



## LESSON PLAN: Vicarious Losses

**Topic:** Experiencing Losses- Understanding the Life of a Person with a Brain Tumour

**Subjects| Stream:**

Health & Wellness

Social Studies

**Grade Level:** Intermediate (7-10) | Senior (11 & 12)

**Objective(s)**

- To support students in understanding the losses that people with brain tumours face upon their diagnosis and throughout their treatment, survivorship and beyond.

**Brief Summary**

This activity is meant to provide a visceral experience for students to help them recognize the impact of a brain tumour upon a person’s social life, hopes and dreams, and activities of daily living.

A debriefing should be done with students afterwards to discuss their feelings as this activity is intended to have an emotional impact.

**Background Information**

This activity has been modified from its original form, “Coming Out Stars”, which was created by Jeff Pierce, University of Southern California.

The original activity can be found here: <https://lgbtrc.usc.edu/files/2015/05/Coming-Out-Stars.pdf>

**Resources | Materials Required per Pair:**

- Coloured paper stars:
  - Blue
  - Red
  - Orange
  - Purple
- One star per participant, divide as evenly as possible
- Writing utensil: one per participant





### Activity Instructions:

Step 1: Each participant to choose pick either a **BLUE**, **ORANGE**, **RED**, or **PURPLE** star.

- *Alternatively, if this lesson is facilitated virtually, you can assign a colour to each student (as evenly as possible) and ask students to draw their own star with five (5) points.*

Step 2: Read the following to the class:

Imagine this star represents your world, with you in the center and those things or people most important to you at each point of the star.

1. Write your name in the center of the star, making it your very own star!
2. Pick a star point to begin with. Choose a friend who is very close to you. Someone you care about very much. A best friend or a close friend, it doesn't matter. Write their name on a star point.
3. Move clockwise. Think of a community you belong to. It could be a religious community, your neighborhood, a club, a sports team, or just a group of friends. Take the name of this group that you are a part of and write it on the next star point.
4. Think of an activity you love to do. It could be listening to music, playing sports or video games, travelling, reading books- something that makes you happy. Please write this activity on the next star point.
5. What job would you most like to have? It could be anything from president to dentist. Whatever your career aspiration is, write it on the next star point.
6. What are some of your hopes and dreams? Maybe you want to own your own business, travel, or have kids one day. Think of a few of your hopes and dreams and write them on the last star point.

Step 3: Once the star is filled out, have everyone stand up in a circle. Explain that each person has been diagnosed with a brain tumour and each are about to begin their disclosure process. Tell them that they cannot talk for the rest of this activity.

*It may be helpful if students already have some familiarity with brain tumours.*





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Step 4: Now begin the activity by reading the following:

### Star Point 1:

You decide that it will be easiest to tell your friends first, since they have always been there for you in the past and you feel they need to know.

- If you have a **BLUE** star, your friend has no problem with it. They noticed that something was going on with you but weren't sure what it was. They thank you for being honest with them. Luckily, they act no different toward you and want to support you in your journey back to health.
- If you have an **ORANGE** or **PURPLE** star, your friends are kind of hesitant. They are a little irritated that you have waited so long to tell them, but you are confident that soon they will understand that having a brain tumour is just a part of who you are ... you just need to give them some time. Please fold back this side of your star.
- If you have a **RED** star, you are met with fear and disgust. This friend who has been by your side in the past tells you that having a brain tumour makes you act weird and they don't want to hang out with you anymore. If you have a red star, please tear off this side and drop it to the ground- this friend is no longer a part of your life.

### Star Point 2:

Sharing this news is difficult. It reminds you that not everyone is supportive and even when they are, you are still the one who has a brain tumour. To cheer yourself up, you decide to spend some time doing your favourite activity.

- If you have a **PURPLE** star, you have a bit of trouble with your favourite activity. It is harder for you to be able to engage with it the way you usually do because you are having trouble with your body and/or your senses. You may feel weak, tired, sick, have trouble hearing or seeing, or have difficulty controlling your movements. You are still able to enjoy your favourite activity, but it is more challenging than usual, and you don't perform to your usual standard. Fold this side of your star back- you will be able to continue to have this activity in your life, but it may take some time to feel normal again.
- If you have a **BLUE** star, you are able to enjoy the activity the same way that you usually do. You are one of the lucky people who are not experiencing side effects from your brain tumour- at least not yet.





