

TOGETHER

Family Recovery



Directed by: Jess Speight, Kathy Wrenn,
Shelly Young and Pam Lanhart

Rain Dance Productions

“INSPIRING *hopeful* evocative”



Together Intro





The Power of Storytelling: Using Documentary Film as a Tool for Family Recovery Education

- Larkin Maxwell Francis, PhD, MSW, VCU School of Social Work
- Sarah McFarland, R-CPRS, FSP, Sarah McFarland Consulting
- Kathy Wrenn, Executive Producer & Co-Director, *Together*
- Ya-Li Yang, Ph.D. Candidate, MSW, VCU School of Social Work
- Shelly Young, Co-Director & Co-Producer, *Together*



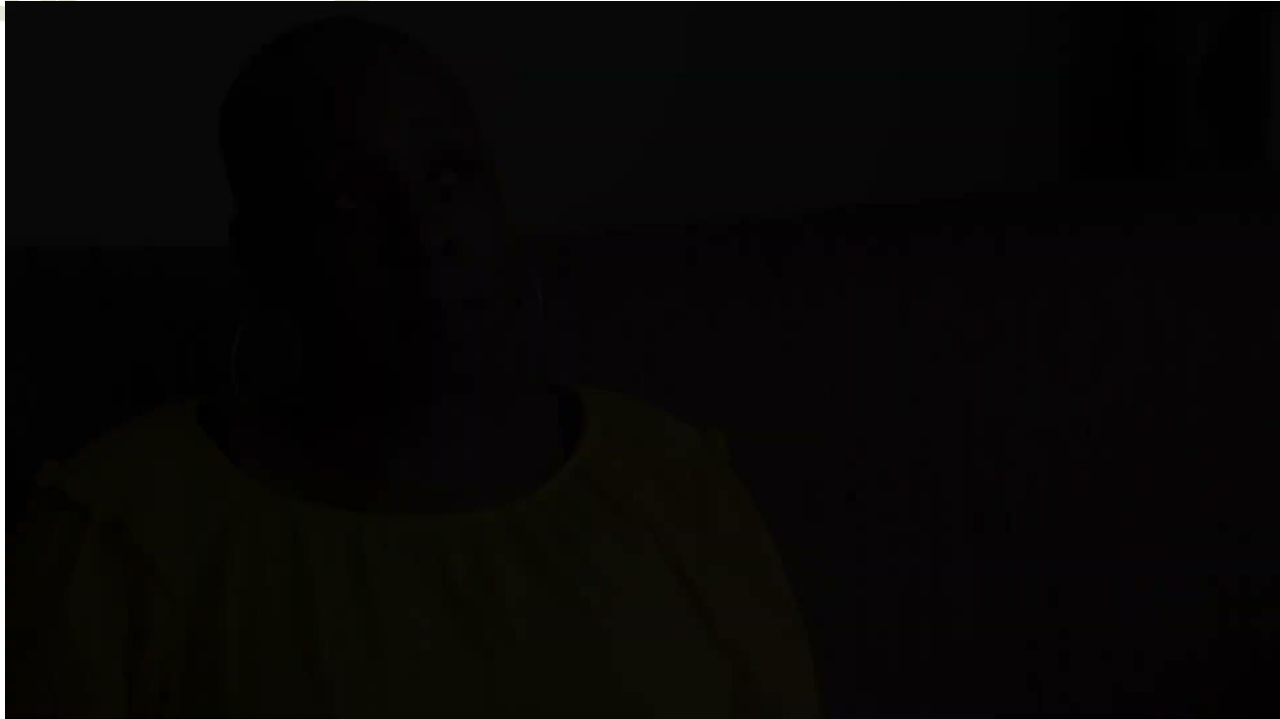
*“[This film] has shown me the possibilities.
So much of what we see is the negative.”*

- **Storytelling as a Catalyst:** Utilizing the power of documentary film to shift the narrative from traditional "detachment" to active, informed family connection.
- **The Power of Connection:** Highlighting lived experiences and expert insights to prove that strong family support doubles the likelihood of lasting recovery.
- **The "Double Dividend" Effect:** Leveraging evidence-based narrative arcs to reduce cognitive load, educate families, and spark global cultural change.

