



Resource Guide For Parents & Carers

Discussion Notes for Parent & Carers

We appreciate that some parents and carers may not feel as if they are well equipped enough to discuss some of the issues in **I Just Want To Be...Me!**, especially if the ideas are very new to them.

We would say, thank your mind for that thought, make space for those feelings – and do what is important to you!

The following questions are not prescriptive, but provide some guidance as to the kind of things a parent/carer *could* talk about with their child. Some answers have been provided, too, where you may need to prompt. These are not the only answers – young people are creative, and may see things that we didn't.

These questions are best discussed after the story has been read once through in its entirety. We recommend, however, that you don't just go through each question one after another! Ask your child to pick a page/picture that caught their attention in some way, or pick a page that you think is important - and let the discussion flow from there.

There are some challenges for you, the parent or carer, too – the purpose of these is to help children and adolescents understand the universality of some of these issues. Hopefully you will find these questions open up some interesting and useful conversations between you and your child/children.

Of course, if at any time you become concerned about what your child is saying, or if you feel that there are issues coming up that are more complex, we recommend that you seek advice and support from a professional- either your local doctor, the counsellor at your child's school, or another mental health professional.



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These discussion points are not intended to replace therapy for more complex mental health issues.

Page 6 & 7 – When you are worrying about something, do you ever feel any of the same sorts of things that Holly is feeling? Do you feel some different things?

Challenge: When I worry about things like _____ I often feel _____

Page 10 & 11 – Have you ever tried to talk about these types of feelings? Did anyone answer like any of the people in the book? (**Challenge** to parent/carer: “Did I answer like this?”) How did you feel? Maybe it made you feel better for a little while – but did the feelings come back anyway?

- Do you notice what is happening in the background in some of the panels on this page?

[Monster shapes are beginning to appear, reflecting Holly’s unhelpful thoughts, feelings and unpleasant sensations]

Page 11 - 13 – What are some things Holly fails to notice on this page? Why do you think she misses that?

[She thinks everyone else is happy, but they are not. She doesn’t notice Scott and Andy. She does not notice her friends smile and wave to her – she is too caught up in unhelpful thoughts; she is wearing a thought blindfold]

Page 18 – Notice the change in colour from this page. Why do you think the colours on the first pages were darker?

[Dull colours reflect how flat and unhappy Holly was feeling]

Page 23 – Holly encounters 6 kinds of monsters:



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- 1) Emotions – what kinds of emotions has Holly been feeling?
- 2) Memories – we don't get to see what unpleasant memories she is having – but using your imagination, what kind of things might she be remembering?
- 3) Thoughts – what kind of unhelpful thoughts has she been thinking?
- 4) Unpleasant sensations – what has she felt? Where?
- 5) Mental images of the future – what kind of things might she be picturing?
- 6) Strong urges – what urge have we seen her act on?

Do you think these were new things she has been feeling? How long do you think they have probably been turning up?

Have you had similar “monsters” turn up on your “boat”?

Talk about each of the 6 types of monsters – what similarities are there between what the young person has felt and what Holly has felt? Remind them that Holly at first thought she was the only one going through this, and that if they have been thinking the same thing, then it might seem hard to talk about these things – but it is ok to have that thought or feeling, let it “flap” there, and still open up.

Challenge: You could open up here about some of your own monsters.

NB: It is VITAL that the young person get the message that while these monsters keep appearing for everyone, we can learn skills to reduce their impact and influence, and take action to live a meaningful life. We do NOT want to give the false message that you just have to “put up” with these things and resign yourself to a life of misery.

Page 25 - 26 – Holly tries to fight the monsters and push them off the boat. What is this like doing in real life?

[It is like trying to force unhelpful thoughts out of our head, or block them coming in]



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How do people try to do this?

[By trying to make themselves think only happy thoughts instead, or distract themselves, or squash the unpleasant thoughts/images down]

What is the problem with spending your time fighting the monsters?

[Not paying attention to where you are going, can be exhausting, not doing what is really important to you]

Page 27 – What was it like for Holly when she gave up?

[She felt relieved at first, but then bored, and disconnected from all the things that are important to her]

Page 32 - 33 – Do you sometimes compare yourself to other people, and decide you aren't as good?

[Emphasize this is a natural thing we all do. It can be motivating, but if you get too "stuck" it can be unhelpful. **Challenge:** talk about your own experience here.]

