

perfect strangers

one gently used kidney — free to a good home

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions can help facilitate a post-screening discussion with high school and college students, community groups, classes in philosophy and ethics, mindfulness studies, health policy, religious organizations, medical schools, social workers, and patient support groups.

- 1) After watching the film, the first question that is typically raised by the audience is, “Why did Ellie voluntarily donate her kidney to someone she didn’t know?” What is your understanding of her motivation?
- 2) What prevents people from registering to be a deceased donor? Should we become a nation in which one has to actively “opt out” (as is the case in many European countries) rather than requiring an individual to “opt in”, or actively sign up, if they wish to become a donor?
- 3) Kathy’s husband, Jim, admits that he was secretly relieved when he learns he is not medically eligible to donate his kidney to his wife. Can you identify with this sentiment? How would you feel if you were asked to donate a kidney to a family member? What factors would play into your decision?
- 4) Can you imagine becoming an “altruistic” donor? If so, would it matter if the donation is “directed”, allowing you to choose who might get your kidney (Ellie’s original situation) vs. a “non-directed donation” where you would have no control over the recipient? (This was ultimately the case with Ellie’s donation.)
- 5) Ellie’s decision was a very personal one and she did not fully consider the impact on her son, Jacob, until an emotional phone call with him shortly before surgery. Did she have a responsibility to more fully include family members in her decision?

6) After the surgery, Ellie is eager to hear from her recipient and Mike does eventually contact her after receiving her letter. Mike's wife, Woiza, whose kidney went to a young man in Chicago, was disappointed that she never heard from him. The same expectations often exist with deceased donor families and their recipients. Why do you think some donors and recipients choose to form a relationship and others make no contact?

7) There are between 100 and 200 "Good Samaritan" donors every year in the U.S. – why do you think the number is so small? What can we do as a community to improve these statistics?

8) Iran is currently the only country where it is legal for a person to sell his or her kidneys. As result, there is no wait list. The "vendor" is compensated by both the government and the recipient. The Uniform Anatomical Gift Act is a U.S. law that prohibits the buying and selling of human organs for transplant purposes. Should compensation for living donors in the U.S. be considered as a way to increase the supply of organs? What form might this compensation take (e.g. health care for life, educational expenses for donor's children, monetary payment, etc.).

9) Should the law be changed to permit the sale of organs in the United States? What are the potential pragmatic and ethical concerns?

10) In 2021, there were 5,971 living organ donations out of 25,490 kidney transplants. In 2022, 92,220 remain on the waitlist for a kidney. The Living Donor Protection Act would ensure that living organ donors are entitled to Family Medical Leave Act protections so they can take time off from work to recover from surgery without fear of losing their job. Should this bill become law?

11) 60% of living organ donors are women and 40% are men. Does this surprise you? What might account for this difference?

12) In an interview that is not in the film, Ellie states that she believes many people are altruistic and "heroes" in their own way. As an example, she mentions an individual who adopts a "special needs" child – something she admits she could never do. Who are heroes in your own life? What are your own responsibilities to society and where do you reside on the continuum of altruism?



