the HUNGRY HEART

A Documentary Film About Prescription Drug Addiction and Recovery

DIRECTED BY BESS O’BRIEN

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION GUIDE
KINGDOM COUNTY PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS

The Prescription Drug Crisis in our Communities

A DOCUMENTARY FILM
DIRECTED BY BESS O’BRIEN

PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE IN OUR COMMUNITIES

24% of teens have abused a prescription drug

This number has increased 33% since 2008

27% of teens believe prescription drugs are safer than street drugs

Prescription drug abuse results in one death every 19 minutes

In 2009, Americans consumed $300 billion worth of pharmaceutical drugs

Sources: Drugfree.org; US Centers for Disease Control; Bureau of Labor Statistics
This discussion guide was produced through a series of meetings with educators, behavioral health counselors, health professionals, people in recovery from drug addiction, and the families of people in recovery. We’d like to thank the following people for their help in its development:

Hannah Rose.......................... Director of Recovery Education and Training at the Vermont Association for Mental Health and Addiction Recovery
Raina Lowell.......................... Mother of two and a recovering addict
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Linda Cross .......................... Mother of a daughter who struggled with addiction
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Bess O’Brien ......................... Filmmaker
Gary Miller .......................... Content Developer

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Please Note: This film contains realistic subject matter and some strong language. The professionals who worked on the film and this discussion guide strongly recommend that anyone who intends to show the movie to any audience view the film in its entirety before screening it. We also suggest that you consult with counselors or other social service professionals at your school or organization for guidance on how to use the film and support materials successfully.
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Dear Friends,

Thanks so much for using The Hungry Heart Educational Package and Community Discussion Guide in your school or organization!

It was in 2010 that pediatrician Fred Holmes asked me to travel one wintry night to St. Albans, VT and meet with a group of community folks to talk about prescription drug addiction. Franklin County had been valiantly struggling with this issue, and Dr. Holmes wanted a creative project that would raise the voices of recovering addicts, parents and family members. It was decided that we would produce a documentary film.

Beginning in the fall of 2011, director of photography Patrick Kennedy and I began to shoot the movie. We spent 8 months hanging out at Mousetrap Pediatrics with Fred and his patients—chronicling the everyday visits of young addicts in recovery. This was a wonderful experience, even though our movie cameras I’m sure drove the nurses and staff a bit crazy! The openness and intimate conversations that we recorded at the office became the backbone of the movie.

In addition, we did in-depth interviews with many of Fred's patients. We also ventured into the town of St. Albans and into the local Turning Point Recovery Center where we met older recovering addicts and interviewed them.

The making of this movie was both rewarding and arduous. We shot 150 hours of footage and had to edit it down to 1 hour and 33 minutes. My editor Scott Esmond and I were holed up in Montpelier, VT for almost a year reviewing footage and putting the whole movie together.

In the fall of 2013 we toured The Hungry Heart to 32 towns in Vermont and raised consciousness about this very important issue throughout the state. Now, we are thrilled to offer the Educational Package to folks like you. Please use the film and the many discussion topics found in this booklet to start a conversation about this very real national epidemic of prescription/opiate addiction. This is something we all need to talk about together. Let’s take the courage of the people in the film and use that to motivate us to create awareness and change around this important issue.

I am very proud of this film—but most of all I am proud and honored to have had the opportunity to work with such brave and amazing people. To all of the folks in recovery and family members who opened their lives up to me and told their stories, I am eternally grateful. This film is powerful because of YOU.

I want to thank Fred Holmes and his staff Nicky, Dawn and Pat who were more than generous in letting us film at their office. Also, much thanks to all the volunteers who helped write this discussion guide and to our fearless leader Gary Miller who put it all together!

Thanks for sharing this film with others and for continuing the conversation.

Most Sincerely,

Bess O’Brien
Producer/Director
THE PEOPLE IN THE FILM

We wish to thank the people who appear in *The Hungry Heart* for their courage and generosity in sharing their personal stories of addiction and recovery. During your discussion, you may wish to use these photographs to recall and refer to the people who appear in the film.

- Ashley
- Bowie
- Cheryl
- Christine
- Danny
- Dustin
- Fred
- Greenos
- Holly
- Jesse
- Julie
- Katie
- Kevin and Tasha
- Kyle
- Lexi
- Linda
- Matt
- Misty
- Penny
- Raina
- Sam
- Stephanie
- Stevie
- Tiffany
- Tyler
SYNOPSIS

*The Hungry Heart* is a documentary film that reveals the tragic impact of prescription opiate abuse and addiction on Vermont’s young people, their families, and their communities. More importantly, the personal stories revealed in *The Hungry Heart* present compelling proof that it doesn’t have to be this way: when people suffering from the disease of addiction are treated with dignity and compassion, recovery and the return to a healthy, productive life is possible.