Page 34 – [This is a key page for helping reduce the impact and influence of thoughts] What would happen if you treated all the signs the monsters are holding like they *are* true/important/orders/wise? What would you do or not do? What would you do less of/more of?

Page 35-36 – Holly realizes that everyone has their own monsters they struggle with. **Challenge:** open up about some monsters you have struggled with, in order to reassure your child that they are not alone.

Page 38 - Holly has to be willing to make room for the monsters so she can get back to her family and friends. What is something important you want to do in life that



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you know you will have to make room for some monsters to do? [**Challenge:** share some stories of when you have gone ahead and done something in the face of anxiety or fear of failure etc because it was important to you, eg getting your drivers' licence, making a speech etc]

Page 39 – Important discussion point – note that the seagull doesn't say “get rid of the monsters”, he says they will “get smaller”, and that “some” might go. Why does he say it like this?

[Because it is natural and normal to have these kinds of thoughts, feelings, urges etc, especially when we are trying to do something important – nobody can totally get rid of them. However, we can reduce their *impact and influence*, so we can live the kind of life we want.]

Page 40 – [You can reinforce this idea of ups and downs being normal by describing a day you had recently that contained both. Emphasize how you got on and did what you had to, even when in a down, because you knew it would pass]. Tell me about a day you have had that had ups and downs like this. Can you think of a time you were in a “down” but you still did what you had to do anyway?

Page 41 – You can play around with the idea of reason-giving by together thinking of things someone might want to do, and then some of the reasons their mind might come up with that could stop them, if they treated them as facts. Eg somebody wants to exercise more... what reasons might they come up with not to do it? Too tired, too busy etc.

Page 43 & 44 – Look at the thought blindfolds Holly and the other people are wearing. Do any of them look familiar? What kinds of thoughts like these do you have



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about yourself? If you really believe it, and let it cover you, how would it affect how you live your life? Now try adding this to it: “I notice I’m having the thought

_____. Thanks, mind.” What do you notice when you do this?

[Hopefully the young person will feel some sense of distance between them and the thought, like it is less powerful. Don’t worry if they don’t, this is a skill to practice and may take some time]

Page 45 to 47 – What is the main story Holly’s mind tells her? What unpleasant movies does your mind show at your cinema? Something to do with school? With friends? Family? Something else? Give it a name – “The ____ Movie”. Try playing around with the image, or even just changing one small part of it, like what someone is wearing. For example, worrying a lot about your teacher getting angry at you? Imagine them doing it in a chicken outfit!

Page 48 to 50 – See if you can scan your body as if you are a curious scientist. Where do you feel things when you are feeling worried or angry or afraid or upset etc? Imagine drawing a line around that feeling. How deep inside is it? Using your imagination, what colour is it? Is it moving or still? Hard, soft, spiky? Once you have got a good picture of it, give it a score out of 10 for how strong it is right now, where 10 equals very strong, 5 is in the middle, and 0 is very weak. Now try practising the breathing and expansion like Holly does in the book. Remember, we are not trying to make the feeling go away, we are just making space for it so it doesn’t bother you so much.

Page 51 – What are some things you can do, thanks to your mind? [This is a chance to bring your child’s attention to the things he/she is capable of – could be



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sports, reading, maths, caring for others, solving problems, being kind, good coordination, cooking etc etc]

Page 56 – What senses is Holly using? Here is a simple activity to practice, which is designed to get you “out of your head” and back “into the moment” – wherever you are, take some time to notice 5 things you can see. Then, notice 5 things you can hear. Finally, notice 5 things you can feel (touching you- e.g. feet on the floor, back on a chair).

Page 57 – what do all the other things in this picture represent?
[all the other things in her life – like family, friends, her cat, school – the “up” side of life]

Page 62 & 63 – summing up, what has Holly learned to do? How will life be different for her now? What will still be the same? [She has learned skills to reduce the impact of the negative thoughts and feelings so she can go on with the important things in her life- getting on with what matters, no matter what! Although unpleasant thoughts and feelings will still arise, she can make room for them so she can still notice the things going on around her right now.]

Remember that it's also okay to let your child know this is new to you too, and you can work on trying some of these ways of looking at unpleasant thoughts and feelings together. It's not always going to be easy sailing, but it's worth the trip. Good luck- and bon voyage!