

# Helping a student that feels isolated



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## Film Therapy Paper

*Wonder*

Olivia “ Via” Pullman is a 14-year-old freshman at high school. She has a brother with Treacher Collins syndrome. Her parents wanted her to come speak to me because she is not confiding in them. I have learned she is having issues transitioning to high school, feeling the desertion of her best friend and dealing with the feelings of loneliness because her parents have a tendency to focus more on her brother.

The summer before high school, her best friend, Miranda, went away to camp and when she came back, she was different and not as friendly with Via. Via has expressed feelings of desertion because her best friend, Miranda, doesn’t talk to her anymore. These feelings are more intense because of the fact that she just started high school. Because she is a freshman in this new school, she doesn’t know what to do because she feels lost without her best friend. In wanting to help with Via’s transition to high school, I would suggest strategies that will help her find her place. She needs to be able to feel like she belongs and comfortable in high school which is key to her feeling successful (Roybal, Thornton, &Usinger, 2014).

Ninth grade is a very challenging time. Moving to a new school can be a challenge with peer relationships and moving forward from the comfort of their teachers from middle school (Neild, 2009). According to Neild (2009), ninth graders are likely to get off track in their schooling because of life changes, transitioning to a new school, inadequate preparation for high school and/or high school organization and climate. Via is currently

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experiencing the life changes and transitioning to a new school. She has new teachers and is struggling to figure out where she fits in to the school.

The first step to helping Via be more comfortable in high school is helping her deal with what she feels is the desertion of her best friend. Since she has that lost feeling, my first suggestion would be for Via to think of her teachers and decide if there is one that she feels comfortable with. Because she is feeling lost without her best friend, a good starting spot is to have Via try and find a teacher that she has already built a rapport with to help ease her fear of high school. It is known that teachers who show compassion and are thoughtful are the ones who will try to ease the fear of high school versus the teachers that are unaccommodating make it more difficult (Roybal, Thornton, & Usinger, 2014). By having that teacher, it will allow her to have a place to go when she is feeling out of place and doesn't know what to do. She can go to that teacher even if it is a place to just sit and hang out, so she doesn't feel so alone. The teacher needs to be one that she feels comfortable just being in the same place and can possibly share what is going on in her life. It is also those same teachers that will use lessons that are more engaging and are clear in what they expect of new high school students (Roybal, Thornton, & Usinger, 2014). For schools where teachers offer more help with personal issues, have higher expectations and provide students with more personal attention in class, students are more likely to have a more positive experience in school (Nield, 2009).

Teachers are important in making sure that students feel welcomed because they provide the bridge between school and the student (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010). Ellerbrock and Kiefer stated that teachers and schools are there to

help support students and advocate for their success and development. Teachers that have a positive outlook about their students are more likely to develop the type of relationship that allows for the support that students need to feel welcomed and safe in high school. When student's feel that teacher understands their needs, it helped them feel a sense of caring and belonging. The connection helped them feel content within the school community.

Habeeb (2014) also stated that providing that rapport helps to make high school a more nurturing place, so students don't end up falling behind or getting lost emotionally. In schools where teachers proactively provide services for students, they have less of a chance of falling behind.

Feeling connected to school also helps with the motivation of wanting to be there and be successful (Beland, 2014). Beland states that teachers need to create a safe, supportive and caring environment. If a relationship is formed with a teacher, Via would have a safe place and welcoming place to go. This would also extend throughout her years in the high school, which would embrace her sense of belonging. This relationship usually helps students to grow both academically and emotionally.

Another suggestion was for Via to become part of a mentoring program or get involved with peer tutoring. A mentoring program would allow her to be paired with another student, whether it is a freshman or a student of another grade level, to help make friends. They might be paired with students with similar interests which would also help to ease the transition. Peer tutoring is also good because it helps ease some anxiety when helping others. Both of

these can be used as stepping stones to help ease the loneliness factor and create a sense of belonging. A mentoring program is a good way to find people that might have the same interests and if nothing else, it can be a great support system while still finding her way through high school.

Programs at schools that help build peer relationships and find ways to have a more positive school outlook can be helpful for students with anxiety (Coyle & Malecki, 2018). Usually by providing a support system, it helps with the social anxiety of school (Coyle & Malecki).

