



A Parent's Guide to an Honest Discussion of the Real Opioid Crisis

**This film and guide is a gift for all parents who are doing the best they can and recognize we need each other. Funded by Spring Green Educational Foundation, please go to www.springgreen.org or www.chasinghope.org for more information.*

Introduction

I chose to write this intro from a personal perspective, although as I sit here at my desk, I hold the position of Executive Director for the **Spring Green Educational Foundation (SGEF)**. At SGEF, we believe everything is learned through modeling, and we never ask someone to do something we aren't willing to do ourselves, so let me illustrate this in the most authentic way I know how.

If you really knew me...

I am a mother of a son who continues to be the miracle I prayed for. He is 21 years old, has the best sense of humor and makes me laugh all the time. He is compassionate, brilliant, has more creativity in his little finger than I do in my entire body, and he is addicted to heroin. As I type this he has been clean for 6 days, but if you are familiar at all with addiction, recovery is often an ongoing battle that is frequently challenged by relapse. Justin has overdosed numerous times, most recently in the backseat of a car where he was dumped onto the street and left to die.

Here is what I want to say; I thought I did everything right. Of course, like all moms I made mistakes that I learned from, but overall I was proud of my parenting. I raised him as a Christian, lived in a great community, had phenomenal family and friend support, and was the "school mom" who made all his Halloween costumes, threw him special themed birthday parties every year and was constantly having "date days" with my son (my favorite is a pj party the two of us had one night and rode around the neighborhood in our pajamas). Here's where it gets even more interesting; I am gifted in counseling. I have worked with hundreds of children, adolescents and their families over my 30+ years in the field of social work and have experienced incredible success. I share this not to boast, but rather to point out how miserably I failed in helping my own child.

I missed key signs. I made significant mistakes. I fell short when he needed me most. I am not using this as a tool to "beat me up," I have come to terms with my role in his addiction. I am sharing this because I believe, no, I know, it can happen to anyone. I know that sounds so cliché, yet there are no other words I can fill in that fit. We are at war; with a culture that has lost its way. We are losing our children to this demon called addiction and it is taking them in record numbers.

This film is based on true stories. We didn't "recreate" anything. We simply asked some individuals to share their heart with us and in the process, we accumulated a wealth of knowledge. Some of it is factual, such as the science behind what happens to the brain when addiction forms. Some of it is what we have learned through hundreds of hours of listening to hearts broken wide open. When we become disconnected, when we feel 'less than,' we seek ways to replace that loss. Behavior doesn't get eliminated, it gets replaced. You will see that in these testimonies.

Here's the other scary factor; some people (particularly youth) get addicted simply by using pain medicine only to find out they like the way it makes them feel or worse, when

the prescription runs out, they find their body is needing it. One of the woman in this film talks about how sick she became after she realized her medication ran out. Couple that with feelings of insecurity and you have the perfect storm for addiction.

Here's what this film will cover:

- ✚ Addiction. What really is it, how easily and innocently it can get started.
- ✚ Why 9 out of 10 of our teens are beginning their addiction in early adolescence and how to identify if yours is at risk (spoiler alert, they all are. However, there are definitely warning signs that can let a parent know they need to take action).
- ✚ The physical effects on the body under the influence of drugs. These would include the withdrawal symptoms that most are not expecting but keep many in addiction. We also cover the development of the adolescent brain significantly which is altered whenever alcohol or drugs are ingested. **Once addiction occurs, the brain is permanently changed to crave the drug.**
- ✚ You'll learn about other components of addiction that don't have to do with the body but take over the life of the individual nonetheless. These include incarceration, violence, human trafficking, and prostitution, committing crimes, lying and deceiving family and friends, and almost always isolation and depression.
- ✚ The incredible connection between the individual's ability to cope with negative feelings is directly linked to their risk factor of becoming an addict. This film will ask each person to take an internal honest assessment of what it's like to be them every day. A perfect opportunity for discussion.
- ✚ You'll see a powerful visual that shows you how similar the chemical make-up is between the prescribed medication such as OxyContin and Percocet and heroin.
- ✚ The environment plays a significant role in decision-making. Anyone who grows up around alcohol and drugs are at a much greater risk of becoming addicted. In addition, this film highlights genetic factors that makes that youth at even greater risk.
- ✚ Symptoms of substance abuse and how to recognize an overdose and what to do if noticed.

