

## A culture of perfectionism and performance

### Purpose

To engage the students in a discussion about a perfectionist culture in which too many young people are afraid what their friends will think of them if they share their worries. The debate will foster a reflection on how this culture affects the students themselves. The lesson will also make the students aware that all young people experience ups and downs, and that difficulties shared can create a common understanding and avoid what we call false consensus.

### Content (45 min.)

- Introduction to the lesson and playing the film in class (5 min.)
- Double circle (15 min.)
- Discussion in groups of four (15 min.)
- Summarise in class (10 min.)

### Preparation

- Watch the film and prepare showing it in class.
- Print this script so you have the questions for the Double circle at hand.
- Print the questions for the group discussions.
- Divide the students in groups of four.

### Introduction

The film "For how long can you hold your breath?" is produced by Ventilen and The Mary Foundation. In the film there are 12 young people submerged in water. They are not actors but ordinary high school students talking about their own experiences. Footage and sound are edited in a way, so we do not know whose story is being told. This is because the stories are far from unique to this group of young people. The worries being shared in the film are common worries among youth. From an outside perspective they might seem insignificant, but none of them have been shared by these young people before as they have been afraid to do so.

The purpose of the film is to encourage young people to discuss the culture of perfectionism that permeates our society.

### Double circle

After watching the film, half the class will place themselves in a circle shoulder by shoulder looking outwards. The other half place themselves in an outer circle looking inwards thereby each facing a classmate in the inner circle. If there is an uneven number of students, two of them will form a pair in the outer circle. Now they will discuss the film based on questions that you will provide them with. Read aloud the first question. The students will discuss it with the classmate facing them for two minutes. Then the outer circle takes two steps to the right, and you read aloud the next question. Remind them not to speak too loudly as they stand close to

the other students.

The purpose is purely reflection – there will be no plenary afterwards.

Questions for the Double circle:

1. Which of the stories – one or more – made a particular impression on you and why?
2. How is the message in the film connected with loneliness?

### Group discussion

After the Double circle, the students will get together in groups of four which you have divided beforehand. If there is an uneven number of students, make one or more groups of five.

Hand out a question sheet to each group (they will have 15 minutes for the discussion):

1. 17% of high school students find it difficult to talk to their friends about their worries<sup>1</sup>. What could be the reason for this?
2. 12% of high school students feel stressed every day<sup>2</sup>. And increasing number of young people feel unhappy from all the expectations they find themselves facing. From where does the expectation of the perfect life/the perfect performance come? From the youth themselves? Their parents? Society? What can be done to counter this? What can the young people do themselves? What can the schools do?

### Summarise in class

All the groups will be discussing the same two questions and in plenary you will ask what they found out. It is not a class presentation, but you will ask the different groups what they have discussed. If the students do not mention them, you can raise some of the points noted under 'Purpose' above.

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<sup>1</sup> Sundhed og trivsel på gymnasiale uddannelser 2019, Statens Institut for Folkesundhed

<sup>2</sup> Sundhed og trivsel på gymnasiale uddannelser 2019, Statens Institut for Folkesundhed