Quotes from viewers about the impact of the film are highlighted in green boxes like this throughout the slides



Barriers to Recovery

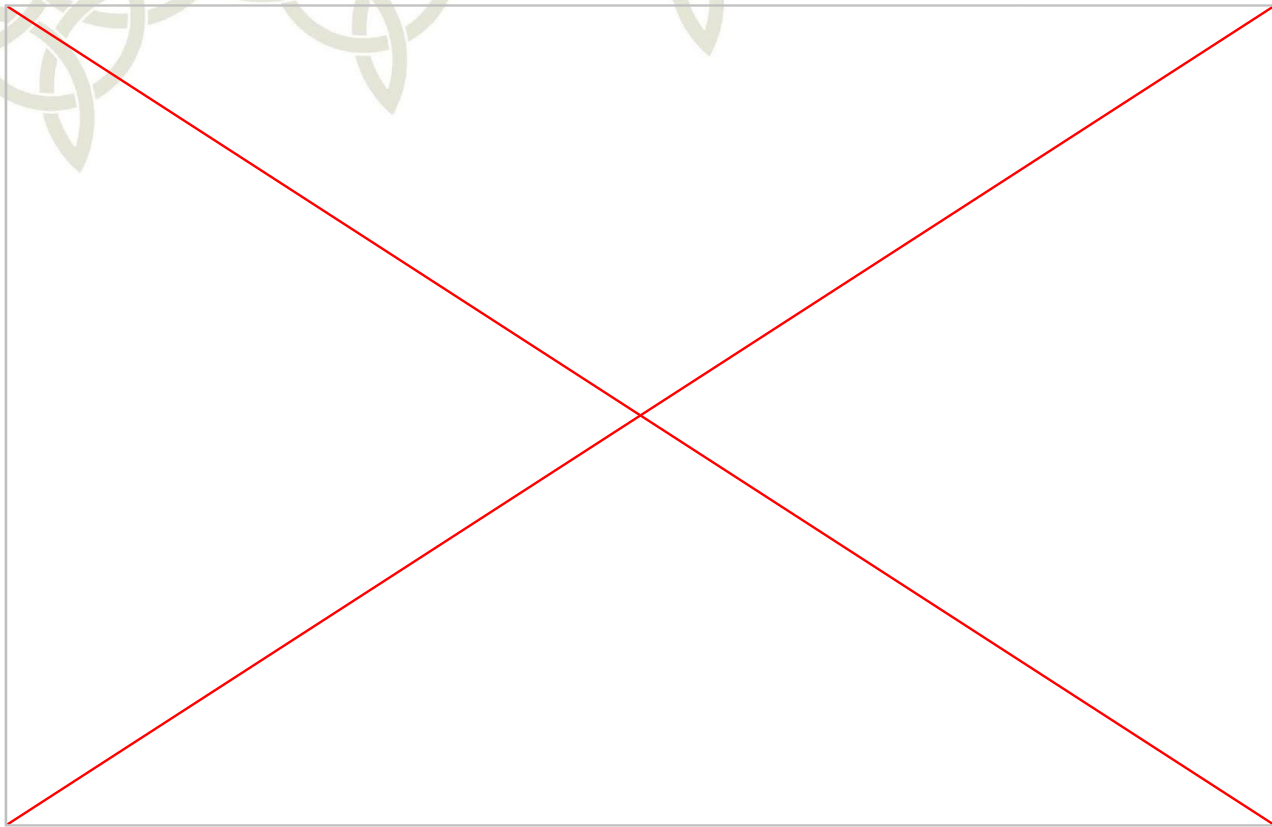


- **Shattering the Silence:** Addressing the silent shame, isolation, and spiritual exhaustion that prevents families from seeking the support they desperately need.
- **From Powerlessness to Empowerment:** Moving beyond the belief that caregivers are helpless by utilizing education to shift the focus toward personal growth and healthy family practices.
- **Healing Through Community:** Building safe, judgment-free spaces that facilitate collective learning and connection, proving that recovery is a family and community journey.