The documentary focuses on the small town of St. Albans, Vermont, and the compassionate treatment provided by pediatrician Dr. Fred Holmes to young patients working to recover from addiction. It also features older addicts in the community who are also in the midst of their recoveries. These stories are often painful, and the outcomes less than certain. But what emerges is the tremendous courage shown by the people who share their stories and the positive change that happens when people with addiction are not stigmatized, but supported, as they work toward recovery.

CRITICAL CONCEPTS

The film tells the story of one small group of people, but it’s about ALL of us. Although *The Hungry Heart* focuses on people in northern Vermont, EVERYONE IS AT RISK FOR DRUG ADDICTION. Statistics prove it; addiction is a disease that does not discriminate. No matter what their economic status, cultural background, or level of education, everyone is at risk. Children in particular represent a powerful combination of unrestrained curiosity and exceptional vulnerability. They face cultural and peer pressure, social anxiety, family trauma, and stress. And too many of them use prescription opiates as a means of escape.

The film is set in Vermont, but prescription drug abuse is a problem EVERYWHERE. In 2008, 14,800 Americans died from prescription pain killer overdose—more than by cocaine and heroin combined. In 2010, more than 12 million Americans reported abusing prescription drugs. Across the nation, this deadly epidemic is destroying lives, shattering families, draining the resources of schools, social service agencies, and law enforcement, and undermining entire communities.

The problem is complicated, but YOU can help. Putting an end to prescription drug abuse means building awareness about the epidemic, preventing people from abusing prescription drugs, ending the stigma surrounding addiction, and providing the compassion and support addicts need to recover. There’s a role for you to play. And it begins with watching this film.

**Where to Show**

THE HUNGRY HEART

- School assemblies
- Health classes
- In-service days for school staff
- Training sessions
- Social service and state health organizations
- Law enforcement
- Substance abuse treatment centers
- Youth organizations
- Hospitals
- Judicial agencies
- Community groups

BEFORE SHOWING THE FILM

What to Expect from THE HUNGRY HEART
“Addiction is a chronic, relapsing disease that affects the brain and causes compulsive drug seeking and use despite harmful consequences.”

- NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON DRUG ABUSE

Prescription opiates are a double-edged sword. Used as intended, they reduce and relieve the pain associated with accident, injury, and disease. But when used to get high, they can cause incredible damage to individuals, families, and communities. In the US, more than 14,000 people each year—or about one person every 19 minutes—die from prescription opiate overdose. Millions more have become addicted. It’s a problem we cannot afford to ignore. And the first step to solving the problem involves setting aside some misconceptions and learning some facts.

- IT CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE
Addiction does not discriminate. It cuts across lines of age, gender, ethnicity, and economic status. Eighteen-year-old boys in tough urban neighborhoods suffer from the disease of prescription drug addiction. So do 40-year-old businesswomen in prosperous suburbs. Addiction can—and often does—“hide in plain sight.” In fact, one in four of today’s teens has misused or abused prescription drugs. (The Partnership at DrugFree.org and MetLife Foundation). That’s an increase of 33% since 2008.

- IT’S A DISEASE, NOT A MORAL FAILURE
Critical to solving the prescription addiction crisis is removing the stigma that is often associated with it. It can be easy to look at prescription drug addicts as “those people,” the ones with lax morals who are too weak to resist temptation. In fact, addiction is a disease, over which the addict has little control. And recovery from addiction is a long and complicated process that often includes relapses into addiction.

- HOW PRESCRIPTION ABUSE STARTS
Often, prescription opiate addiction starts when a person is prescribed a drug such as Oxycodone for pain and becomes overwhelmed by the feelings the drug induces. In other cases, a single episode of bad judgment—often by a young person succumbing to peer pressure or the stresses of adolescence—causes a person to abuse medication for the first time.

- PAIN ISN’T JUST PHYSICAL: THE HUNGRY HEART
While prescription opiates were created to reduce physical pain, they can also reduce psychological pain. All people experience “The Hungry Heart” of emotional emptiness sometimes. But it’s important to understand that the numbness created by the abuse of opiates is actually the opposite of feeling. Rather than experiencing and processing normal emotions such as loss, grief, or anger, an opiate user blocks those feelings with drugs. Until opiate use stops, those feelings cannot be processed, and positive resolution isn’t possible.
BRAIN CHEMISTRY PLAYS A ROLE
Prescription opiates mimic natural opioids found in the brain. Called endorphins, these natural brain chemicals are involved in pain control, and may be linked to “pleasure centers” in the brain. When a prescription opiate enters the bloodstream, molecules of it bond to the brain’s endorphin receptors, producing feelings of intense pleasure.