Before you think this may not be a concern you have with your child, let me share another personal piece of my story. Since I have become involved with the production of this film, I have been surrounded, overwhelmed and saturated with information about the opioid crisis. I have sat with dozens of people in addiction and listened to their stories, I have attended funerals of those who lost the battle, I have sat with the coroner and an ER physician and heard things that made my stomach drop. I missed it. Me, the Executive Director with a masters and 30+ years of experience and my son was exhibiting certain behaviors that I "blew off" as typical adolescence. I would find things

in his room I couldn't explain and attributed it to his "creativity" since he was always a child who invented amazing things. Had I paid more attention, had I taken the time to understand or even research some of what I was noticing, I may have been able to prevent him from getting to where he is now. Maybe not. But it will forever be a question unanswered.

This is an opportunity to create an honest and open dialogue with your teen not only about opioids but also critical life skills. How do they cope with stress and pressure? Do you know?

SGEF is beyond proud of this film and are so grateful to the individuals who courageously offered their personal stories as a resource for others to learn and grow. We stand behind all of them as they are now forever a part of our "Foundation Family." Personally, as a mother I am more than thankful for the opportunity to grow not just professionally but personally and spiritually because of this experience. As the Executive Director of this Foundation, I can honestly say I have never encountered a more genuine, compassionate and heart-led organization as SGEF. This gift is meant to help prevent another parent from going through what thousands are confronted with daily.

Thank you for the chance to share my heart and opening yours to this film. We welcome any comments, questions or feedback at 419-250-0810 or email at dawntaylorsgef@gmail.com.

Dawn Taylor



What Do You Know?

This section is simply designed to get an understanding of where your teen is with their knowledge base. It also allows the teen to start reflecting into their own perception and ideas of what addiction is. We recommend parents complete their own assessment along with your child and compare your responses. The idea is to present a message of walking through this journey together. Parents may be surprised what they don't know while completing this. Celebrate this! You're learning together and what a fantastic conversation that can be.

1. What is an opioid?
2. Do you know anyone who uses opioids? Do you know of anyone who abuses opioids? And do you know what the difference is between using and abusing?
3. How popular are opioids in your circle of friends/family? If so what are some forms or types of opioids you believe/know they have used? *(It's important to note your teen may not feel comfortable disclosing who this is. Allow them to share without giving names but please follow up later. If they do know of someone using these, it could be life threatening and your son/daughter needs to understand this).*
4. What is addiction? How does one become addicted?
5. Do you know what puts you at risk for becoming addicted? Would you know how to identify if someone was addicted? At what age do most alcohol/drug abuse begin?
6. What does it mean when someone goes through withdrawal? What happens to the body during withdrawal?
7. Do you know what the use of drugs does to the brain? If so, what?
8. What is the leading cause of death among teens in this country?
9. Do you believe your emotions, feelings, and stress have any connection with drug abuse? If so, how?
10. List three things that almost always happens when abusing drugs.
11. What do you do to cope when you have stress, anxiety, anger or depression?
12. What are the signs of drug abuse? How can you tell if someone has just overdosed vs. is drunk?

Before You Start This Film

You're ready to watch this film. Before you start, please keep these points in mind as you watch:

- ✚ These are actual stories shared by the ones who have lived through this and are either in recovery or still using. In some cases, you'll even hear from parents who have lost their children due to an overdose. These are not actors, but

rather people who have chosen to share their experiences in hopes of preventing someone else from falling into addiction and/or death.

- ✚ Like we said, you will hear from several different individuals. Some male, some female. You will hear from athletes, straight A students, cheerleaders, a gang member, etc. Pay attention to which one you identify with the most. How is their story of “life” like yours? Do you relate to any of their experiences, their feelings?
- ✚ Pay close attention to the graphics of drugs and the brain. This is a very powerful illustration of where your brain is in development right now.
- ✚ All of these individuals, despite their differences in ethnicity and background have something in common. See if you can identify what it is.