“My biggest take away was recognizing ‘you don't know, what you don't know.’ This makes me want to learn more and educate myself so that I can better support my loved one, myself, and my future family and the inevitable struggles that will be faced.”



Family Matters



“I’ve been able to put more faith in trying compassion over tough love.”

- **The Ecosystem Shift:** Moving beyond the "individual struggle" to address how addiction disrupts the entire family’s physical, emotional, and financial well-being.
- **Connection Over Confrontation:** Replacing the outdated "tough love" narrative with evidence-based models (like CRAFT and BALM) that leverage empathy and relationship bonds to drive change.
- **Validating Impact:** Partnering with the VCU School of Social Work to bring academic rigor and research data to our documentary storytelling, tracking exactly how this film is changing minds and healing families.

“Love...this film comes from the heart, so it is no surprise that when talking about family recovery the theme of loving your loved one where they are is a core principle.”

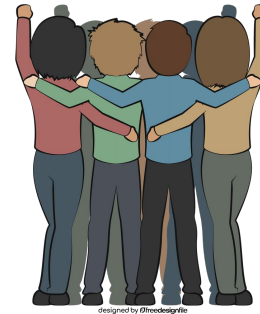


Partnership with the VCU School of Social Work research team

Assess the film's impact on family members'



Intentions to **take action** to learn more about family recovery

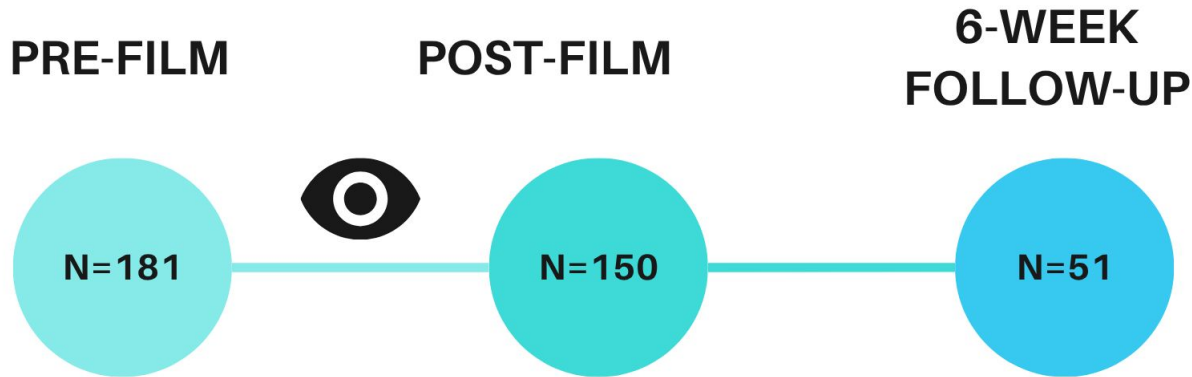


Intentions to **engage** with the family recovery community



About the Study

- Surveys with closed-ended and open-ended questions at three time points
- Quantitative & qualitative





