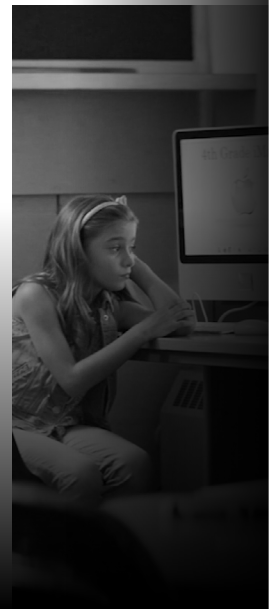




WHAT ABOUT THE KIDS?





INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your interest in the new film “What About the Kids?” a collaboration between Wahl St. Productions and OSV Institute. It’s our hope that this film, written and directed James Wahlberg, sparks conversations in communities around the country and ignites a movement of support for our neighbors who are locked in a battle for their lives against addiction.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, one in twelve American adults struggled with a substance use disorder in the last year. The most recent data also show us that 10.3 million Americans misused prescription opioids in 2018 alone, and opioid overdoses claim 47,600 lives every year. This epidemic of addiction is ripping through families and communities around the United States, leaving brokenness in its wake.

“What About the Kids?” is an intimate portrait of the true impact of opioid addiction told through the eyes of eight-year-old Chloe whose parents both struggle with drug abuse. Informed by Wahlberg’s own journey to sobriety, which is detailed in his book “The Big Hustle,” the film highlights the powerful effects of family and faith in defeating the monster of addiction.

Key themes explored in the film and the accompanying discussion guide include:

- Addiction
- Opioid Abuse
- Grief
- Family Dynamics
- Prayer
- Questions of Christian Faith



This is a film that should move, challenge, and encourage us all to reach out to those we know and love who are trapped in destructive patterns. This discussion guide is intended to equip individuals and organizations to initiate important conversations about addiction in America and help those who are suffering on their recovery journey.





GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Following a screening of “What About The Kids,” and the supplementary interview footage featuring the Feinsein family, it may be helpful to allow the audience to take a few moments to reflect on the film, its themes, and the true stories that inspired it. Below are some suggested questions to help viewers organize their thoughts, either individually or as a start to a group discussion:

- In one word, what was your initial reaction to the film?
How did it make you feel?
- What in the film most challenged you? Why?
- Were there any scenes that particularly moved you?
Left you with questions?



THEMATIC DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Family Secrets

“What About the Kids?” begins with what appears to be an ordinary morning in the home of a seemingly happy family. But it is quickly revealed that this family is hiding dark struggles beneath the surface. Young Chloe surprises her parents with breakfast in bed, and a tragic scene unfolds that shatters the status quo for every character: the mother, Nicole, has died from a drug overdose.

- What might a family like Chloe’s be afraid of that would lead them to keep secrets?
- Why do families that are struggling often try to make it appear that nothing is wrong?

Addiction, Stigma, and Judgment

At her mother’s funeral, Chloe expresses anger that people have said unkind things about her mother and treated her with judgment rather

than compassion. Her reflections on her relationship with her mother and remembrances of happy times show the complicated nature of addiction and our tendency to stigmatize those caught in it.

This complicated and often misunderstood battle with addiction is also described in Jim's conversations with Dennis Feinstein as he reflects on the struggle to hold a family together while suffering from substance addiction.

- Why are we tempted to judge others, particularly those experiencing something like addiction?
- What impact might stigma or expectation of judgment have on those with substance use disorders?
- Have this film and Dennis Feinstein's story affected your view of people suffering from addiction? If so, how?
- Who is responsible for the sin of addiction? Might others also share in the responsibility with the person who takes drugs?

Helping Those Struggling with Addiction

The bishop presiding over Nicole's funeral challenges the community's response to the struggles of those trapped in cycles of addiction, saying, "We need to do much more, as a faith community, and as a society, to take care of our sick. We need to lift those suffering with addiction up, and not to tear them down."

- What are some things we can do as a community to help those who are suffering from addiction and their families?
- What would it mean for society to help to lift up, rather than tear down, people with addictions, and others devastated by their disease?

The Effects of Addiction

One theme throughout the film and the Feinstein interviews is the way others are affected, emotionally, spiritually, and even financially, by the death of a loved one due to drug use. In the film, Nicole's addiction and her death affect her family members in profound ways.