HABITUATION
While prescription opiates can cause an intense high, the addict’s body quickly adapts to the ingested dose, or become habituated. When this happens, the addict needs to ingest a larger amount of the drug to get high. With prescription opiates, habituation happens rapidly. At first, a prescription opiate user may need as little as 5-10 milligrams of OxyContin to get high. But within just a few months, the user may need more than 10 times that amount.

ADDITION AND WITHDRAWAL
Addiction to a substance takes place when drugs make changes to the brain’s structure and/or function. These changes can reduce a person’s self control and ability to make good decisions. (National Institute on Drug Abuse) Research shows that genetics may also play a role in this process. According to studies with twins, up to 50% of the risk of addiction comes from a person’s genes. (National Institute on Drug Abuse)

When a person becomes addicted to prescription opiates, he or she cannot stop using the drug without experiencing severe physical and/or psychological withdrawal symptoms. Physical symptoms can include vomiting, diarrhea, bone pain, and cold shakes. Psychological symptoms can range from intense craving for the drug to guilt, fear, and shame. These symptoms make recovery from addiction very difficult.

METHODS OF ABUSE
To get high on prescription opiates, users employ a number of unsafe methods, including ingesting higher dosages, grinding up and inhaling pills or melting pills with water and injecting them. All of these methods produce an intense high, but greatly increase the risk of addiction, overdose, and accidental death.

Resource: Helpguide.org
THE FOUR STAGES OF RECOVERY

Recovering from prescription drug addiction is much more than a matter of individual willpower. Most recovering addicts rely on a number of strategies, from 12-step programs and in-patient rehabilitation to talk therapy, peer and family support, exercise and diet, and medications such as Suboxone or Methadone.

The physical, psychological, and social connections to opiates are incredibly strong. For this reason, relapse is many times a part of the recovery process. It’s not uncommon for addicts to relapse on their way to recovery, and this is considered a normal part of the recovery process. For every person, recovery is different, but many experience some of the following:

STAGE ONE:
Beginning of Recovery (often the first year)
- Learning about addiction
- Staying clean and sober for as long as possible
- Physical detox and stabilization
- Learning to socialize in a group setting
- Learning to break down the pattern of isolation
- Developing role models
- Anxiety management
- Learning to eliminate friends/places that are dangerous to recovery
- Developing self-responsibility
- Learning to ask for help

STAGE TWO:
Deepening (often the second year of recovery)
- Identifying old behaviors that do not feel right anymore
- Emotional detox
- Changes in verbal attitude, feelings, and behavior
- Increase in the quality of physical health
- Increase in the ability to tolerate feelings
- Beginning to make distinctions between and among feeling states
- Increased commitment to working on personal recovery

STAGE THREE:
Connectedness (often years three-five of recovery)
- Depth of joy and misery can be profound
- The need to go back and redo some tasks form earlier in recovery
- Learning to avoid the creation of drama in one’s life
- The outer world of the person is beginning to reflect the inner world
- Connections are made to a wider circle of people both in and out of recovery
- There is an increase in honesty

STAGE FOUR:
Integration (often years six-ten of recovery)
- Relationships based on love rather than need
- Avoidance of getting stuck
- Automatic use of tools learned in recovery
- Ability to act on knowledge, insight, and follow through
- Self forgiveness
- Having fun and joy in life

In *The Hungry Heart*, Dr. Fred Holmes prescribes Suboxone, a drug designed to ease dependence on opiates, to his patients. Suboxone contains two components. One component, Buprenorphine, reduces the craving for opiates. The other is Naloxone, which reduces the effects of other opiates. This can prevent a relapsing addict from feeling the effects of opiate abuse.

Used as an addiction therapy treatment since 2002, Suboxone is available as a pill, film, and skin patch. While Suboxone is one treatment tool, it cannot work alone, and must be combined with other supports. In addition, Suboxone can be abused, resulting in dependence or even death by overdose.
NOTES ON VIEWING AND DISCUSSING THE HUNGRY HEART

■ REMEMBER TO LISTEN!
A major goal of The Hungry Heart project is to enable sustained, enriching dialogue about issues of prescription drug abuse in communities across America. Watching and listening with an open mind and heart is a critical first step. The openness, honesty, and insight of the people shown in the film can be enough to inspire a rewarding dialogue. However, it is important to consider the power of the issues explored, their complicated nature, and their emotional impact. As such, we strongly advise that you take the following steps to prepare you and your audience for a successful screening.