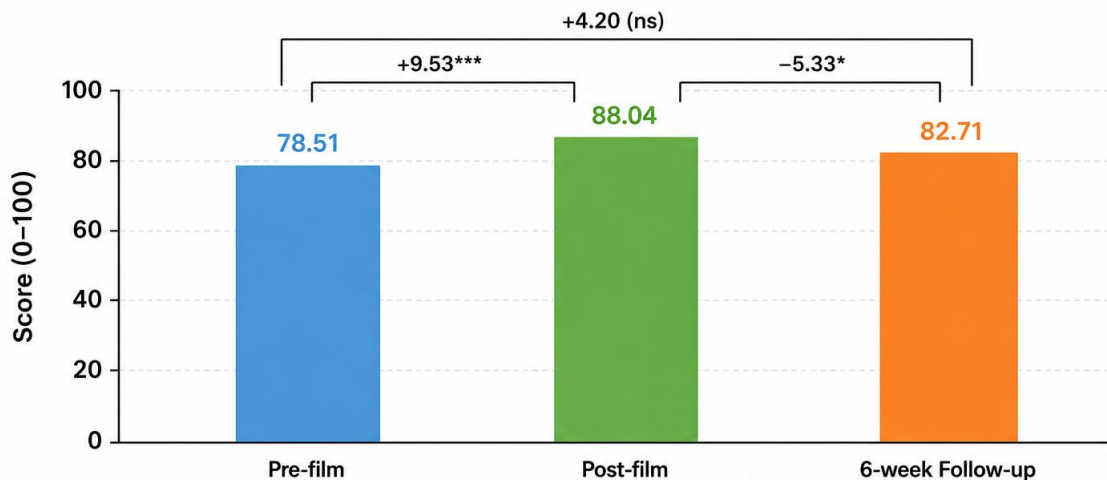
Awareness & Knowledge



Families recognized the importance of involving family members to supporting their loved ones' recovery process

Perceived Importance of Family to Their Loved Ones (0–100)

Higher scores indicate greater perceived importance.



Pairwise Comparisons	t (50)	p	Cohen's d
Pre- vs Post-film	t(50) = -3.80	p < .001	-0.533
Post-film vs. 6-wk Follow-up	t(50) = 2.19	p = .033	0.307
Pre- vs. 6-week Follow-up	t(50) = -1.27	p = .209	-0.178

* p < .05 *** p < .001 (ns) not statistically significant

“Family is a vital part of recovery and even one person can make a difference”

Attitudes

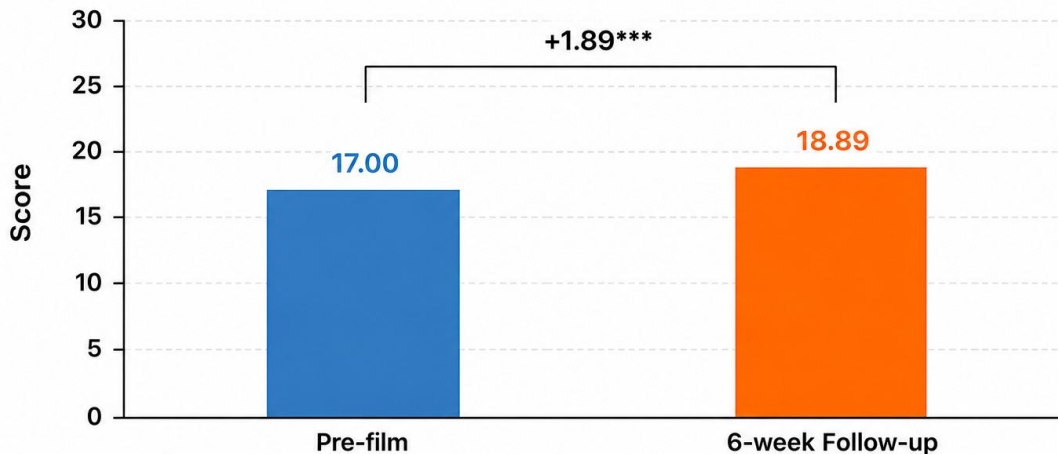


Family Resilience

Higher scores indicate greater family resilience.

Families reported increased abilities to cope and overcome challenges

“Gaining hope helps me to be calmer and more logical with him.”



