



DISCUSSION GUIDE

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HOW TO HOST AN IMPACTFUL SCREENING

Thank you for sharing GUEST HOUSE with your community. We hope the film and this guide help start a conversation about second chances, the power of empathy, the cycle of abuse, addiction, and resilience.

Tips for Hosting an Impactful Screening

- Viewing this film can be an intense experience for audiences. Preview the film yourself so that you can speak to the content well before your screening begins.
- Encourage viewers to do what they need to in order to feel safe and supported--before, during and after the screening.
- Provide time for reflection and discussion following the film and ensure that you direct audience members to resources that can help them to continue to process and learn after the screening ends.
- Remember that as a facilitator, your role is to guide the discussion and set expectations that allow for everyone's voices to be heard.
- You are not expected to be an expert in the issues presented so you might want to involve a subject matter expert from your local community in your screening. We also encourage you to reference the key issues section and the resources outlined at the end of the guide
- If you or someone you know is looking for local reentry programs and services, visit the [The National Reentry Resource Center directory](https://www.guesthousedoc.com/) to find a program in your community.

SYNOPSIS

GUEST HOUSE follows three women working to become independent as they re-enter society after being incarcerated for nonviolent drug crimes. Grace, Maddison and Selena meet at Guest House in Northern Virginia, a live-in program that supports women in the crucial weeks after they are released from prison. At Guest House, they learn and practice life skills--work and career, managing money, and, importantly, the emotional support, introspection and self-care they will need to be successful.

GUEST HOUSE is an honest portrait of women experiencing reintegration from the prison system as they work to overcome feelings of shame, isolation, disappointment and otherness so they can be free to pursue the dreams and desires they have for their lives.

The house is full of diverse personalities driven by survival instincts. The women use their humor and intelligence to cope with the aftermath of a justice system that responds to drug addiction with incarceration, rather than treatment, which contributes to recidivism.

Grace, 29, just got out of her third stint in jail for possession of heroin. Grace is smart, driven, and emotionally intelligent, but also hot-headed and confrontational. She is running out of chances to turn her life around, but Grace is determined that, this time, she will make it.

Maddison, 30, grew up in the foster system, was adopted by abusive parents, and eventually turned to heroin to understand why her birth mother left her. Maddison is committed to the cold-turkey method of cutting off her past. She wants to leave the program a professional, successful woman.

Selena, 39, comes to Guest House optimistic, focused and ready to change her life. Her infectious spirit, ever-changing hairdos, and motivation to succeed inspire others, yet in private Selena admits to having low self-esteem. Selena struggles with the balance of maintaining past ties while simultaneously realizing her dreams for a drug-free future.

Following these women over six months, with intimate access to their routines around the clock, Guest House shows complexities and daily ups and downs during a time when these women are figuring out who they can trust, and if they can even trust themselves.

A STATEMENT FROM THE DIRECTORS

Yael and I have both felt drawn to creating films about pressing social issues, especially ones that affect women. *Guest House* came to life as a vérité feature documentary that follows three women, Grace, Maddison, and Selena. Newly released from prison, as they embark on a tumultuous journey to battle their drug addiction, come to terms with their painful pasts, and build a stable life. The odds for recovery are stacked against them, but as we come to understand these women through their most intimate moments and deeply personal interviews, they inspire us to believe in their success and root for their redemption.

As two female filmmakers, we wanted to highlight personal stories that are representative of the millions of women who are currently struggling with opioid addiction. Today, twice as many women as men are being imprisoned for non-violent offenses, due to the opioid crisis. Low-income women are especially vulnerable, since they lack the resources to get help and are often stigmatized and expected to fail.

Throughout the filming process it became clear that the main issues that these women struggle with afflict almost everyone at one point or another: lack of self-confidence, loneliness, shame, hopelessness. Too often in the media addicts are intentionally portrayed as dangerous, something to be feared, when the reality is that they are us. The real fear should be the distance we are creating amongst ourselves, preventing us from seeing the reality of addiction, and solving this crisis.

GUEST HOUSE is a story of despair, triumph, courage, and the power of a nurturing support network. We hope this documentary offers hope to people recovering from addiction and their families and loved ones, and encourages conversation within our communities to start chipping away at this epidemic through understanding and empathy.

Sincerely,

Hannah Dweck & Yael Luttwak

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are your initial reactions to the film? How did it make you feel?
2. Which of the subjects did you connect with? Why?
3. Before watching the film, what was your impression of places like Friends of Guest House? How did the film change how you viewed these places and the people who live there? How does this depiction differ from what you typically see in news coverage and pop-culture?
4. "Someone will open a door for you if they see you trying. " These encouraging words are the introduction to the film. Can you recall a time when someone opened a door for you? Perhaps they gave you a chance or some extra help?
5. Grace recalls that it was almost a given "she would go to college and have a great job." But similar to so many others, she was prescribed pain killers and not warned about how addictive they are. There is such stigma associated with addiction and incarceration. How does Grace story - and the other stories of the women in Guest House - chip away at these preconceived notions?
6. Did this film change your view of how and why people are incarcerated?
7. Selena says "Sometimes what you see is not always what you get" in reference to not always feeling inside the way she projects outwardly. Think back to a time when you acted the same way. Share your experience.
8. What gives Selena the motivation to sometimes act stronger than she feels? Discuss the relationship between our feelings and actions. How can we act strong when feeling afraid?
9. The women in the film have so much to overcome and their resilience is so inspiring. Discuss something you have overcome. It can be as small or as large as you'd like.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