View Video

DISCUSSION POINTS

If you've ever participated or know anything about a Book Club, typically the participants read a book together and generate discussion around it that encourages personal growth, the sharing of ideas and concepts, healthy discussion and often a lot of fun. Much like that, we encourage you to approach your conversation with your child in the same manner. Ask each other these questions and be open to hearing things you may not agree with, but be grateful the dialogue has begun. Remember, this isn't a lecture, it is a conversation, which means an equal balance of energy. While of course you are

the parent with the authority, your desire here is set up an ongoing exchange that doesn't stop after you're done today.

Points to discuss: Facts (discussion of film points that focus on facts)

- ✚ How do you understand addiction differently if at all? How would you define it?
- ✚ After listening to the individuals talk about how they became addicted, what are some factors you think may put you at risk? Is it your environment? Friendships? Genetics?
- ✚ Talk about withdrawal. What do you understand about it after viewing this film? How quickly can this happen? What does it feel like?
- ✚ Remember the visual of the brain development? Right now, your brain is in the stage of development where your personality is being formed, which is why they say drugs literally change who you are. It also impacts the impulse center, changing your ability to control impulses. So, with that type of knowledge, what impulses do you think could get you into trouble? Since we also know it directly impacts the memory portion of your brain, how would this impact you right now?
- ✚ The leading cause of death in adolescence is accidents due to risky behavior. How would impulse control impairment contribute to that? What about decisions to become sexually active?
- ✚ What are some of your biggest stressors right now?
- ✚ How do you cope with this/these? What do you do when you're feeling sad, angry, frustrated, stress or depressed?
- ✚ In the film Justin struggled with never feeling like he was good enough. Can you remember a time when you felt that way? Describe it.
- ✚ Ashley was a cheerleader, straight A student and in the National Honor Society yet felt like if people really knew her, they'd see her the way she sees herself and not like her. Can you identify with this feeling? She talks about having a voice of reason in her head that told her what she knew she was doing was wrong, but did it anyway because she wanted to fit in. Can you think of a time in your life

when you did something you knew was wrong and did it anyways? Do you remember why you did it? How do you feel about it now?

- ✚ Jacob was abused physically and sexually but never shared this with anyone. The weight of his secret tore at him and took its toll. Has there ever been a time you were abused or hurt and never shared it? How did you cope? Are you still being abused?

- ✚ Josie was raised around a lot of drugs and alcohol and always thought it just looked like fun. Have you seen a lot of adults in your life abusing alcohol or drugs? How did it look to you? Have you noticed any negative impact in their life from their using?
 - Perhaps the most powerful thing Josie shared was that she may be laughing, joking and giggling all the time on the outside but inside she didn't feel that at all. So how about you? Have you ever walked around putting a face on for others but inside you were feeling pain?

- ✚ David shared the pain he carried about growing up without having his father in his life. Seeing other kids with their dads was a constant reminder of what he did not have. Is there someone missing from your life that has brought you pain? Whether it be through divorce, abandonment or loss, it can be devastating. Does this pain lead you to a feeling of emptiness or abandonment?

- ✚ Nicole was beautiful, popular, a cheerleader, yet always felt she was one step behind everyone else. Have you ever felt different; less than? Can you think of a time when your family or friends were telling you how great you are but you just didn't feel it?

- ✚ Tim talked about how he never in a million years thought he would be the one to hurt his father who was his hero. Talk about a time you hurt your parent(s) or someone you really admire and respect. What did you do? How did you feel after?

- ✚ When Tito lost his father to prison, he carried around an anger that he said eventually turned into a rage. This came out through violence, often in fights. So, what about you? What do you do when you're angry? How is it expressed? Do you feel like your anger takes over at times and hurts others or yourself?

Think about a time when you did something based on your anger, what happened? How did you feel immediately after?