Comparison	t (48)	p	Cohen's d
Pre-film vs. 6-week Follow-up	t(48) = -4.84	< .001***	-0.691

*** p < .001

Note. Figure generated using ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2026).



Family Closeness & Communication

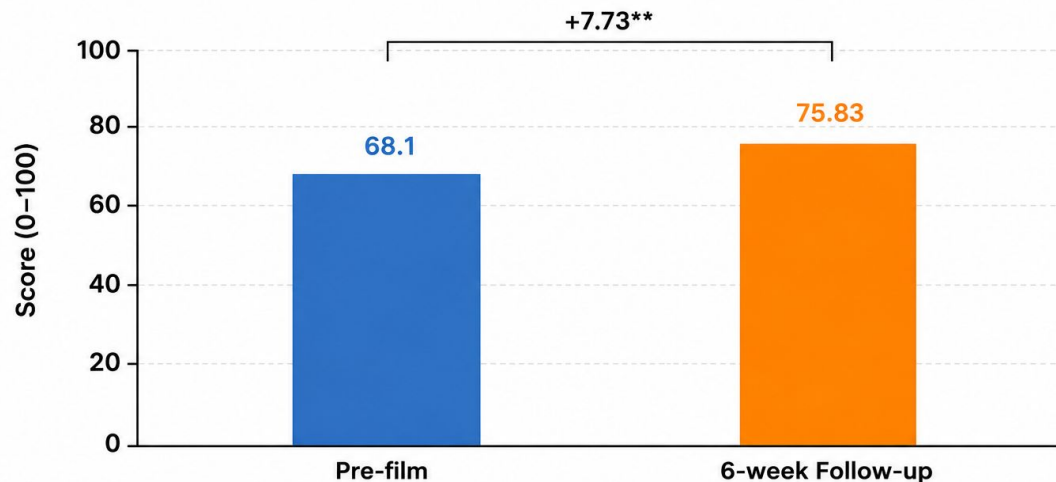


*“We share an openness & awareness of support and understanding”
(since viewing the film)”*

“I have been more intentional about loving my sister and seen results in our communication improving.”

Perceived Closeness

Higher scores indicate greater perceived closeness.



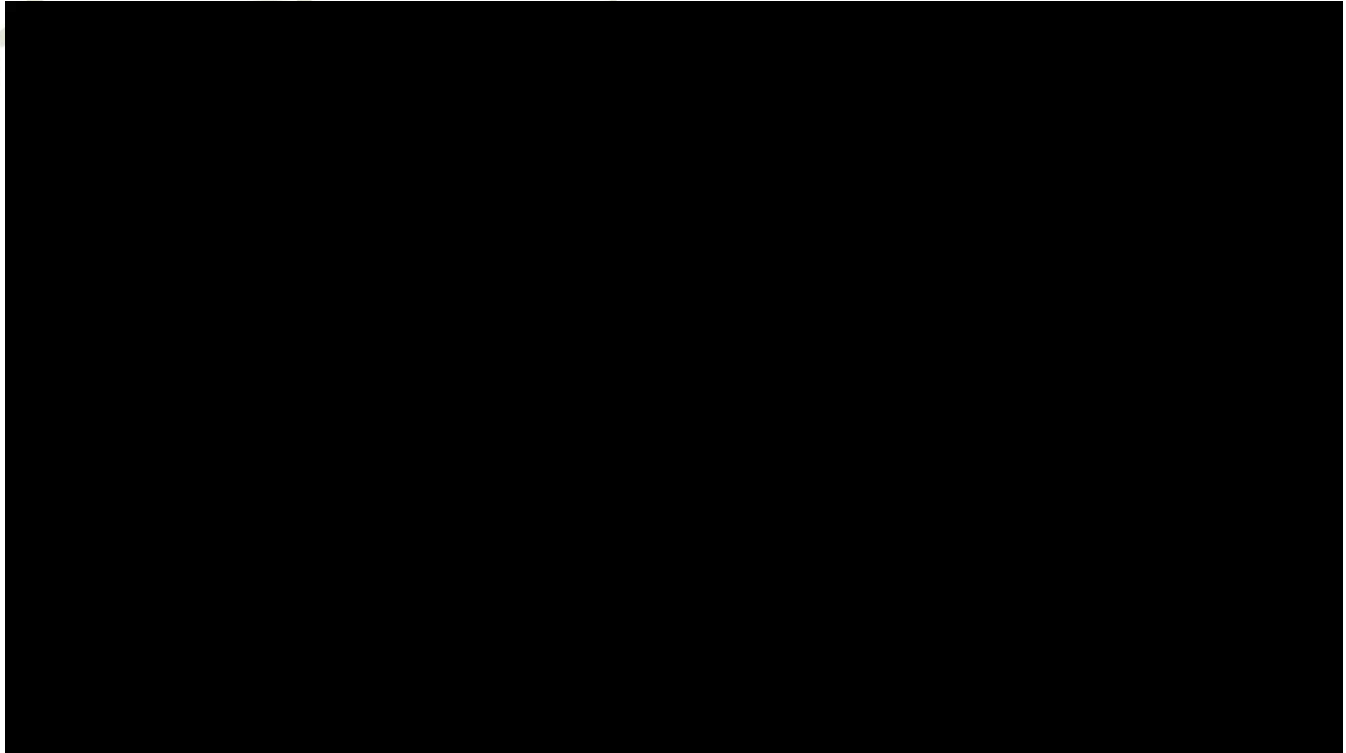
Comparison	t (47)	p	Cohen's d
Pre-film vs. 6-week Follow-up	t(47) = -2.77	.008**	-0.399

