can’t be that different, that different
People go through similar stuff but maybe it’s just hidden
In an attempt to appear perfect
But for me it’s all out on the surface
And so I’m either overemphasized or ignored
No room for me to just be, o lord

CHORUS

V.2
She had no idea it’d be this hard
Is this a form of punishment, God?
Is the thought she would often have
Course her dad thought it was
Even worse than that she believed it herself
And carried it like a bag
Living all by herself knowing no one knew what she felt
Trying to hide the fact that her mind was off track
Contact with the world was at a minimal flow
She didn’t want people to know cuz she knew
They would go from treating her like a person
To saying “she’s just slow.”
Growing up being called a mistake is how you learn
Being happy is someone else’s fate
She keeps her questions tied to her lips
How come someone tell me why I exist and
Why when people guess who I am, they miss, miss

CHORUS

BEAUTY MARKS

CHORUS
If we could see the beauty that marks our suffering
It would truly make the heart sing
If we could see the beauty that marks our suffering
It would truly make the heart sing
If we could see the beauty that marks our suffering
It would truly make the heart sing
If we could see the beauty inside this whole thing
It would truly make the heart sing

V.1
Loving you is a journey I’m still on
The road’s been hard; the road’s been long
I’ve done some things right and others wrong
I’ve been weak at times I’ve been strong
But on those days when I want to disengage
I’m reminded in a million different ways
That you’re a gift not a problem to fix
And I think of all the beauty I miss
When I’m preoccupied with cures and solutions
Which usually lead to disappointment and confusion
But when I choose to just be here with you
That’s when I see most clearly this truth
That the space between us is more sacred
Than any temple or any destination
It means more than the world and its clamor
For money, success, honor and glamour
So here I am setting the timer on the camera
To capture a piece of the life that I’m after
A life of joy, a life that celebrates
Not just the good times but all the struggles that we face
The sacrifices I’ve made have been worth it
Not because it’s better now and everything is perfect
But because this is a chance for me to love
With all that I am and that’s reward enough

CHORUS

v.2
I was twenty three when your mom and me
Saw that we would be a three person family
Both of us were happy
There’s nothing better than knowing I’d be a daddy
I changed your first diaper gladly
And I’ll never forget the way I felt when we met
With all the thoughts in my head I thought the future was set
But like a thief in the night my dream was stolen and life
Became a tormented fight and what I saw wasn’t right
Because my child went from smiling and playing with me
To staring off into space at something I couldn’t see
And all the doctor could tell me was he’d seen it before
I wanted answers but all I got were tears on my floor
And I’ll be honest, autism isn’t something that’s fun
There’s a lot of days when I just want to quit and then run
But your mommy she needs me cuz for her it’s not easy
We’ve been having to give up a lot of dreams and believe me
We both know that you’re worth it
Cuz see this life isn’t perfect but I believe there’s a purpose
And that’s the reason I wrote this
I want the world to take notice that life is all out of focus
Until you’ve fought for the moments
That most are taking for granted
I’ll be taking advantage of every hug that you give me
Cuz now I know that you growing is the real reason I’m living
And I won’t ever forget it cuz now you’re here to remind me
That you’re the most important treasure ever to find me

CHORUS

BRIDGE
I will call you out to be more than the world could ever see (X8)
Beauty marks, beauty marks the spot where my tears fell I will give all I got, I got (X4)

MORE TO THE STORY

INTRO (X2)
Don’t think you know me
Cuz you only saw my broken side
Please judge me slowly
Cuz I’m holding something broke inside

CHORUS (X2)
There’s more to the story than what you see
Don’t pass judgment on me
I’m goin do what I can, what I don’t understand
I’ll need help with but help’s not free

v.1
So my child has a hard time listenin
And some people tell me he needs more discipline
If I ever get accused like this again
I might throw you in the lake that you’re fishin’ in
Naw, seriously there’s a serious need
For some people to know it’s not that easy
To explain how the brain of child is wired
There’s more to it than the two cent bullets you fire
You want to write off the problems on my parenting skills
Then I don’t know for sure who’s more mentally ill
Is it you or my child that struggles to sit still,
Still there’s a deeper issue and it’s real
Yes, I’m annoyed and a little on edge
You’d understand if you had heard what people have said
Telling me my child’s mental needs are an illusion
I’m in a sea of confusion