- ✚ When Jordan's mom talked about her son Brandon's death, she admits she was clueless and had no idea what was really going on. Honestly, how comfortable are you talking with me (your parent) about this subject? About your feelings? If not, can you help me understand why? What can I do to make it easier?
- ✚ Brandon died after becoming addicted to a prescription painkiller. Much like Tim's story, it started off innocently and legally, but quickly escalated to a deadly addiction. Have you ever taken a prescribed opioid? Did anyone explain to you at the time how dangerous these were?
- ✚ Most addicts began using drugs and alcohol between the ages of 12 and 14. How many people do you know who are using drugs either through experimentation or regular use?

Points to Discuss: (Heart related). WARNING You may tend to want to skip over this section but let us warn you, this is equally if not more important than the previous discussion. This helps to get to the why of why so many are using despite their knowledge. This will also bring you to a closer connection with your child.*

Parents please be sure to take turns doing this portion with your child. You each should get an equal opportunity to share.

- ✚ Who did you identify with most? Share why you chose him/her, what are the similarities? What are the differences? What has this person's story caused you to think about?
- ✚ Finish this sentence, "If you really knew me..." Talk about what it's like to be you. What do people see on the outside, and what is really going on, on the inside?

- ✚ The one thing all film participants had in common was a lack of connection. They felt disconnected from friends, family, their community. Talk about a time you have felt lonely, isolated, not enough.

Their Story

The following information is meant to serve as a reminder of the stories of each individual in the film. These are by no means their entire story, rather a brief overview for you to be reminded of how they perceive addiction came into their life and what the obstacles are/were to recovery. This is a great tool to look over when answering which story best connected with your own.

Justin

Football player who received full scholarship, but gave it all up and ended up on the streets addicted to heroin. Despite receive accolades from the school and surrounding community for his athletic skills, Justin never felt like he was good enough. His family

never talked about feelings and mom left when he was a child, no one ever talked about why or how to cope.

Ashley

Straight A student, a cheerleader and in National Honor Society, but did not love herself and never really knew who she was inside. Started hanging out with people who were getting into trouble and even though she had the voice inside of her telling her what she was doing was wrong, she chose to ignore it because fitting in was more important.

Jacob

Physically abused at the age of 8, Jacob was then later sexually abused but never told anyone. He tried to get into the popular crowd but kept getting kicked out of sports and felt like he just never belonged, eventually dropping out of school and selling drugs until he became addicted himself.

Josie

Josie grew up describing her house as like a “bar,” where she was surrounded by heavy drinkers. She recalls thinking this looked fun and couldn’t wait until she could join in. She describes herself as someone who walks around on the outside laughing and giggling but inside she is a wreck, with no idea how to deal with her feelings and eventually became addicted to crack, cocaine and heroin.

Rick

Both sides of Rick’s family were big drinkers and he grew up thinking drinking and smoking weed just meant it was always a good time. When he was dropped from the wrestling team, his drug use escalated. After high school his addiction led to his seizures, eventually losing his job and without the ability to work ended up in prison for robbery to support his habit.

David

David recalled his grandfather giving him a capful of liquor as a child, so at a very early age he knew what alcohol would do for him. His father was never in his life and he struggled as a child growing up watching other kids have a dad in the picture. David spent time in foster care and juvenile detention, which led him to choosing to “numb out,” using drugs to make him forget his pain.

Nicole

Life began changing for Nicole in high school where despite being a popular cheerleader and hanging out with what she described as the “cool crowd,” she always felt like she was one step behind all of them. She felt accepted once she began going

to parties and drinking and using drugs, like she finally fit in. Eventually she became addicted to pain pills and became a prostitute where she was beaten badly.

Tim

Describing himself as having a good relationship with his father, Tim never imagined he would have to tell his father that he was using heroin and was fully addicted. He was never into the “party” scene and ended up become a master electrician. After becoming addicted to pain pills, he turned to heroin, began stealing from his employers and ended up in jail.

Tito

His life watching his father abuse his mother and then go to prison for murder eventually caught up with him, where he shares his anger turned into rage. Tito describes being angry all the time and never knowing why, but would easily strike out at someone as soon as his feelings of anger would show. With a gift of music, he signed with Sony Records where he won a Grammy, only to lose it all to his addiction.