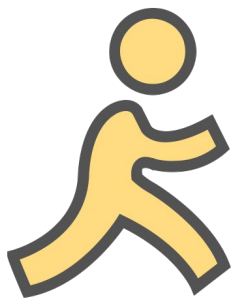
** p < .01

Note. Figure generated using ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2026).



Audience Impact



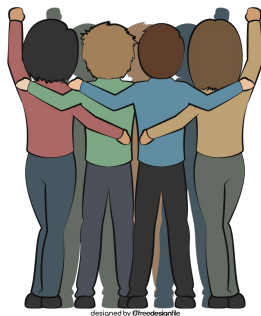


Taking action to learn more & engage with the family recovery community

“I learned that I need to learn more, get support, and check in with a professional on/ about progress and challenges”

“I want to learn more.”

“[This film] made me push ahead and finally attend a group and realize that as a support person need help too”



Impacts on relationships & communication

*“I find myself really appreciating my time spent with them and **genuinely listening to them** more than in the past. **I now see more of them as a beautiful person rather than their affliction.**”*

“We are actually communicating”

“I have softened towards her.”

*“**[This film] has made me realize that I need to set more boundaries for my mental health so that I can be the parent I want to be.**”*



Bonus Finding! People Said That Watching the Film Helped Them Realize the Importance of Self-Care & Boundaries

*“...that taking care of yourself allows you to care for others better...
Love is medicine.”*

*“...that **supporting ourselves is critical.**”*

*“...that self care and boundaries are important in the **modern form of family recovery.**”*

*“...the importance of **healing for the entire family unit.**
Self-care and boundary setting are important for both the family members
and for the individual's recovery.”*



*“We
are not
alone”*



UNDERSTANDING

LESSON 2

Addiction as a Brain Disease



CHECK-IN: What came up for you since watching the film and our first discussion? Are you doing anything differently since watching the film?

DIGGING DEEPER

After watching the film and opening with brief reflections, the discussion moves to specific themes and moments from Together Family Recovery. Each set of questions is paired with clip or screenshots from the film to help guide conversations. These prompts are designed to center what you've seen on the larger issues families face, encouraging you to reflect more deeply, share perspectives, and explore ideas for change.