■ PREVIEW THE FILM IN ITS ENTIRETY BEFORE SHOWING IT TO AN AUDIENCE.
The Hungry Heart explores issues that may have a powerful emotional impact on audiences—particularly those impacted by addiction to prescription or other drugs, including alcohol, so watch the film first to prepare. You may also wish to hold a preview screening for in-service trainers, administrators, supervisors, community leaders, parents, or teachers, depending upon your audience.

■ RELY ON THE SUPPORT OF SOCIAL SERVICE PROFESSIONALS. If possible, it’s best to include counselors or other social service or health professionals in your plan. They can prove invaluable in directing discussion, handling challenging questions, and identifying additional resources that can make your screening a rewarding one.
INFORM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM ABOUT YOUR SCREENING PLAN. In general, most school administrators like to be aware of the content shared with students. The leadership teams of other organizations like to be similarly informed.

KEEP PARENTS AND OTHER CAREGIVERS IN THE LOOP. Many parents and other caregivers appreciate being informed when their children view and discuss films featuring realistic situations and challenging issues. If you are showing *The Hungry Heart* to an audience of young people, you may wish to contact parents and other caregivers prior to screening and inform them of your screening plan.

REACH OUT TO YOUTH WHO ARE AFFECTED BY ADDICTION. In preparing this guide, we spoke to a number of young people impacted by drug addiction. The vast majority of them felt that a screening and discussion of *The Hungry Heart* would be beneficial to them and to youth in similar situations.

However, please keep in mind that some young people may not wish to reveal this aspect of their lives to others. Some of them may wish to join in the screening and discussion; others may wish to opt out of either or both. For this reason, it’s important to reach out to vulnerable young people before screening the film. Let them preview the film and suggest strategies for screening it successfully. Some may be willing to share their experiences, while others may not.

SET THE STAGE FOR GOOD COMMUNICATION. The “Top Ten Ways to Improve Your Communications Skills” on page 10 can help your discussion of the issues stay focused, positive, and productive. You may wish to distribute copies of the guidelines or review them with your audience before discussion begins.

ALLOW ADEQUATE TIME FOR SCREENING AND DISCUSSION. *The Hungry Heart* is 1 hour and 33 minutes long. In general, we recommend 30 minutes to 1 hour for additional discussion. Depending upon your audience, you may wish to allow more time. If your audience is large, you may wish to break into smaller groups for discussion.

CHOOSE AN APPROPRIATE DISCUSSION FORUM. It’s best to think about your discussion format beforehand. You may wish to break into small groups, for example. Or you may wish to hold a panel discussion. In any case, it’s critical to have a skilled facilitator on hand to set discussion guidelines and direct the flow of the dialogue.

BE READY FOR FOLLOW-UP. Familiarize yourself with school or organizational protocols to ensure appropriate follow-up for any student or adult who comes forward with serious concerns. Have counselors available for those who need them.

As long as the shame is there, and as long as the ignorance is there, there is no way to break through that addiction.”

– RAINA, THE HUNGRY HEART
FOR SCHOOLS: Meeting Common Core Standards

Viewing *The Hungry Heart* in a school environment can help teachers, administrators, counselors, and students to create a healthy, productive environment for young people at risk for addiction. In addition, doing the suggested warm-up activities and discussing the thematic questions will enable middle school and high school students to work toward meeting the following College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening:

1) Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly persuasively.

SL.6/1c. Pose and respond to specific questions with elaboration and detail by making comments that contribute to the topic, text, or issue under discussion.

SL.6.1d Review the key ideas expressed and demonstrate understanding of multiple perspectives through reflection and paraphrasing.
Top Ten Ways to Improve Your Communication Skills

These communication tips can help to make your screening of THE HUNGRY HEART worthwhile.

1. Listen without judgment.

2. Be willing to be swayed by the other person’s opinion.

3. Listen without thinking about what you will say next.

4. Do not be invested in being right. Being right is not the point.

5. Try to focus. If you miss something, ask the speaker to repeat what was said.

6. After someone speaks, repeat back what you heard and ask if it is correct.

7. Listen to yourself. Be aware of how your mind and body feel during the discussion.

8. Speak honestly, but consider others’ feelings. Be polite, respectful, and sincere.

9. Understand that most things are not black or white, but in a gray area.

10. Build trust. Don’t say what you don’t mean. Don’t promise what you won’t or can’t fulfill.
FOCUS QUESTIONS

Before screening the film, start with a few focus questions that will help your audience to invest themselves in what they are about to watch. Particularly if you are showing the film to a school audience, you may wish to present these questions in the form of a K-W-L graphic organizer. The questions are simple ones: What do you Know about prescription drug addiction? What do you Want to know about prescription drug addiction? After the screening, you can complete the organizer by asking one more question: What did you Learn about prescription drug addiction?