- If you have an **ORANGE** or **RED** star, you are unable to enjoy your favourite activity at all. When you try, you find that your tumour is preventing you from having the ability to engage the way you usually would. You may have developed a hearing or vision loss, you may be unable to stand or walk without difficulty, or you are just too nauseous and tired to be able to do much more than sleep. Your doctor tells you that these changes are likely permanent- a side effect from your brain tumour or your treatment and that this is a part of your new life. If you have an orange or red star, please tear off this side and drop it to the ground.

### Star Point 3:

The news of your brain tumour is beginning to spread through your community. People that you haven't told yourself are starting to hear about it.

- If you have a **PURPLE** or **BLUE** star, your brain tumour diagnosis is accepted by your community. They continue to embrace you like anyone else and they begin to ask how they can support you and your family.
- If you have an **ORANGE** star, you are met with a mixed response. Some accept you and some don't know what to think. They talk to you less and you get a lot of funny looks, but you remain a part of the community, and with time, will fit in as you once did. If you have an orange star, please fold back this side.
- If you have a **RED** star, your community reacts with anger. They are worried about how the brain tumour will affect your personality and think that you might be dangerous. They don't want you to be around them or their children in case you hurt someone, and they tell you that someone like you doesn't belong in their community. Those who had supported you in your times of need no longer speak to you or acknowledge you. If you have a red star, tear this side off and drop it to the ground.





#### Star Point 4:

You have heard that rumors have started circulating at school regarding your brain tumour diagnosis. In the past, you have made it a point to confront these rumors as soon as they began, but now you're not sure if that will do more harm than good. But, unfortunately, you don't have the chance.

- If you have a **BLUE** star, your classmates begin to approach you and let you know that they have heard the rumors and that they don't care, they will support you. Your teachers react the same way, letting you know that you do good work and that's all that matters.
- If you have a **PURPLE** star, your school environment has become quite interesting. Everyone seems to think that you have a brain tumour, even though you haven't mentioned it to anyone or confirmed any of the rumors. Some people speak to you less, but the environment has not seemed to change too drastically. If you have a purple star, please fold back this side.
- If you have a **RED** or **ORANGE** star, you continue to do your work as though nothing is happening, ignoring the rumors that have spread throughout your school. One day, you come in to find that your work area has been packed up. You are called into your principal's office and they explain that you will have to start doing your schoolwork from home. When you ask why, they tell you that you've missed too many classes because of all of your appointments, your learning needs are too much for them to handle, and other students' learning is suffering because of it. If you have a red or orange star, please tear off this side and drop it to the ground.

#### Star Point 5:

Now ... your future lies ahead of you as a person with a brain tumour. Your hopes and dreams, your wishes for the perfect life ... for some of you these are all that remain.

- If you have a **PURPLE**, **BLUE**, or **ORANGE** star, these hopes, and dreams are what keep you going. Most of you have been met with some sort of rejection since beginning your disclosure process, but you have managed to continue to live a happy and healthy life. Your personal hopes and dreams become a reality. You are a brain tumour survivor.
- If you have a **RED** star, you fall into despair. You have been met with challenge after challenge with your health and you find it impossible to accomplish your lifelong goals without the support and love of your friends and community. It is difficult for





you to find happiness and daily life can be a struggle. You live in fear of your tumour returning or dying from this disease. If you have a red star, please tear it up and drop the pieces to the ground.

*Please note: Not all primary brain tumours are cancerous and not all brain tumours have the same prognosis. There are 120 different types of primary brain tumours*

Step 5: Unpack this activity with students when it is finished and discuss their feelings.

Suggested questions:

- What did it feel like to be told that you have a brain tumour? Did you consider how your life might change? In what ways?
- What was it like to face the potential loss of each step (friend, activity, community, school, hopes and dreams)? What was the most impactful loss?
- Do you have people you could count on if something like this were to happen to you?
- How could you let someone with a brain tumour know that you care about and support them?