"Families are often the first ones who can identify the signs and symptoms in their loved ones. With that education, would allow them to, with compassion and understanding, address what they are seeing."

—THE REV. JIM BROWN

21:40 EDUCATION

In this clip, The Rev. Jim Brown emphasizes that one of the first steps in family recovery is **education**. Learning about substance use, mental health, genetics, environment and trauma helps families better understand what their loved one is experiencing and what they themselves are going through. Research shows that when families get help, their loved one is more likely to attain and sustain recovery.



"When I think of traditional recovery, it wasn't giving me the education about the disease that I needed and wanted. Things like self-care, positive reinforcement, learning how to communicate differently, learning how to regulate my emotions... I wanted to fill my toolbox with all those things."

—ASHLEY

1:10:56 In the scene in Karly & Robert's garden, Robert likens recovery to planting seeds and nurturing growth. Karly shares, "I didn't know how to garden. I had to learn how to take care of my plants, and the same thing with Family Recovery. We don't know what we don't know. When we get educated we are better prepared for handling those different situations."

What stands out to you when hearing Karly's perspective about education being one of the first steps for families?

How can becoming educated about substance use, mental health, and trauma help with early intervention and recovery for the whole family system?

What insights might family education bring for you personally? What benefits could it bring for your loved one?

What needs were planned for you while watching the film?

FUN FACT

After forests burn, Beeweed (*Chamaenerion angustifolium*) is among the first to rise. This tall, showy wildflower with delicate magenta blooms stretches toward the light, symbolizing resilience and renewal. In many ways, recovery follows a similar rhythm — growth emerging gently from even the most difficult seasons.



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THE WORK

LESSON 6 Values and Intention



Heather shares that one of her most important values is honesty. When Ashley was struggling, Heather practiced honesty even when it was hard and she feared it might create distance between them. Ashley later reflected that while she sometimes experienced Heather's honesty as painful at the time, it ultimately had a positive impact on her recovery. This shows how practicing honesty in a loving, non-judgmental, and factual way can build trust and connection over time.



What stood out about Heather and Ashley's story of honesty in their relationship?

How can you practice honesty with your loved one about your feelings and experiences in a way that is compassionate and non-judgmental?

What is one small action you can take to start being more aligned with your values?

What values of your own do you feel have been compromised because of substance use in your family system?

What is one step you could take to choose honesty that builds connection, rather than disconnection?



VALUES insight

When families become clear about what matters most, decisions begin to feel less reactive and more intentional. Alignment doesn't happen all at once. It happens choice by choice.

KEY MESSAGES

- Values guide our actions and recovery-oriented choices.
- Self-reflection helps us see how we are showing up in relationships with the intention of aligning with our values.

PRACTICE

As we continue "The Work" together, approach each lesson mindful of your values. You will be prompted to note which of your values each lesson is rooted in.

What 3 values do you plan to connect to the work?	What will support your practice of connecting with those values?
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

CLOSING PROMPT

"One thing I understand differently now is..."

Further Exploration and Additional Resources:



TITLE FAMILIES IN THE FILM



ASHLEY EGELAND AND
HEATHER MARTIN



KATHY, ROBERT, TUCKER AND
BELLA WRENN



SARAH MCFARLAND

EXPERTS IN THE FILM



THE REV. JAN BROWN,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
SPIRITWORKS



DR. KEVIN MCCAULEY,
CO-FOUNDER OF THE
INSTITUTE FOR ADDICTION
STUDY, DIRECTOR OF
PLEASURE UNWOVEN &
MEMO TO SELF



DR. DANIELLE DICK,
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Action Steps

1. **Join Us for a Round Table Discussion @ 3:30pm**
Academic Learning Commons - VCU - 1100

2. **Visit our website to learn more**
www.togetherfamilyrecovery.com

3. **Inquire about Screening the film by**
scanning the QR code

