

WHISPERING SPIRITS

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Authored by Ellen Morehouse, LCSW, CASAC, CPP
Executive Director, *Student Assistance Services Corporation*

Whispering Spirits generates a lot of emotion. Therefore it is important for students to have time to process it. This discussion guide can be used with the 24-minute classroom version of the film in a standard class period or discussion can be more in-depth and a role-play can be added if there is additional time.

The discussion should be as interactive as possible but it is important for the facilitator to be aware of time and make sure the following topics are discussed:

(1) How to help a friend; (2) the Good Samaritan Law; and (3) Naloxone (Narcan)

The more important questions and facilitator talking points are preceded by an asterisk (*). However, if there is more than 10 minutes for discussion, it is suggested that the questions be asked in the order they are listed.

Ask the class: Was there anything in Justin's life that caused his heroin use?

Explain what a risk factor is and give non-drug use examples.

(Obesity is a risk factor for diabetes, not wearing sunscreen is a risk factor for skin cancer, etc.)

Ask the class: What are the risk factors for teen substance use?

Ask the class: What were the risk factors in Justin's life?

List risk factors for teen substance use: drug using friends, positive attitudes towards drug use, school failure, depression, family history of substance abuse.

* **Ask the class:** Is there anything Justin's friends could have done to prevent Justin's death?

* **Ask the class:** Why do you think Justin's friends didn't speak to his parents, counselors at school, or a trusted adult?

* **Ask the class:** What can a friend do if they are worried about a friend's alcohol or other drug use?

* **Review** the four steps of how to talk with your friend, ideally when he/she is not impaired.

Step 1 - Tell your friend that you are worried about him/her and give specific examples of why.

“Last night you couldn’t even walk, you became violent for no reason, you fell asleep while you were driving, etc.”

Step 2 - Acknowledge that how the person acted was not how they would normally act.

“You would never have cursed at your mom. I think the drug(s) you were using might have made you out-of-it.”

Step 3 - Express your concern about the drugs causing problems.

“I think those pills you’re taking are mellowing you out too much or making you really irritable.”

“When you drink you turn into a different person.”

Step 4 - Suggest help.

“How about talking to someone about ways of using less or not using at all.”

Optional: Divide students into groups of three. Have one student be the teen with the Substance Use Disorder, have one be the concerned friend, and have the third be the observer. Role Play with three rotations so everyone gets a chance to be the friend and try out how it feels to speak to someone who has a problem with substance use.

Ask the class: What can teens do if they know that a brother/sister is using drugs?

Ask the class: What can teens do if they are worried about a brother or sister’s alcohol or other drug use?

Ask the class: What are the differences in how a teen might respond to a friend’s use versus a sibling’s use?

* **Explain** the Good Samaritan Law (if your state has one).

* **Explain** how naloxone can reverse overdose effect of opiates such as heroin and prevent death.

* **Discuss** the availability of Narcan in your community.

Extra discussion: Explain the different types of drug treatment for teens.

(outpatient programs, day treatment, detoxification, inpatient, residential, etc.)