

Saving Jackie: A Documentary by S.A. Burks

A Screening Guide for Teachers, Case Workers, and Foster Parents

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“This powerful film captures the seductiveness of doing drugs, a lure so irresistible that basic instincts to nurture and protect one’s children are discarded. The film also illustrates that life is precious even when it is imperfect.”

-Judith Harmony, Ph.D, Professor, College of Medicine, University of Cincinnati, Retired

About the Film

“We were filled with that drug, but little did I know that drug was going to take over my entire life and snuffme out as an individual.”

-Jackie Burks

Saving Jackie is an intimate portrait of a middle-class family destroyed by the abusive nature of drug addiction. Jackie, single mother to Selena and Lorita, recovers from a 20-year crack cocaine addiction as her daughters transition into adulthood. Through the course of the film she begins to acknowledge and accept responsibility for the deterioration of her relationships with her two daughters, Selena and Lorita.

Set in the Midwest, Jackie’s daughters were forced to live in a drug-ravaged house in fear of what each day might bring, and hoped that their love for their mother would help her turn away from crack-cocaine and abusive men. With their father Henry out of their lives, Selena and Lorita were subjected to poor living standards in a house without food, electricity or running water. The eldest of two daughters, Selena, became Lorita’s surrogate mother at the age of ten. After failed attempts of selling crack to raise money for her sister and herself, Selena revolted against her mother. As a result, Selena and her sister were placed in foster care, thus becoming increasingly disconnected from their mother, Jackie.

Saving Jackie examines the long-term side effects of abusive behaviors on family relationships. Selena, documents her and Lorita’s raw reconciliation process with their mother as it unfolds.

Possible Uses and Topics Covered in the Film

“Ms. Burks’ success as a student and filmmaker will inspire both teens and the foster parents who care for them. The film would provide an excellent focal point for a discussion with students, teachers, and caregivers.”

-Joanne Rentschler, Public Librarian & Collection Development Manager, Campbell County Public Library

This film can be used as an educational tool as well as a stimulus for a group/family therapy experience facilitated by a knowledgeable leader. Addiction studies, social work, psychology, urban studies, and sociology classes will find *Saving Jackie* to be an excellent addition to the classroom. Other settings include: teen programs, foster parent or case worker trainings, substance recovery group meetings, workshops for foster parents, case workers, counselors, youth leaders, and other adults who care about neglected children and foster children.

The film touches on the following topics:

- Drug Addiction and the effects on the family

- Foster care and things foster parents need to be aware of
- Recovering addicts and the formation of relationships with loved ones (co-dependency)
- Relationship building for broken families
- Sensitivity training for case workers

Watching the Film

“I would recommend this film to all teens who are holding their feelings in and who have problems with their own mothers. It can make them talk to their mother more, speak out and tell how they feel, and express their feelings and talk about what is on their mind.”

- Anonymous, teen female

This film examines the positive and negative experiences of children of addicts who enter the foster care system. An excellent tool for generating discussion, *Saving Jackie* will provide insight into the struggles of recovering addicts, children of addicts, case workers, foster parents, PTO/PTA, and churches. Due to the intense emotional content of the film, teachers and facilitators are encouraged to watch the film prior to leading a group discussion and answer the following questions:

- What did you find difficult to watch?
- What piqued your interest?
- What did you learn from the film?
- How was your childhood similar/ different to the girls in the film?

Please note: There are two different lengths of the film (director’s cut is 35 minutes long and the festival cut is 27 minutes long). Choose the version of the film that is most suitable for your particular time constraints. The film should be watched in its entirety (regardless of the version) but can be watched in 2 parts. Watching and discussing the film will take approximately 2 hours.

Creating a Safe Space for Discussions

Since *Saving Jackie* is an emotionally-intense film it is important for participants to jointly agree to some basic guidelines before reviewing the film. These guidelines can be created as a group by asking the following question: What do you need in order to feel safe to share your thoughts and express your emotions?

Facilitators may want to provide the group with the following specific guidelines:

- No talking or using a cell phone during the movie.
- Do not speak at the same time as someone else.
- If your group has difficulty allowing one person at a time to speak, introduce a ‘talking stick’ or ‘talking ball’ where only the person holding the object has the floor and the right to speak or pass the object to someone else.
- No put downs or name calling.
- Respect each person’s need to express his/her self.
- Reinforce that this is a safe place to share one’s own experiences.
- No one is forced to share anything they do not want to.