### Before Screening

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do I Know about prescription drug addiction?</th>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do I Want to know about prescription drug addiction?</th>
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### After Screening

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What did I Learn about prescription drug addiction?</th>
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In addition, you may wish to share information from the synopsis of the film from page 7 and present some of the information on addiction and recovery presented on pages 8-10.

After you’ve read all the caveats, breathe. And in whatever way you choose to present THE HUNGRY HEART, just do it. Then give your audience a chance to talk about the film, and talk about it some more. Be sure to listen!

Now watch the Movie!!!
ACTIVITY 1
First Thoughts
Ask people to start out by talking about their general response to the film? What did you find most powerful or important about the stories of these people? What did you learn that surprised you? What emotions did you feel as you watched? What words would you use to describe these people and their situations? How is their community similar to—and different from—yours.

ACTIVITY 2
I Am the One
This exercise helps people to think about their identities and how those identities have been shaped by life experience. This is a great way to prepare for comparing and contrasting their lives with those of the characters in the film, and with making meaningful connections.

Start by asking members of the audience to write for 3-5 minutes starting with the sentence “I am the one who...” After they have completed their writing, invite audience members to share excerpts with each other and the group. Those who prefer anonymity may ask the moderator to read excerpts from their writing aloud without being identified.

Then invite audience members to reflect upon how their lives compare and contrast with those of one or more of the people in the film. You may find it more productive to focus on one person in the film at a time, and ask some questions.

How is your life similar to that of __________________________ in the film? How is your life different? How have your life experiences helped to create the person you are—outgoing, shy, optimistic, pessimistic, etc.? How might you be different if you had experienced the same things as __________________________ in the film?
ACTIVITY 3

Visible/Invisible
This is an activity in which people consider the positive and negative aspects of visibility and anonymity.

Make two sheets of paper with “Visible” on one and “Invisible” on the other—have the teens/adults list or call out times in their lives where they have felt invisible or visible. Those who want a more private way of doing this can write their thoughts privately on pieces of paper and share afterwards if they feel comfortable.

Then ask them to consider people suffering from addiction in general, and some of the people in the film in particular.

How might being addicted to drugs make someone feel more visible? How might it be a bad thing? How might this visibility be a good thing? How might a person addicted to drugs feel invisible? How might this invisibility be a good thing? How might it be a bad thing?

ACTIVITY 4

Sharing Some Feelings
Ask each participant to make a list of four different feelings they have experienced. Then use these individual lists to make a group list. Which of these feelings are part of every person’s life?

Next, divide those emotions into two lists—Positive and Negative. What is the breakdown, percentage-wise, between positive and negative feelings in the average person’s life?

Then focus on some of the negative feelings. What are some of the negative strategies people use to deal with difficult feelings? What are some of the negative strategies people in the film use to deal with them? What are some of the positive strategies you can use to deal with or resolve negative feelings? What positive strategies did people in the film use to deal with their negative feelings? List those positive strategies on a group list. Be sure to include strategies that people can use when their choices may be restricted by being in a classroom, at work, in a business meeting, etc.

Katie’s List
Katie from The Hungry Heart uses a number of different strategies to deal with negative feelings and stress. Here are a few of her strategies you might want to try.

LAUGHING:
There’s nothing like a good laugh to release tension.

MUSIC:
Listening to music can get negative thoughts out of your head and let you relax.

THERAPY:
Talking to someone who knows how to listen and help you problem-solve can be a great way to reduce stress.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following pages contain open-ended questions based on THE HUNGRY HEART. These questions can be used to start a conversation about prescription drug abuse prevention, addiction, and recovery. They are broken down by the categories identified as Themes. (These pages may be copied and distributed.)

THEME

PEER GROUPS AND PRESSURES

In the film, Kyle describes the pressure his friends put on him to try opiates: “What is this thing that’s so great that they are talking about, and keep telling me ‘you should try it?’” Kyle tried opiates and became addicted, even though he might have known that what his friends were doing was dangerous and illegal. Peer pressure—the pressure to conform to the behavior of a peer group—played a role in his decision. Every day, kids face powerful peer pressure, in both negative and positive forms. Positive pressure can lead kids to make great contributions to a class, social group, or team. Negative pressure can lead kids to put their own lives, and the lives of others, in great danger.

