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From the Academy Award® nominated co-writer of *The Kids Are All Right*

# THANKS FOR SHARING

Life is a journey you never have to take alone.

## DISCUSSION GUIDE



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# ABOUT THE ISSUES

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Over 23 million Americans suffer from substance addiction. Almost 1.5 million Americans are in a 12-step program for addiction. And every day, over 700,000 Americans seek help for their addiction. Within the recovery and addiction communities, sex addiction is increasingly becoming a mental health problem, estimated to afflict between 3 and 9 million Americans. With the accessibility of sex online and throughout our culture, it is becoming more evident that sex addiction needs to be recognized as a valid illness by the mental health and recovery sectors. While the science remains speculative on whether sex can be an addiction, those who compulsively engage in destructive sexual behaviors report life-changing consequences such as: loss of primary relationships, loss of finances, sexual arrest, sexual diseases/unsafe sex, failure to maintain sobriety within other addictions, and a legacy of low self-esteem, sexual shame, and secrecy. Additionally, people report that these types of problems have stemmed from their inability to create and maintain stable, self-affirming boundaries around their sexual choices. When we can overcome the stigma associated with sex addiction and encourage more transparent dialogue and acknowledgment from the mental health community, people suffering from the condition and their families can get real and lasting help.

-Alexandra Katehakis, MFT, CST, CSAT, Founder and Clinical Director of Center for Healthy Sex

# ABOUT THE FILM

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From Academy Award®-nominated screenwriter and first-time director Stuart Blumberg (The Kids Are All Right), *Thanks for Sharing* is a sharply comic and deeply moving look at a new kind of modern family, as a group of friends in recovery learns to face life together with heart, humor, and humility. Academy Award-nominee Mark Ruffalo, Academy Award-winner Tim Robbins, and Broadway star Josh Gad (“The Book of Mormon”) anchor a stellar ensemble that includes Academy Award-winner Gwyneth Paltrow, Joely Richardson, Patrick Fugit, and pop star Alecia Moore (“Get the Party Started”), in her first film role.

On the surface, Adam (Ruffalo), an over-achieving environmental consultant, Mike (Robbins), a long-married small-business owner, and Neil (Gad), a wisecracking emergency-room doctor, have little in common. But all are in different stages of dealing with addiction. Confident and successful in his career, Adam is afraid to allow love back into his life, even if that means losing a chance to start over with smart, beautiful, and accomplished Phoebe (Paltrow); Mike’s efforts to control his wife Katie (Richardson) and son Danny (Fugit) as tightly as he does his impulses are tearing the family apart; and Neil is still deeply in denial when befriended by Dede (Moore), who has just begun to take her own small steps back to health. As they navigate the rocky shores of recovery, Adam, Mike, Neil, and Dede become a family that encourages, infuriates, and applauds each other on the journey toward a new life.

# SCREENING GUIDELINES

## PREVIEWING DISCUSSION

1. Before the group views the film, provide a brief introduction to the film and the issues it raises. Refer to the sections “About This Film” and “About the Issues” in this guide for a general description. Then, communicate some of the central themes of the film:
  - Stigma -- the stigma of addiction and its societal effects
  - Recovery -- how and why people are able to recover, and the obstacles they face while doing so
  - Relationships -- the way addiction affects familial, platonic, and romantic relationships
  - Obsession vs. Addiction – what are the fundamental differences?
2. Before viewing the film, use some or all of the following questions as a way of encouraging viewers to use their knowledge, personal skills, and assessments of the issues surrounding sex addiction -and addiction at large- as a basis for problem-solving and spreading awareness.
  - Is there a difference between stigma related to sex addiction versus substance addiction?
  - Do you think some people are more naturally vulnerable to addiction than others?
  - What defines addiction? Are all addictions problematic, or can there be a “good” addiction?
  - What is the difference between an addiction and an obsession?
  - Why is addiction, a chronic disease, viewed differently by policy makers than diseases such as asthma or diabetes? How does this contribute to the way the general population views addiction?

## VIEWING PROMPTS

1. Suggest that the group think about the following questions while viewing the film.
  - While you’re watching, pay attention to the scenes of relapse. What causes relapse in people struggling with addiction? What steps could have been taken by the characters or their support network to prevent relapse?
  - While you’re watching, think of the steps the characters take to heal themselves. Which seem to be the most effective? Why?
  - While you’re watching, think about how fictional narrative can be used to spread awareness and open up a dialogue about addiction and its effects on people. How might this film be used for such a purpose?
  - Likewise, what are the risks of looking towards a fictional narrative to start a dialogue? Can or should such a film bear the burden of spreading awareness of a social issue? Does this undermine its artistic and entertainment value?
  - While you’re watching, think about how addiction can impact all aspects of a person’s personal and professional lives.

