

A New Norm: Discussion and Resource Guide

“A New Norm” is a poetic tale that is intended to reflect the feelings of those of us who struggle with anxiety, depression, grief, anger, doubt, shame, fear and more, yet provide encouragement that difficulties such as these can be overcome. It expresses how routine thoughts of negativity can sometimes cloud our reality making it difficult to enjoy life, to appreciate what is truly good, to have positive relationships, or to develop to one’s full potential. It is a story that reminds us that perception is reality. That if one is willing to look, willing to accept, and willing to try, that there is a light both within and beyond available to not only illuminate, but change our world for the better. Our hope is that this story and the discussion guide that follows will become a springboard for a conversation with ourselves and/or with others to define what our dark clouds are and how we can make efforts to find the light of our new norm.

- Tom Roberts

“The moral of this story

Is within you there’s a spark

With a yearning to grow

And overcome the dark

If you’re willing to look

and focus on the good

you will find a better world

like you know the world could

Look not with your eyes

But, with mind and heart

Let that be your normal

Let that be your start

Discussion Question Answer Key:

“There once was a boy whose name was Norm and inside his head was a terrible storm.” (page 1)

What feelings do you have that are similar to Norm’s?

Answers will vary; may include sadness, fear, anxiety, grief, doubt, shame or guilt.

What situation in your life triggers that feeling?

Answers will vary but may include:

- *Difficult situations at home*
- *Rejection or bullying at school – feeling like I don’t have any friends*
- *Poor grades or difficulty keeping up with homework and school*
- *Seeing other kids achieving in sports, music or grades and feeling like I don’t measure up*

What about the situation can you control?

Example answers – I can only control me or I can also control the way I look at the situation. I can control making the choice to ask for help.

If you could think about the situation in a more positive light, what would that thought be? How would your feelings change if you thought that way instead?

Example answer – Right now I think that there is nothing good about it. But I could remember that I get more one-on-one time with each of my parents now that I switch back and forth from house to house.

“He tried yelling and shouting and screaming real loud but it had no effect on that nasty old cloud.” (page 15)

What have you tried to make yourself feel better? Did it work?

Answers will vary but may include:

- *Negative behaviors such as substance abuse, acting out in anger, seeking revenge, binging on junk food*
- *Positive behaviors such as getting more exercise, working on an art project, playing an instrument or singing*

We are made up of different parts — our body, our mind, and our spirit. What's something you can do to help your body feel better? Your mind? Your spirit?

Example answers – Exercise and healthy diet help the body, medication or therapy may help the mind, and meditation or prayer may help the spirit.

“The moral of the story is within you there’s a spark with a yearning to grow and overcome the dark.” (page 30)

How would your life change if everyone around you tried to grow each other’s sparks?

Example answer – There wouldn’t be as many bullies, people may feel better because they have more support, others may not feel so alone.

Who can you speak to if you or a loved one needs help?

- Parent
- Adult friend
- Teacher
- Principal
- School counselor
- Pastor
- Therapist

The “Spark of Light”

The “spark of light” in the story is intended to represent the positive essence that make up the world around us, as well as the world within us. That light can be experienced in many forms, such as:

- Talking with an encouraging friend, family member or trusted adult
- Visiting with a counselor or therapist
- Accepting professional medical help
- Engaging in a healthy diet and exercise
- Participating in creative activities
- Helping others
- Seeking a spiritual connection

It is important to know that persistent negative thoughts can be very harmful both mentally and physically. Recognizing them and asking for help is the best way to start working toward a happier and healthier future.

What are some negative thoughts to be concerned about?

- Ongoing feelings of deep sadness
- Always feeling anxious or upset
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Quick to anger or talking about seeking revenge

If you, or someone you know, struggles with a cloud that may involve thoughts or behaviors like the ones above, please ask for help.

- **Call anytime day or night: 1-800-273-8255 or text HOME to 741741**
- **Call 211- Helpline South Dakota**
- **Avera Behavioral Health Assessment: 605-322-4065 or 1-800-691-4336**
- **Children’s Home Society: 605-334-6004**

Additional Activities

Please consider completing the below activities to help kids better understand how they can be a spark for others or how to find their own spark!

Being a spark for others!

- **Activity #1 - Be a spark with your words.** *We can be a spark to others with our words. Look at the list below, what are examples of how I can be a spark to others with the words I use. Please see worksheet below.*
- **Activity #2 - Be a spark for someone else, Letter of Thanks.** *A simple way to be a spark for someone else is to write a letter of thanks to someone. Writing a letter to tell them thank you, helps them to know what we appreciate about them. Take some time and write a letter of thank you to someone in your life.*
- **Activity #3 - Be the spark collage.** *On a blank sheet of paper, create a collage of words, quotes, or pictures describing how you can help others. Think about how you can help others, by being the spark, at home, in school, or in the community you live? If this is done in a group, encourage kids to share their worksheets and then talk about how we feel when we help others?*

Finding our Spark!

- **Activity #1 - Looking in the Mirror.** *All of us are made up of different gifts and talents. When we look in the mirror, it is important that we remind ourselves of everything that is great about ourselves. Writing statements of praise and encouragement to ourselves is important to set a positive mindset. If done in a group, you can also ask students to write positive things about their peers.*
- **Activity #2 - Support Network.** *Some problems require the help of others and some we can solve on our own. It is important we all know who our support network is. Fill out the worksheet below and keep this worksheet in an important place!*

Be a SPARK with your words!

We can be a spark to others with the words we share with others! We can use our words to help others and to encourage others! Look at the list below, what are examples of how you can be a spark with your words today!

Tell someone I like their glasses...

Tell someone I like their shoes...

Tell someone thank you for opening the door...

Tell someone thank you for reminding you something you may have forgot...

Tell my mom or dad thank you for making me supper....

Tell my friend thank you for being a good friend...

NOW - Challenge yourself to come up with your own examples! What are 3 ways you can be a spark with your words this week!

Support Network

Some problems require the help of others and some we can solve on our own. It is important we all know who our support network is. Fill out the worksheet and keep this worksheet in an important place!

Who can I talk to at school?

Who can I talk to if I am having a problem at home?

Who can I talk to in my community?