What is peer pressure?

Why do people pressure others to take drugs?

What kinds of things do people do to pressure their peers?

What are some examples of non-verbal peer pressure?

What feelings do you associate with belonging to a group?

What feelings do you associate with being an outsider?

What role does social media play in peer pressure?

How can peer pressure be negative and dangerous?

How can peer pressure be positive and productive?

What are some strategies for protecting yourself from and responding to negative peer pressure?

Why might certain groups of peers find some drugs acceptable but others not acceptable?

TAKE ACTION Create a poster showing positive and negative examples of peer pressure. Put the poster up in a school or other public area.
THEME

THE STIGMA OF ADDICTION

In the movie, Bob Bick, Director of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services at the Howard Center, says “Stigma is really about blame. It’s about condemnation and loss of…full engagement with the ‘us.’” The stigma around drug addiction can make an addicted person feel intense shame, making them more reluctant to seek treatment and increasing the difficulty of recovery. One of Dr. Holmes’ main goals—and one of the main goals of *The Hungry Heart*—is to eliminate the stigma of addiction.

What does it feel like when someone judges you? Why does being judged make you feel that way?

What is a stereotype? Can you give some examples?

What are some of the common stereotypes about addicts?

Which of these stereotypes appear in the movie? How do the addicts in the film act differently from the stereotype of the addict?

Why do people use stereotypes to think about and describe others?

How can the negative stigma surrounding addiction make it harder for addicts to seek help? How can it make it harder for them to recover?

How can we help remove the stigma surrounding drug addiction?

TAKE ACTION  Ask the group to create a digital media product, such as short video or podcast, designed to reduce the stigma of drug addiction. To create a digital media product, group members might interview their peers, experts on addiction, or recovering addicts, to talk about the damage of stigma and how to avoid it.
In the film, the parents of Tyler Greeno, and Linda, the mother of Jessica Cross both experience the loss of a child to drugs. As Dustin’s mother says, drug addiction can tear a family apart. When tormented by addiction, a person loses the ability to think rationally, and can cast family loyalty aside. Addicts often lie to family members, steal from them, and fail to uphold many other responsibilities. Members of an addicted person’s family often endure painful bouts of anxiety, depression, and anger.

Families can also play a critical role in an addicted person’s recovery by providing the support necessary to get clean. Dustin’s mother confronted him about his addiction, helped convince him to visit Dr. Holmes for treatment, and continues to provide support. But not everyone in the film can rely on family. Kyle says that he did not have a father. Penny’s mother struggled with addiction herself. This lack of support may have made it harder for them to recover.

What does the word family mean?

What role does the family play in a young person’s growth and development?

How can a parent’s addiction affect children in the family?

How can a child’s addiction affect parents and other family members?

How did addiction affect the families in the film? Why might addiction be difficult for parents? Why might addiction be difficult for siblings?

Would it be easier or harder to get clean if other members of your family were using? Why or why not?

What kind of information do parents and other families need to know to help a family member who is suffering from addiction?

Why might it be hard for an addict to share information about their addiction with family members?

TAKE ACTION Create a guidebook for your family that contains critical information about prescription drug addiction, including the signs of addiction, strategies for avoiding drugs, and ways to get help for addiction.
THEME
THE HUNGRY HEART

In the film, Raina describes a central emptiness in her life that had been there since her first memory. Katie says that drugs make her feel like the person she wanted to be, but taking drugs only makes her life much worse. All humans struggle with emptiness, loneliness, and doubt at some time in their lives. The film’s title describes this need as *The Hungry Heart*.

Some people fill the hungry heart with their relationships: family, friends, co-workers, or romantic partners. Others fill the hungry heart with work, or with recreational activities from music and competitive sports to fishing and photography. And some people blot out their feelings of emptiness with drugs. This film is about helping people to overcome addiction and learn a better way to fill their hungry hearts. Their success is best expressed by Stephanie, who is now in recovery. She says “Now, I can actually feel. It’s a human experience. I am experiencing human experiences. It’s a beautiful thing.”

**Why do you think the director of the movie called it THE HUNGRY HEART?**

**Can you give some examples from the film of what people’s hearts were hungry for?**

**What are some of the negative ways that those hungry hearts were being filled?**

**What are some of the positive ways in which those hungry hearts were being filled?**

**What kinds of things does the media offer us to fill our hungry hearts?**

**What kinds of things do you do to fill your own Hungry Heart?**

**TAKE ACTION** Design packaging for a product designed to fill a hungry heart. The “ingredients” can include relationships, hobbies, and anything else that can fill a hungry heart in a healthy way.
In the film, Dustin keeps his involvement with drugs a secret from his family for a long time. It is only when the secret is revealed and his family finds out about his addiction that he begins his recovery. Like Dustin, many addicts keep their addiction secret because they feel ashamed of it—and of the dishonest things they do to obtain drugs and the damage their addiction does to family, friends, and the community. The friends and families of an addict may also keep the person’s addiction secret for these reasons.