- At any time, anyone in the group can ask what the group needs to do to have a safe discussion and additions will be made to the list of guidelines.

Facilitators should be aware of individuals who may be more vulnerable to the content of the film and those whose emotions may be triggered by the film. Facilitators may want to prepare follow-up options (such as list of counselors, clergy, etc.).

Using the Guide

Questions in this guide can be used as starting points with individuals or groups. The questions are arranged by four themes: general, addiction, foster care, and resilience.

General Questions

- What is your initial response to the film?
- How does the film affect you emotionally?
- Which person/ people in the film can you relate to most? Why?
- After watching the film, what questions do you have?
- Why do you think the filmmaker made this film?
- Since the filmmaker is so close to the topic, in what ways does this strengthen or weaken the film?

Addiction

- In what specific ways does Jackie's addiction affect her daughters?
- How does Jackie understand the impact her addiction has had on her daughters?
- What are the causes of Jackie's addiction?
- What different roles did each of the daughters play in the family to cope?
- How can people intervene or help families like the one in this film?
- How might the "story" be different if Jackie had sons instead of daughters?

Foster Care

- How did Selena and Lorita's life change after entering the foster care system?
- Describe the role the foster care mother played in the life of Selena and Lorita.
- What might a foster care social worker need to consider when placing children like Selena and Lorita?
- Foster care played a positive role in this family but this is not always the case. How can we ensure more positive experiences like the one featured in this film?
- How might Selena and Lorita's experience been different if they were placed in a foster family of a different race or culture?
- Describe how the girls' identity was shaped by their experiences in foster care.
- How might social workers and the foster family help to maintain a connection with the girls' mother and father?

Resiliency

- What coping methods did Selena and Lorita use to deal with their mother's addiction?
- What factors might increase resilience among children like Selena and Lorita?

* See Lorita’s audio interview for more information on resiliency.

Additional Resources

“This movie would help people in a rehab place. They would realize that this could happen to their kids and might encourage them to talk with their kids so they don’t enter into a life of drugs.”

-Anonymous, teen female

Al-anon/ Alateen

<http://www.al-anon.alateen.org/english.html>

Provides support for those affected by a family member’s addiction.

Alcoholics Anonymous

<http://www.aa.org/?Media=PlayFlash>

This website has information on AA as well as free audio and video clips.

Foster Club

<http://www.fosterclub.com/>

A website designed for kids currently in foster care. This site also includes Foster Club for Adults

which provides information and resources for adults involved in the foster care system.

Nar-Anon

http://www.nar-anon.org/Nar-Anon/Nar-Anon_Home.html

A group that supports those who are affected by someone’s addiction.

Narcotics Anonymous

<http://www.na.org/>

Provides information on recovery.

National Institute on Drug Abuse

<http://drugabuse.gov/nidahome.html>

Provides up-to-date information on drug abuse and addiction.

Saving Jackie

<http://www.savingjackie.org/>

Additional information, clips, and resources are available on this site.

The Recovery Place

<http://www.therecoveryplace.net>

The focus of this website is for families that have been affected by addiction.

About the Authors

Meera Rastogi is an assistant professor of Psychology at the University of Cincinnati Clermont College. Previously she was an associate professor of psychology at Edgewood College in Madison, Wisconsin where she received the 2006 Faculty Advisor of the Year Award. She earned her Ph.D. from The Ohio State University's Counseling Psychology Program in 2001. Her specialties include psychopathology, multicultural psychology, and emerging adulthood issues.

Selena A. Burks-Rentschler is a filmmaker with a passion for storytelling and confronting the complex issues facing urban America. Selena earned her BFA from Wright State University in 2003. With a fellowship grant from the Wexner Center for the Arts at The Ohio State University, she completed the documentary short *Saving Jackie*, the profound story of her mother's battle with drug addiction. The film premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2005 and was an Official Selection at the Palm Springs International Film Festival as well as countless other film festivals nationwide. Selena was awarded an Ohio Arts Council Fellowship Grant for her work with *Saving Jackie* the same year.

Following the completion of *Saving Jackie*, Selena formed **S.A. Burks Productions** and has since presented her film to a variety of drug outreach programs, state and county child service organizations, and high schools and universities.