10. Maddison tells a story of when she was out jogging and then this blonde lady was coming the opposite way and smiled at her like “she wasn’t a criminal or a drug addict —because she couldn’t tell.” The women in the film speak frequently about feeling like they were not good enough or don’t belong. Do you recall a time when you didn’t have confidence in yourself? This is something that plagues a lot of us regardless of background. How can we help each other feel like we’re enough?
11. In Virginia, when mothers are released from prison, they receive a bill for childcare the state was providing while they were incarcerated. This is an example of the system trying to keep certain people down and not trying to help get people back on their feet. Talk about social safety nets that work and ways we can better help women transitioning out of incarceration.
12. GUEST HOUSE shows what love, acceptance, non-judgement and accountability can do. What are other adjectives to describe the women of Guest House and their values?
13. In the genogram mapping activity, we learn about Maddison and Selina’s family history and the patterns that emerged. This activity was so helpful in understanding some of their own struggles. Family history and patterns can also lead to and predict positive outcomes. Think about your family - how has your family impacted your trajectory? Do you see any toxic patterns in your own life? Who supports you in times of need?
14. The end of the film urges us to do better for people, that all lives have equal value and we as a community have to help those that most need it. What are some ways we can help our community and our most vulnerable neighbors?
15. When Grace is at DC Central Kitchen, she is motivated by others looking up to her. What motivates you at work, at home, in school etc?
16. Maddison speaks about how the sky looks so big after her release. Discuss a time when you weren’t able to be outside—perhaps struggling with an illness, recovering, while being incarcerated—what did you appreciate more afterwards?

RESOURCES & TAKE ACTION

THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC

- Every day, more than 118 people in the United States die from overdosing on opioids.
- About 80% of people who use heroin first misused prescription opioids.
- Opioid overdoses increased 30 percent from July 2016 through September 2017 in 52 areas in 45 states.
- In 2017, an estimated 1.7 million people in the United States suffered from substance use disorders related to prescription opioid pain relievers.
- Opioid overdoses in large cities increase by 54 percent in 16 states.

Source: [National Institute on Drug Abuse, February 2020](#)

WOMEN & PRISONS

- Between 1980 and 2017, the number of incarcerated women increased by more than 750%, rising from a total of 26,378 in 1980 to 225,060 in 2017
Source: [The Sentencing Project](#)
- Women in state prisons are more likely than men to be incarcerated for a drug or property offense. 25% of women in prison have been convicted of a drug offense, compared to 14% of men in prison.
Source: [The Sentencing Project](#)
- Formally incarcerated people are unemployed at a rate of over 27% — higher than the total U.S. unemployment rate during any historical period, including the Great Depression. Source: [Prison Policy Initiative](#)
- Between 1999 and 2015, the rate of deaths from prescription opioid overdoses increased 471 percent among women, compared to an increase of 218 percent among men, and heroin deaths among women increased at more than twice the rate than among men

Source: [Office of Women's Health](#)

RESOURCES & TAKE ACTION

WOMEN & OPIOID ADDICTION

- There has been a startling increase in the rates of synthetic opioid-related deaths; these deaths increased 850 percent in women between 1999 and 2015. At the same time, the differences between how opioid misuse and use disorder impact women and men are often not well understood. Even in areas where differences between the sexes are apparent, such as women appearing to progress more quickly to addiction than men, very little is understood about why those differences occur.
- Between 1999 and 2015, the rate of deaths from prescription opioid overdoses increased 471 percent among women, compared to an increase of 218 percent among men, and heroin deaths among women increased at more than twice the rate than among men.
Source: [Office of Women's Health](#)
- In 2016, 7,109 women and 9,978 men died from prescription opioid overdose (a total of 17,087)* which is about 19 women per day compared to about 27 men dying from overdosing on prescription opioids. However, from 1999 to 2016, deaths from prescription opioid overdoses increased more rapidly for women (596 percent or sevenfold) than for men (312 percent or fourfold). Women between the ages of 45 and 54 are more likely than women of other age groups to die from a prescription opioid overdose.
Source: [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#)

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THESE ISSUES YOU CAN VISIT:

- [Prison Policy Initiative - Fact Sheet](#)
- [The Sentencing Project](#)
- [The Drug Policy Alliance](#)

If you or someone you know is looking for local reentry programs and services, [visit the The National Reentry Resource Center directory](#) to find a program in your community.

RESOURCES & TAKE ACTION

TO VOLUNTEER OR DONATE to ORGANIZATIONS FEATURED IN THE FILM, VISIT:

I. [Friends of Guest House](#)

II. [DC Central Kitchen](#)

There are reentry and job training programs in every state. Consider searching for a program in your area.