It is important to consider the difference between guilt and shame. In order to recover from addiction, people must admit guilt for their actions and acknowledge the harm they have done to themselves and to others. But feeling shame, or thinking that they are bad people because of what they have done, is not necessary. In fact, shame often prevents people from getting help for their addiction, and feelings of shame can make recovery harder. One way to reduce the shame around addiction is to understand that addiction is not a moral issue. It is a disease over which the addict has little control.

What is the difference between guilt and shame?

What makes secrets so powerful?

When might it be good to keep a secret?

What kind of secrets can be harmful?

Why might people with an addiction to drugs feel ashamed?

How might these feelings of shame make it harder for them to get help?

How might these feelings of shame make it harder for them to recover from addiction?

What do the people in the movie admit about their drug use?

How can revealing secrets and admitting the guilt of addiction be helpful?

TAKE ACTION As an individual or a group, take one step to bring the issue of addiction out into the open and help people understand that it is a treatable disease, not something to be ashamed of.
In the film Jess, Tyler, Katie, and others describe how they used drugs to cope with their psychological pain. However, it is important to understand that while drugs can dull the pain of personal problems, they cannot make those problems go away. Use of drugs prevents people from being able to think rationally, engage with their feelings, and solve their problems. Until a person stops using drugs, these problems cannot be resolved.

People use a variety of different strategies to resolve personal problems without relying on drugs. These strategies include discussing problems with family or friends and getting support from school staff or counselors. Many people also find that it’s important to pay attention to their own needs by eating a good diet, getting enough sleep, exercising, taking time alone, and avoiding stressful situations when possible.

**What kinds of problems do the people in the film face?**

**What kinds of negative strategies did they use to respond to their problems?**

**What kind of positive strategies did they use to respond to their problems?**

**Think about a time in your life when you experienced difficulty. What strategies—both negative and positive—did you use to help you cope?**

**What role do family, peers, and other members of a community play in helping young people to cope with difficult circumstances?**

**How can compassion play a role in helping people to cope with drug addiction?**

**TAKE ACTION** Make a plan that lists strategies you can use to cope positively with personal problems and stress.
THEME

A SOCIETY FULL OF ADDICTIONS

In the film, we see just how dangerous prescription drugs can be. But pills are seen as a solution to many of our problems. Just watch television for an hour or two and you’ll see numerous advertisements for prescription drugs. Other drugs make an appearance in the media, too. Just flip through your favorite magazine, and count the number of ads for tobacco products. Watch football on a Sunday, and log the number of commercials for alcoholic beverages.

We live in a society full of addictions. Prescription drugs, tobacco products, and alcohol aren’t the only ones. Think about how often you and the people around you connect with your cell phones to text or communicate over social media every day. More and more people are concerned about “screen addiction.”

What is an addiction?

How did the people in the film become addicted?

What are some of the addictions in our society?

What role does the media, peer pressure, and other elements of society play in creating addictions?

Do we judge one type of addiction differently from another? Why or why not?

What is the best way to help people with addictions?

What are some things in your school and community that promote wellness and the prevention of addiction?

How can compassion play a role in helping people to cope with drug addiction?

TAKE ACTION Is “screen time” really an addiction? Find out by asking the people in your school, workplace, or community to go without using cell phones and all forms of social media for one day. At the end of the day, have members of the group talk about how their day was different, and what it felt like to be without their screens. What does this experiment tell us about addiction in general? What kinds of coping skills did people use?
IN YOUR OWN BACK YARD

Control the Medicines in Your Own Home

The number one source of abused prescription opiates is the home medicine cabinet. Make sure your medicine cabinet, and those of grandparents and other relatives, do not become a source of drugs for your children or others by taking three simple steps:

1. Monitor Take an inventory of all your prescription drugs, including counting the pills, so you will know if any come up missing. If your child is given a prescription for opiates, keep the pills in your control and dispense them to the child yourself.

2. Secure Put all your prescription drugs in a locked box or cabinet. Make sure no one but yourself and other responsible adults can access the prescriptions.

3. Dispose Drug take-back programs allow the public to bring unused drugs to a central location for proper disposal. Contact your local law enforcement agency, or visit www.dea.gov for a full list of take-back sites participating in National Prescription Drug Take-Back days.

