

WONDERLAND

Educational Packet

NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Educators,

There is a stigma of shame attached to mental health that prevents many people from getting the help they need. Today, mental health issues are more prevalent than ever, and we need to be gentle with ourselves and our neighbors.

Art can be a vehicle to start conversations and initiate new viewpoints. We hope your students will identify and empathize with the characters in Wonderland, regardless of how outrageous they are, and join us in celebrating the fact that there is no such thing as normal.

With gratitude,

Regina Peluso, Artistic Director
Collide Theatrical Dance Company

NEED:

Pediatric health experts say that mental health issues among youth in the U.S. are on the rise. And in MN, an all-time high number of students reported mental health problems, per the MN Dept. of Health in 2022. Risk factors can include family income, racial and gender identity, housing stability, and school environments. Among the recommendations to address this crisis are programs to promote healthy development and provide avenues to open the conversation.

SCHOOL SHOWS:

Wonderland uses an accessible format (dance theater) to provide education and a positive message about the importance of mental health and empathy. Following each performance will be a short discussion session with the cast, during which students will be able to ask questions about the show.

We offer the following suggestions of things teachers and school counselors can do with students before and after viewing the performance.

Synopsis/Content

The Doctor welcomes everyone to WONDERLAND, a premier institution for mental health. Throughout the show, we see the backstory of each character, which shows us a side of the character we never saw and gives us an insight into why they are the way that they are. The Doctor gets frustrated and feels like he's not helping his patients, so the patients step up and help the Doctor and each other. In the end, we see that even the Doctor has things that he struggles with, and the characters find beauty in their imperfections and empathy for others.

White Rabbit

The White Rabbit has anxiety due to witnessing his mother's death in a car accident caused by a drunk driver.

**Note: the car accident is acted out and has the sound of a crash. Should this be triggering for anyone and they don't wish to see this part of the show, they should leave after the White Rabbit's tap number (when the music switches to instrumental and they go into the backstory).

Alice

Alice has body dysmorphia, which we mention can lead to an eating disorder or suicide.

Mad Hatter

The Mad Hatter has a gaming disorder that exacerbates his OCD.

Red Queen

The Red Queen has narcissistic rage caused by an unrealistic outlook on reality.

Doctor

The Doctor has White Knight Syndrome, which pulls him to "fix" everyone around him rather than look at himself.

Pre-Show Vocabulary Terms

(adapted from [WebMD](#), [The Child Institute](#), and [Britannica Kids](#))

Anxiety

People with anxiety disorders often worry a lot and respond to certain things or situations with fear and dread, as well as with physical signs of anxiety (nervousness) like a rapid heartbeat, dizziness, shortness of breath and sweating.

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Children with ADHD generally have problems paying attention or concentrating, can't seem to follow directions, and are easily bored and/or frustrated with tasks. They also tend to move constantly and are impulsive (do not think before they act).

Body Dysmorphia

A person with body dysmorphia sees their body in a way that is not the truth, usually thinking they're very fat when they're not. People with this disorder may frequently examine their appearance in a mirror, constantly compare their appearance with that of others, and avoid social situations or photos. This can lead to eating disorders like anorexia (eating very little food) or bulimia (eating a lot of food and then making yourself throw up).

Depression

Depression can cause people to feel very sad and hopeless. People with depression have trouble enjoying things they used to love and may be easily annoyed. It's normal to feel sad when bad things happen, but a person with depression doesn't feel better even when things improve.

Narcissism

Narcissism is when a person is obsessed with themselves. It includes behaviors of thinking very highly of oneself, needing admiration, believing others are inferior, and lacking empathy for others.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Children with OCD experience unwanted thoughts, worries, or impulses called obsessions, which are very upsetting and hard to control. To calm the anxiety caused by their obsessions, they can develop repetitive actions or thoughts (called compulsions), such as repeating certain words or doing an action seven times before moving on.

Psychiatrists

Psychiatrists are medical doctors who treat people with mental illness. Psychiatrists may prescribe medication to reduce the symptoms of some mental disorders and allow patients to resume normal lives.

Psychotherapy (usually just called therapy)

During therapy, patients talk about their feelings and behaviors with a therapist, who helps them learn to control the symptoms of their mental disorder.

Post-Show Questions for Discussion

1. How does the Doctor change throughout the show?
2. Did you change your perception of any of the characters after seeing their backstory? If so, why?
3. Which character did you relate to the most and why?
4. Alice's journey is greatly affected by her addiction to social media. How do you think social media influences your emotions?
5. The White Rabbit has an anxiety disorder. Can you think of situations that make yourself anxious? What coping mechanisms do you use to help calm yourself in these situations?
6. Collide used a variety of dance styles in the show, including tap, jazz, and ballet. How do you think the movement assisted the characters in telling their stories?
7. Each character has a special item that is a safety net for them. Can you identify the item for each character? (*Answers: Queen - Mirror, Alice - Phone, Rabbit - Watch, Doctor - Book, Mad Hatter - Teapot*)
8. There was very little dialogue in the show. How did the show use movement and music to tell the story and express emotion?
9. How did the music in the show help you relate to the character's story? Access the [Spotify playlist here.](#)



Workshop Ideas to Accompany the Show

WONDERLAND WORKSHOP #1

Discuss the 4 steps of the RAIN technique that can assist with coping with large emotions.

RAIN:

Recognize,
Allow,
Investigate,
Nurture (or Non-Identify)

In pairs, have students identify ways in which the following Wonderland characters could use the RAIN technique to help them cope with their emotions.

Rabbit - Anxiety, Queen - Anger,
Alice - Sadness & Self-Judgment



R RECOGNIZE THE FEELING YOU ARE EXPERIENCING. NAME IT IF YOU CAN.

A ALLOW THE FEELING JUST TO BE THERE. IT WILL PASS, JUST LIKE THE RAIN.

I INVESTIGATE THE FEELING WITH KINDNESS. HOW DOES IT FEEL IN YOUR BODY? WHERE DO YOU FEEL IT MOST STRONGLY? CAN YOU FEEL YOUR FEET TOUCHING THE GROUND?

N NON-IDENTIFICATION. THIS EMOTION IS NOT WHO YOU ARE. THE FEELING WILL GO AWAY, YOU DON'T HAVE TO HANG ON TO IT.



WONDERLAND WORKSHOP #2

1. Ask students to research different coping strategies for mental health issues: for example, fitness, art, meditation, getting support, or creating lists.
2. Ask students to write a diary extract in the life of someone using these strategies to support their mental health. Alternatively, they could create a mood board on their findings and feelings about different coping strategies.
3. Using the work they created, ask students to create a piece of movement which tells a story of an individual experiencing a form of mental health who is using strategies to help overcome any obstacles they may face. They may do this individually or in small groups.
4. Ask students to watch one another's work and give feedback on the clarity of the storyline from an audience's viewpoint.

