

So, How Should I Be?

Written by Linda A. Carson
A Presentation House Theatre Production

Study Guide and Resources

“So, How Should I Be? delivers a story for 10 to 14-year olds, but speaks to anyone who has ever thought, ‘if I’m just a bit thinner and look a little better all my problems will go away and I’ll be happy again!’”

Linda A. Carson, Playwright



Photo of Manami Hara by Emily Cooper

Written for a younger audience, but with content everyone can relate to, ***So, How Should I Be?*** explores the impact that mass and social media, friends, family and our communities have on mental health, with a specific focus on eating disorders.

So, How Should I Be? opens up dialogue about eating disorders, anxiety and mental health amongst kids and teens, with the goal of helping them avoid traps they might otherwise fall into. The objective is to help students become aware of societal influences all around them that may knock them off-centre and undermine their healthy, positive self-esteem. Much like presenting the perils of smoking or drugs, ***So, How Should I Be?*** introduces the dangers of body dissatisfaction and helps students prepare themselves before entering the many pressures of High School.

For students in elementary school grades it is enough to understand that an Eating Disorder is something that affects some young adults in their teens or early twenties (striking some even earlier) giving them a distorted sense of themselves and their appearance. An Eating Disorder can manifest at first as depression or anxiety and lead to unhealthy life choices that can ultimately cause death.

In these early years it is important to build a strong, healthy personal self-esteem and body image and become aware of how our words and actions might affect someone in our social community.

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A Word of Warning:

Grade 6 and 7 students may already know the names but not explicit details of the Eating Disorders, Anorexia and Bulimia. Studies have shown that it can be extremely dangerous to teach students about the specific nature of these disorders. As the National Eating Disorders Information Centre (NEDIC) points out:

“Research shows that it might be harmful to teach students about eating disorders. Some students might learn to glamorize disturbed eating patterns.

Instead, teach students about general health, including:

- Healthy lifestyles (healthy eating, active living, self-acceptance)
- Media literacy
- Positive life skills (assertive communication, positive relationships, problem solving)
- Ways to cope with sexual, racial or other harassment and appearance-based teasing.

Links to Good Body Image Lesson Plans:

According to the NEDIC:

“Despite common belief, it is possible to prevent the development of food and weight preoccupation and eating disorders. It is also possible to prevent existing eating disorders from getting worse. From learning about and improving our own self-esteem and body image, to working with others and making positive societal changes, the following information can help us to reduce the occurrence of disordered eating.”

Prevention Tips:

nedic.ca/give-get-help/prevention-health-promotion

Lesson Plans:

Working in cooperation with the Dove Self Esteem project, the NEDIC provides lesson plans for each specific grade to build better body image and help students become aware of social and mass media influences.

NEDIC: Beyond Images – a self-esteem and body-image curriculum
www.beyondimages.ca/about which links to: www.beyondimages.ca

Dove Self Esteem Project – School Workshops on Body Image: Confident Me
www.dove.com/ca/en/dove-self-esteem-project/school-workshops-on-body-image-confident-me.html

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What do I do if a student discloses?

If a student tells you that they are struggling with “thought monsters” taking over, or with an eating disorder or poor body image, let them know it is good that they are talking to you about it. Working with the school counsellor and parents, seek appropriate help for the student (see list of resources below). Studies show that the earlier an eating disorder is treated, the faster the recovery.

The Canadian Mental Health Association British Columbia (CMHA BC) says,

“The good news is that mental illnesses can be treated successfully, and early treatment can help reduce the impact of a mental illness on your child’s life. The kind of treatment that works best for your child will depend on your child’s needs.” (Canadian Mental Health Association, British Columbia)

www.cmha.bc.ca/documents/mental-illnesses-in-children-and-youth-2/

Resources -- Finding Help in Vancouver:

The Looking Glass Foundation

The Looking Glass Foundation is a caring community that offers support to those affected by eating disorders including loved ones. In addition to helping with prevention and early intervention, we offer innovative programs for eating disorder support, recovery, and sustained relapse prevention. We are about getting to the other side of eating disorders, to eventually achieving a world without this devastating disease.

<https://www.lookingglassbc.com/>

Be sure to check out the many resources provided on the Looking Glass Foundation website at:

<https://www.lookingglassbc.com/resources>

Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre

The Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre is a provincial resource centre that provides mental health and substance use information, resources, help with system navigation, and peer support to children, youth and their families from across BC. We also provide resources and peer support to people of all ages with eating disorders or disordered eating concerns. Learn more about our [Eating Disorders Peer Support Worker](#), as well as [parent](#) and [youth peer support workers](#) here. All of our services are free of charge, and you can reach us over the phone, in person, or through email.

<https://keltyeatingdisorders.ca/finding-help/introduction/>

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Post Show Discussion Questions:

1. **“So, What Can We Do?”** This is the last question of the play. What can we do to keep ourselves feeling good just as we are, despite the pressures from the outside or from ourselves? Where did the pressure come from for each of the “Oranges” in the play?

(Answer: Angie Orange felt she had to get everything “right” at school, including looking “right” to be liked. Orange Boy felt the pressure of being “liked” on-line. Orange Poet felt the pressure of not fitting in, being made fun of, not being accepted for who she was.)

2. Discuss how beautiful the models appear in mass media and ask students what percentage of the population looks like they do. Ask students if they think the models themselves naturally look the way they are presented. What changes are made to their “images”?

Show the Dove video, “Evolution”. Discuss how we are manipulated to think we “should” look this way to be popular and happy, but in fact nobody actually does. www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYhCn0jf46U

3. Create two entrance ways in the classroom: Beautiful and Average (as in video link below). Ask students to enter through the entrance they think best represents them. Show the Dove Video “Make a Choice” and discuss what influenced their own choice.

You could try doing this privately first on a piece of paper. Draw the two entrances and get the students to mark which one they would enter. Then do it publicly as a class to introduce peer pressure. www.youtube.com/watch?v=7DdM-4siaQw

4. Ask the students to finish the sentence, “If I could change one thing...” then show the Dove video “If I Could Change One Thing” and discuss. www.youtube.com/watch?v=litXW91UauE
5. In **So How Should I Be?** the actors explore what it is like to get a negative thought in their head. Following the play –discuss the impact of positive thoughts. Can you give yourself positive thoughts? Can you give your friends and community positive thoughts? How can students work together as a classroom community to create a safe, accepting environment for all?

The NEDIC lesson plans have great exercises for this: www.beyondimages.ca/about which links to: www.beyondimages.ca

Final Thoughts

To learn more about the intention and meaning of **So, How Should I Be?** please read and enjoy this interview with playwright, Linda A. Carson by Jake McGrail:

<http://thelastsource.com/en/2018/10/08/play-explores-the-proliferation-of-thought-monsters/>

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