As Nitza and Dobias (2015) stated, for students that are paired with upperclassman, the interactions are valued more since they have been through these issues more recently. The grouping allows the students to have the one on one experience of someone their age listening to their concerns, feeling connected and supported through their issues. The programs help promote social development and a more positive outlook on school.

Once Via has been able to work on her issues with school, she will need to focus on her feelings of isolation within her family. Since she is meeting new people at school, she even told one of her new friends she was an only child. She feels that her parents worry more about her brother because of his disability and she gets forgotten. She has stayed home from school one day to spend quality time with her mom, but unfortunately that was interrupted by her brother feeling sick at school and he had to be picked up. These feelings of isolation can be detrimental to her well-being if they are not taken care of. By having her feel secure in school with friends and school in general, she will be able to focus more on getting her feelings of loneliness

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and isolation from her family under control. She needs to start expressing to her parents how she feels. Her parents are not intentionally slighting her, and this is something that she needs to understand.

To help with her feelings of isolation, she needs to become more involved in areas for her. She needs to work on building herself up to be the great person she is and continue to show the love she has for her brother. Via tends to play the role of bodyguard for her brother which is what many other siblings do and what her parents are doing as well. She needs to learn that she should support him in his needs, not necessarily protect him.

Since Via does not seem comfortable confronting her parents and brother about her feelings, I suggested that she keep a journal or a blog. Writing helps to provide the emotional support and show the positive changes that students have made, and it also reinforces that students are in charge of their lives (Oliver, Nelson, Cade, & Cueva, 2007). Writing is a great tool for helping the effectiveness of a counselor's efforts to help support and maintain a positive change in the individual (Oliver, Nelson, Cade, & Cueva).

According to Kress, Hinkle, and Protivnak (2011), writing can be a successful way to promote student change and to help build her decision-making skills. Many adolescents do a better job of sharing when they are involved in another activity, therefore by having Via write instead of face to face conversation, it should make it seem less intimidating and may help her be more open. Writing also allows her to have more time to think about and reflect on what she wants to say.

Lent (2009) also supports the use of writing. He states that it can help with self-reflection and will allow Via to explore within as she goes through the process. Because we are moving into a new generation, blogging may be better. It uses an older form of therapy and adds a piece of technology to it. Journal writing is a great way of allowing a person to see issues, concerns, conflicts and confusions more clearly. The blog just integrates it into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Whether it is journal writing or blogging, it allows the person to see what they are thinking and become more self-aware. As adolescences mature and grow up, journaling or blogs allows them to be able to put more time and effort into what they are thinking and why (Kajder & Bull, 2004).

Zyromski (2007) also promotes journaling as a tool because it allows the student to be able to continue with their thoughts when not in counseling sessions. It saves time because there is a limited amount of face to face time especially in schools now. By writing in a journal, it provides an opportunity for self-evaluation which can shed light on current issues and provide clarity for the future which will lead to a positive change. He states that by using blogging instead of traditional journaling, it allows the student to be able to express their thoughts more often, easily accessible by all parties involved, and it allows for creativity. Journaling or blogging allows for more creativity within the person. Journaling as a counseling tool allows students to analyze, examine, and break down internal and external issues, leading to mental and emotional awareness of their problems and solutions.

Another suggestion I would have would be to join a Best Buddies program. This would allow Via to be able to use that protectiveness she feels for her brother with another student within the school. Similar to a mentoring

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program which would be more for Via to feel comfortable within school, I feel that the Best Buddies program would allow her to have more self-confidence because she is helping out another student, similar to peer tutoring. She may give her a sense of purpose within the school to help build her esteem and give her another avenue with clubs to join in school to provide a sense of purpose.

Overall, by using these interventions, Via would be quite successful in high school. The mentoring and tutoring/best buddies would allow Via to feel more welcomed and safe in school. Having her find a teacher she is comfortable with would just help provide a safe place when she needs one. These areas together will help build a sense of community and comfort in a new place.

Journal writing or blogging will help her to be able to express herself more clearly and share with her family. She may even use the writing to express her feelings about school. It will help her to not keep everything inside but to put her thoughts down and be introspective with her thoughts.

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