CHORUS

v.2
I ain’t buyin what you’re sellin
The lies that you’re tellin
That you can just fix my kid with formulas
When he was born to us the beauty was real
But like a terrible parent is how I’m starting to feel
Because I don’t have any answers, I’m just trying to stay
Committed to my kiddo every step of the way
Through the embarrassment and harassment
I daily go through
Because my kid is an inconvenience to you
It’s like we’re standing at the door of your utopia
Just waitin and prayin for the gates to open up
But they never do and we’re left standin outside
Just wishin for a safe place for us to run and hide
For someone to say come inside there’s space for ya
No judgments or grudges just plenty of grace for ya
But that seems like a fantasy just like your panacea
I need a helping hand from you and not an anesthesia

CHORUS

INTRO (X2)

KALEIDOSCOPE

CHORUS
When we open our eyes we’ll see the kaleidoscope surprise (x2)

V.1
Hey welcome in I’m someone else’s friend
The book that’ll probably never leave the shelf again
I’m the boy across the street, you don’t want to meet
The inconvenient adolescent some would call unique
I’m that little girl your mama said was special
The caterpillar with some really hard to see potential
Hah, I’m the gift God gave you to listen to
I can’t hide imperfection as good as you
Daddy says my mind is a mystery
Well thanks dad for reminding me officially
Maybe that’s why my friends are so slippery
I can’t hang on because I think too differently
Hey, I’m a dusty book
The kind of person people avoid trust me look
I’m a small town missed by the highway
Another reason this bird wants to fly away

CHORUS

V.2
Well if it isn’t the kid who has a hard time fittin in
The one who’s tuned different than all the other instruments
And though the music he makes is thought dissonant
It’s only so to those who can’t hear just how intricate
This symphony is and they just keep missin it
So really who’s the one who has a hard time listenin
It’s time to rethink in a blink re-envision
And see first the person, reverse the aversion
And let the stigma scales fall from our eyes
And start to unbind the lies that keep our hands tied
Tellin us our freedom is only for ourself
Naw, freedom is a self pouring forth to help
And if it’s better to give, then a better way to live
Would be to take a fresh look at the kid for who he is
And not just for what he didn’t do or did
Learn how to dig em cuz the treasure may be hid, ya dig

CHORUS (REPEAT TIL END OF SONG)
Ha ha, look how you do what you do
Ya know you’re so cool
Yeah, you’re so fresh
You’ve got your own gifts goin on so don’t stress
Just be yourself
And when you need it ask for help
Somebody will be there so be aware
Yeah, ha
You’ve got it going on
So keep singing your song
Just keep moving along
When you’re weak, you’re strong
Keep on going with what you know is inside ya
Cuz you never know, ha, it might surprise ya

DO WHAT

CHORUS (X2)
Do what, do what, do what you’re goin need to
Do what, do what you can, what you can
Do what, do what, do what… we’re goin need you
Do what, do what you plan, what you plan

V.1
What you gotta do now is develop a new style
That allows dialogue with those different from you now
Who and how where and when those are the questions
For you to consider we only have a few suggestions
But blessings are more easily counted when we’re connected
And are able to see from somebody else’s perspective
So leave a little room in your days to engage
The struggle of others and even go out of your way
What ya think about that when confronted with the fact
That so many people are affected by the way you act
By the way you think
Back when we started this work
We all knew that the truth was good but it would hurt
We must discipline our minds, catch a vision for the times
Get up listen and decide... will you fizzle out or shine? Yeah.
Discipline our minds, catch a vision for the times
Get up listen and decide... will you fizzle out or shine?

**CHORUS**

**V.2**
Here’s a chance to enhance your sense of well-being
Beyond just well-meaning to really feeling and seeing
Here’s a way to embrace the fact that all of us
Need someone to love and someone to love us
Regardless of hardships that come with mental health
We all need a sense of the value of self
So let the sunshine un-blind us and find us
Unwind us from all the tensions that bind us
And keep us from being free to just be us
And accept and love those that really need us
Speak up when it’s time or just be there to listen
Cuz we all have a voice now let’s all catch the vision

**CHORUS**

**V.3**
Everybody’s gotta part to play
Yeah, punch the clock cuz we start today, ok
It starts with what you think and say, yeah
That’ll be the kind of path we lay, alright
I know cuz it’s easy for me to ridicule
People for how they look or what they couldn’t do, uh-huh
So I know I hurt at least a kid or two
That’s a sign that my mind needs to be renewed
Way too many people feel alone, alone
Maybe that’s cuz they’ve never been shown, shown what
The kind of friendship that feels like home, home
The real kind that is organically grown, grown
Look I don’t know what it took to change me
How’d I start to see the world so strangely
Whatever it was I hope it’s contagious, yeah yeah
I like to see them kind of beautiful changes

**CHORUS (X2)**

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