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2. Before screening the film, distribute index cards to the group. On one side, instruct viewers to write down one of the main themes of the film – “stigma,” “recovery,” or “relationships.” Ask viewers to also write their own definition of the term, and why they chose it.
  3. Instruct viewers to jot notes on the other side of their index card as they watch the film. Notes should pertain to the theme they selected. Ask viewers to be as specific as they can be. Inform the group that their cards will NOT be collected, but that they are for the purpose of helping them remember what they were thinking about while viewing the film in order to foster a more useful dialogue afterwards.

## POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

1. After the film concludes, allow a few minutes for the audience to process.
2. Then, ask the group to divide into small groups of 2-5 people. Groups can be organized in one of the following ways:
  - Create groups in which everyone took notes about the same theme on their index card
  - Create groups consisting of 2 people for each theme
  - Create random groups with people sitting close to one another
3. Allow time for participants to share one question, moment, reaction, or note that they wrote on their index card while they were watching.
4. After viewers have shared their reactions in small groups, reconvene as a large group and allow time for individuals or groups to share their group’s responses. If the groups consist of people with the same theme, you may wish to have each group report back to the larger group and share their findings. Otherwise, use these ideas as prompts for a whole-group dialogue.
5. Mediate a discussion using the following prompt as a point of departure: “as a result of your having seen this film, what, if any, specific actions do you think you will take in the area of addiction? Has this film provided you with any new ideas or insight into how to address addiction and its stigma in our community?”
6. Use one or all of the following quotations as prompts for a whole group discussion:

“We are addicted to our thoughts. We cannot change anything if we cannot change our thinking.” ~ Santosh Kalwar

“It has not been in the pursuit of pleasure that I have periled life and reputation and reason. It has been the desperate attempt to escape from torturing memories, from a sense of insupportable loneliness and a dread of some strange impending doom.” ~ Edgar Allan Poe

“Every form of addiction is bad, no matter whether the narcotic be alcohol, morphine or idealism.” ~ C.G. Jung

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## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

Post-viewing extensions can support the development of an active learning community where people share ideas, expertise, and propagate ongoing inquiry. Use some of the following questions to guide a post-viewing discussion and extend the learning of Thanks for Sharing.

- What role do support groups play for those trying to recover from addiction in the movie? Is this support group effective? Why or why not?
- How is humor used in the movie? Is it appropriate to use humor to tell a story about a serious disease? How does this work or not work?
- How does addiction affect the relationship between Adam and Phoebe? Between Mike and his family?
- How does denial handicap Neil in his healing? What or who helps him to begin his real road to recovery?
- Dede exhibits multiple addictive behaviors. How are they interrelated?
- What steps do the characters take to heal? How effective do you think these steps are in real life?
- How is the stigma of sex addiction different for men and women?
- What do these characters tell us about the experience of overcoming addiction?
- How does the movie's title relate to its themes and content?
- Do you think the movie's depiction of addiction is accurate to real life addiction?
- What role do the addicts' friends and family members play in the movie? Are they able to understand what the addict is experiencing? Does this matter?
- How did this movie affect you?
- How might this movie be used to raise awareness about the realities of sex addiction with the general population?
- How does this movie successfully undermine some of the commonly held beliefs about sex addicts and the addiction community?
- How might someone who is not an addict relate to Mike, Phoebe, Adam, Dede, and Neil? Why is this important?

# RECOURCES

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Center for Healthy Sex  
<http://centerforhealthysex.com>

New York Pathways  
[www.newyorkpathways.com](http://www.newyorkpathways.com)

The Meadows  
[www.themeadows.org](http://www.themeadows.org)

Sex Addicts Anonymous  
<http://saa-recovery.org/>

The Society for the Advancement of Sexual Health  
<http://www.sash.net/>

Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous  
<http://www.slaafws.org/>

The Association for Addiction Professionals  
<http://www.naadac.org/>

World Health Organization  
<http://www.who.int/en/>

National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers  
<https://www.naatp.org/>

California Association of Addiction Recovery Resources  
<http://www.caarr.org/>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
<http://www.samhsa.gov/>

American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry  
<http://www.aaap.org/>

American Society of Addiction Medicine  
<http://www.asam.org/>



## ABOUT BIG PICTURE INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

Big Picture Instructional Design gets all the stakeholders in the educational space talking about - and watching - movies. As former classroom educators with extensive experience in nonprofit work, educational administration, and media literacy, BPID increases the reach and impact of issue-driven films, television projects, and documentaries by creating custom-designed campaigns and collateral materials that always put the film at the forefront.

[www.bigpictureinstructional.com](http://www.bigpictureinstructional.com)