- How is the whole family, including Nicole's husband, daughter, and in-laws, hurt by her death?
- How might Nicole's life, and the lives of those around her, have been different had she not used drugs?

Prayer

Prayer has a prominent role in the film. Through the prayers of the characters in the story, we get insight into their relationship with God and their faith journey through difficult circumstances.

- Seth (Chloe's father) expresses anger, both at his parents and at God. Later, he prays for strength to stay drug-free. Chloe thanks God for the blessings she has despite the bad things that have happened. Debbie pleads with God to protect Chloe as she goes to school. How do the various forms of prayer in the film echo the forms of prayer we find in Scripture (especially the Psalms) and in the Catechism (see CCC, 2625-2649)?
- Is it okay for us to say everything we are feeling when we talk with God, even if that feeling is anger? Why or why not?

Hope and Faith

Each family member has his or her own struggles and journey through the aftermath of Nicole's death, but the characters in the film ultimately find hope and new beginnings through faith.

- Some people say that although it is not God's will for people to suffer and for bad things to happen, God can still bring good things out of difficult circumstances. What do you think of this idea?
- Many experts on substance abuse say that it is helpful, and even necessary, for people to believe in a higher power—something greater than themselves—to overcome addiction. Why might this be so?



RECOURSES AND TIPS FOR DISCUSSION LEADERS

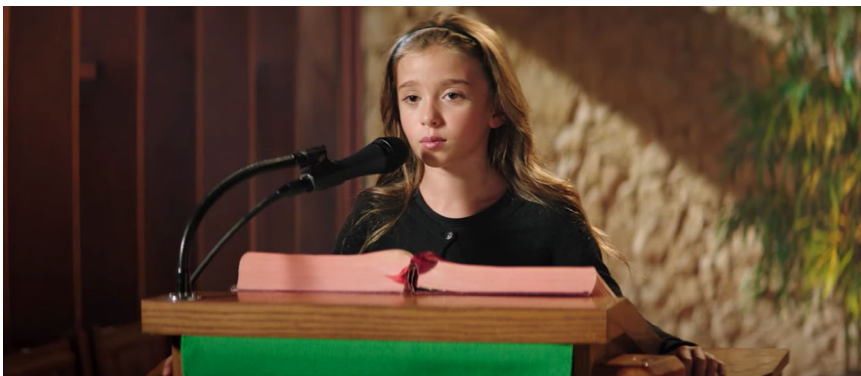
Preparing Yourself and the Audience

Preparing yourself as a discussion facilitator ahead of time is one of the most important ways to ensure a successful event. Below are a few key items to consider in your preparation:

- **Preview the film** - You will be most equipped to guide a group through processing the film if you've already experienced it.
- **Familiarize yourself with the subject matter** (see resources below) - No need to be an expert, but there are basic facts and context for the discussion that you'll want to be equipped to share.
- **Understand the flow of the event** - This will allow you to strategically plan any activities or breakout sessions during the discussion time in a way that makes the event as seamless as possible for attendees
- **Know your audience** - Is this a general parish meeting? A group of recovering addicts? Participants from outside the faith community? It's important to tailor your discussion to the individuals participating, addressing them in a way they can easily relate to.
- **Be clear in setting up the discussion** - Outline for the group at the start of the discussion the hoped for outcomes of the discussion, ground rules for respectful conversation, and considerations of confidentiality or press attending the event

Addiction in America

The far-reaching effects of addiction are ripping through communities across the country. According to the latest data, one in twelve Americans struggles with a substance use disorder, and each year an estimated 47,500 people die from opioid overdoses alone. These numbers represent an epidemic of brokenness that has impacted millions of lives, leaving families and individuals searching for help and hope.



Below are links to helpful resources that give a picture of the crisis of addiction and substance abuse in America today:

- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)
- [U.S. Department of Health & Human Services - "What is the Opioid Epidemic?"](#)
- [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#)

Resources for Attendees

The subject matter addressed in "What About the Kids?" may evoke emotional responses from viewers, particularly those who may have experienced or have a loved one who has experienced addiction. While we hope the film and discussion guide spark conversations that lead to change and healing in our communities, it may be difficult or impossible to address all of the issues raised during your group discussion. Below is a list of resources to share with those participants who may require additional support:

- [Catholic Charities](#)
- [Catholic in Recovery](#)
- <https://findtreatment.gov/>
- National Addiction Helpline: 1-800-662-4357
- [Narcotics Anonymous](#)
- [Alcoholics Anonymous](#)





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