In Vermont, call Vermont 2-1-1, visit www.Vermont211.org, visit the Vermont Department of Public Safety Drug Diversion Unit website at http://vsp.vermont.gov/drugdiversion/disposal or call (802) 241-5630. If you are unable to bring expired, unwanted, or unused medications to a disposal site, please see the recommended disposal guidelines.


Start the Conversation

Starting a conversation about prescription drug addiction is the first step to ending this epidemic. So why not start in your own home? Spend some family time talking about addiction, its causes, and its consequences.

You may wish to begin the conversation by talking about The Hungry Heart, or even watching it as a family. Use the stories of some of the characters to explore what family members know about addiction and its consequences. Try out some of the following questions: Addiction is horrible, so why do you think people use addictive drugs in the first place? What are other alternatives to dealing with difficult or emotional situations? Which character in the film could you most closely relate to? Why?

No matter what your family members talk about, listen with an open mind. Try not to be judgmental or critical. And above all, let everyone know that this is just the start of the conversation. Keep the door open for more discussion—at any time.

TAKE ACTION

We hope that watching and discussing The Hungry Heart has given you some insight into the lives of children and families involved with drug addiction. More importantly, we hope it inspires you to take action to support the children and families in your school, organization, or community.

It’s simple to get started. Working alone or within your group, write down three ways in which you might be able to prevent prescription drug addiction or support someone in recovery. Then choose one of those ideas and take action! Remember, you don’t have to do something complicated or expensive. Just a little support at the right moment can make a big difference. Here are some easy ways to show your compassion and support. Start the conversation in your home:
Make A “Get Out of Danger Free” Card for Families
At any time, children in your family can be pressured by peers to try drugs or alcohol. Give them an option for avoiding this by providing them with a “Get Out of Danger Free” card. The card entitles them to call you at any time to come and remove them from a dangerous peer pressure situation. Here’s how the card works: When your child is in an uncomfortable situation, they can tell their friends that they need to check in at home. When they do, they can give you a predetermined code word or phrase printed in the card, such as “Is Aunt Claire coming over tonight?” When you hear that code word or phrase, you tell your child that they need to come home right away. They tell their friends this, and you go to pick them up and bring them home.

As an alternative, kids can send a text home asking you to pick them up. They can do this unobtrusively, without alerting peers that they feel uncomfortable.

IN YOUR COMMUNITY
Organize a Community Forum on Prescription Abuse
Work with other members of your community to bring ordinary citizens, school staff, members of law enforcement, and political representatives to hold a public forum on prescription abuse. You can share information about preventing prescription drug addiction, develop plans to help people in the community avoid addiction to prescription drugs, discuss the struggle addicts face, and create plans to help addicts recover from addiction.

Mentor a Child at Risk
In the film, Penny talks about how it would have been helpful to have a “parent-type” figure in her life to help her avoid addiction. By becoming a mentor, you can be that kind of a figure for a child needing support. The commitment can be as little as an hour or two a week, and the payoff is limitless. To find out more about mentoring, visit the National Mentoring Partnership at mentoring.org.

Support a Local Recovery Center
Recovery centers form a vital link for people struggling with addiction by providing group meetings, recreational activities, and even just a hot cup of coffee to someone who needs critical support. You can support your local recovery center by volunteering and donating supplies or equipment. If a recovery center doesn’t exist in your community, you can even help organize one. Seek out a group of interested community members to find what it takes to create such a resource—then make it happen. To learn more, visit the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration at samhsa.gov.

IN YOUR STATE
Get the Picture
Is your state doing a good enough job in preventing addiction and providing treatment for this destructive disease? One way to find out is to do an analysis of services, both private and governmental, provided statewide. In general, how is your state responding to the problem of prescription drug addiction? Which towns or cities have sufficient services? Which have service levels that could be improved? What might those improvements look like? Getting answers will mean talking to a number of people, from people with addiction to doctors and recovery specialists, members of law enforcement, educators, politicians, and neighbors. You may even find that you are building a statewide coalition that wants to do something about the problem.

Lobby Your Legislators
Silence is one of the best friends of addiction. If people keep silent about the need to confront this deadly disease, the problem will only get worse. With that in mind, make sure your state legislators and other representatives know your position on prescription drug addiction. Make a phone call, send an email, or better yet, meet your representative in person. Express your concern about the problem of prescription drug addiction and ask your representative what he or she is doing to help. If you have some ideas for a better statewide response, provide them. And most important of all, follow up. It can take lots of pressure to get a response from a politician, and if you give up quickly, you are less likely to succeed.
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