

## **HOW TO USE THIS PROGRAM**

This program was produced for use in classrooms, libraries, community centers, social service agencies, youth organizations, camps, teen groups and parent education centers, or for viewing by parents and teens together at home. Although its target audience is Middle School students & their parents, anyone who has regular contact with and a commitment to young people can benefit from this video as well. It is meant to be used as a part of a learning experience that begins before viewing the program and extends beyond the classroom walls. The discussion questions and follow-up activities are intended to enhance this learning experience. Educators and counselors planning to show *Jenny's Reasons* to teens may want to view the video in advance so that they can adapt their program follow-up to best suit the needs of their group. It is suggested that teens view the video under adult supervision.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- \* To spotlight & better recognize the signs of teen depression and suicidal ideation.
- \* To explore the impact that troubled parents have on their children's mental health and overall well-being.
- \* To examine what peers and educators can do to reach out to a teen they feel may be privately struggling with depression.

## **SYNOPSIS**

Bridging the gap between education and entertainment, 'Jenny's Reasons' provides a haunting look at teen depression and the often unwitting family dynamics that surround it. The powerful, award-winning short finds its main character, Jenny, in the throes of clinical depression, unable to understand the reasons she 'feels so bad all the time'. Deeply confused and desperately overwhelmed, Jenny makes plans to end her life ~ plans that are ultimately thwarted when her best friend, Tanya, confronts her and shares a dark secret of her own.

## **FROM THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH...**

## **How do children and adolescents experience depression?**

Scientists and doctors have begun to take seriously the risk of depression in children. Research has shown that childhood depression often persists, recurs and continues into adulthood, especially if it goes untreated. The presence of childhood depression also tends to be a predictor of more severe illnesses in adulthood.

A child with depression may pretend to be sick, refuse to go to school, cling to a parent, or worry that a parent may die. Older children may sulk, get into trouble at school, be negative and irritable, and feel misunderstood. Because these signs may be viewed as normal mood swings typical of children as they move through developmental stages, it may be difficult to accurately diagnose a young person with depression.

Before puberty, boys and girls are equally likely to develop depressive disorders. By age 15, however, girls are twice as likely as boys to have experienced a major depressive episode.

Depression in adolescence comes at a time of great personal change—when boys and girls are forming an identity distinct from their parents, grappling with gender issues and emerging sexuality, and making decisions for the first time in their lives. Depression in adolescence frequently co-occurs with other disorders such as anxiety, disruptive behavior, eating disorders or substance abuse. It can also lead to increased risk for suicide.

An NIMH-funded clinical trial of 439 adolescents with major depression found that a combination of medication and psychotherapy was the most effective treatment option. Other NIMH-funded researchers are developing and testing ways to prevent suicide in children and adolescents, including early diagnosis and treatment, and a better understanding of suicidal thinking.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR TEENS & PARENTS**

1. Do you personally know of a teen who has struggled with teen depression? If so, what are the parallels between their story and 'Jenny's Reasons'...?

2. What do you imagine Jenny's life has been like growing up? What sort of relationship has she had with her parents and how has it changed through the years (if at all)?
3. Why do you think Jenny feels she can't talk to her parents about her depression at the beginning of the film?
4. Why do you think Tanya was able to successfully talk Jenny out of attempting suicide and getting help?
5. What do you think happens after the film ends? How might the rest of the story play out...?

## **FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES**

1. Invite a local mental health professional to talk to your group more in-depth about the issues addressed in the film.
2. Write and perform a short prequel or prequels to 'Jenny's Reasons', imagining key moments in Jenny's life, exploring in more detail how she arrived at her depression.
3. Write and perform an alternate story told from Jenny's parents' point of view; an inner monologue that covers the same key moments as the above exercise.

**NOTE:** After the above performances, an informed follow-up discussion is strongly recommended.