Helpfulness

Grades 9-12

Segment Summary:

Amanda and Krystell Laffin make self-sacrifices in order to ease the daily challenges faced by their ailing mother.

Pam Laffin suffers from emphysema, a lung disease caused by the cigarettes she started smoking when she was 10 years old. Because her illness confines her to a wheelchair, Pam’s daughters, Amanda and Krystell, must help out around the house more than most of the kids their age. Sometimes, this extra work causes the sisters to miss out on spending time with their friends. At such a young age, they are already familiar with making tough self-sacrifices. However, Amanda and Krystell say they love and respect their mother and don’t mind taking on added responsibilities if it makes her life easier. Although the Laffin sisters try to live normal lives, their mother’s serious illness weighs heavily on their minds. Amanda often worries about what will happen to her and her sister when their mother dies, while Krystell tries not to dwell on their mother’s health problems. But both girls continue to make helpfulness their top priority so that their mother can live as comfortably as possible.

Discussion Questions:

1. How would your responsibilities change if a member of your family were sick? How would this make you feel?
2. As you grow older, do you have to help out more around the house? Why do you think that the older a person is, the more he or she is expected to help?
3. How would you cope with the knowledge that one of your parents is terminally ill? Do you think you would change the way you treat your parents if they were sick or incapacitated? Why or why not?
4. Whom do you think Amanda and Krystell talk to about their feelings? Why do you think they might be hesitant to share their fears or concerns with their mother?
5. If you were Amanda, what would you do to help Krystell? Do you think an older sibling is obligated to help a younger sibling cope with his or her fears?
6. How does Pam try to help her daughters cope with their situation? How do Amanda and Krystell try to help their mother?
7. How important is family support in your life? What happens to sick or disabled people who do not have the support of their family and friends?
8. Do you think our government or society does enough to help children whose parents are seriously ill or disabled? Explain.
9. What type of help is available to the sick or disabled in your community?
10. What life lessons are Amanda and Krystell learning from their experience?
Vocabulary Words and Definitions:

**Anonymity (n.)**
**Definition:** the state of not letting a person’s name be known or not showing who is involved in a certain project
**Context:** The boy agreed to testify against the alleged robber as long as the police granted him anonymity.

**Beneficial (adj.)**
**Definition:** producing results that bring advantages
**Context:** The school staff wanted to make beneficial changes, including the installation of metal detectors, in order to ensure the students’ safety.

**Cathartic (adj.)**
**Definition:** helping a person to deal with difficult emotions and get rid of them
**Context:** Talking to a counselor can be a cathartic and cleansing experience for a victim of harassment.

**Conundrum (n.)**
**Definition:** a confusing and difficult problem
**Context:** The school faces a familiar conundrum as more and more students begin to turn in plagiarized reports.

**Counsel (n.)**
**Definition:** advice, often from a person of authority
**Context:** Instead of following her older brother’s counsel, Wilma broke curfew to attend a late-night party.

**Despondent (adj.)**
**Definition:** unhappy and without hope
**Context:** Martin became despondent and depressed after he was paralyzed in a car accident.

**Emphysema (n.)**
**Definition:** a serious disease that affects the lungs, making it difficult to breathe
**Context:** As a result of having smoked for 20 years, Carleton has emphysema and experiences breathing difficulties most of the time.

**Helpfulness (n.)**
**Definition:** care or help provided to a person to make his or her life easier
**Context:** Because of Krystal's helpfulness, many of the children she tutors are improving their grades.

**Self-disclosure (n.)**
**Definition:** the act of telling or revealing a person’s own secret
**Context:** Students are more likely to practice self-disclosure if they don’t have to record their names when they write about their personal experiences.

**Self-sacrifice (n.)**
**Definition:** the act of doing without things a person wants, needs or cares about in order to help someone else
**Context:** Janie’s self-sacrifice is evident when reviewing the amount of time she spends helping young mothers.

Activity: Agents of Assistance

Objectives:

Students will be able to
- Research local help agencies
- Assess the needs in a community
- Design a community service project
- Collaborate with others to fulfill committee responsibilities
- Recognize the benefits of performing helpful acts

Materials:
- Pens, pencils
- Paper

Procedure:

1. Explain to students that they will design a community service project for a local health agency.

2. Divide the class into groups of four. Assign each group to research two local agencies that assist the disabled. As a part of their research, the group members should answer the following questions:
   - What types of people does the agency help?
   - What kind of help do the recipients need?
   - How could our class help the agency meet its goals?

   **Note:** Consider providing students with a list of local agencies. If your school is in a community where the number of health agencies is limited, consider instructing each group to research only one agency.

3. When students’ research is complete, have each group select the agency it would like to help. A representative from each group will share his or her group’s decision with the class.

4. Have students vote on which agency they want to help as a class. They also need to decide which type of project would be most beneficial to their chosen agency.

5. Divide the class into committees. Each committee will be responsible for a different aspect of the project.
   - **Examples:** publicity, planning, transportation, communication, etc.

   **Note:** The number and size of each committee will vary depending on the project your class chooses.

6. After your class completes the project, close the activity with a discussion about the cost and value of helping others. Consider using the following questions as a guide:
   - Before participating in this class project, what was the most recent helpful act you performed for another person? What was the most recent kind and helpful act someone performed for you?
   - What are the personal and monetary costs involved in demonstrating helpfulness? Provide examples.
   - How have others benefited from your self-sacrifice? How did you benefit from reaching out to others in your local area?
   - Do you think it is a good idea to establish a helpful relationship between the school and the community? Why or why not?