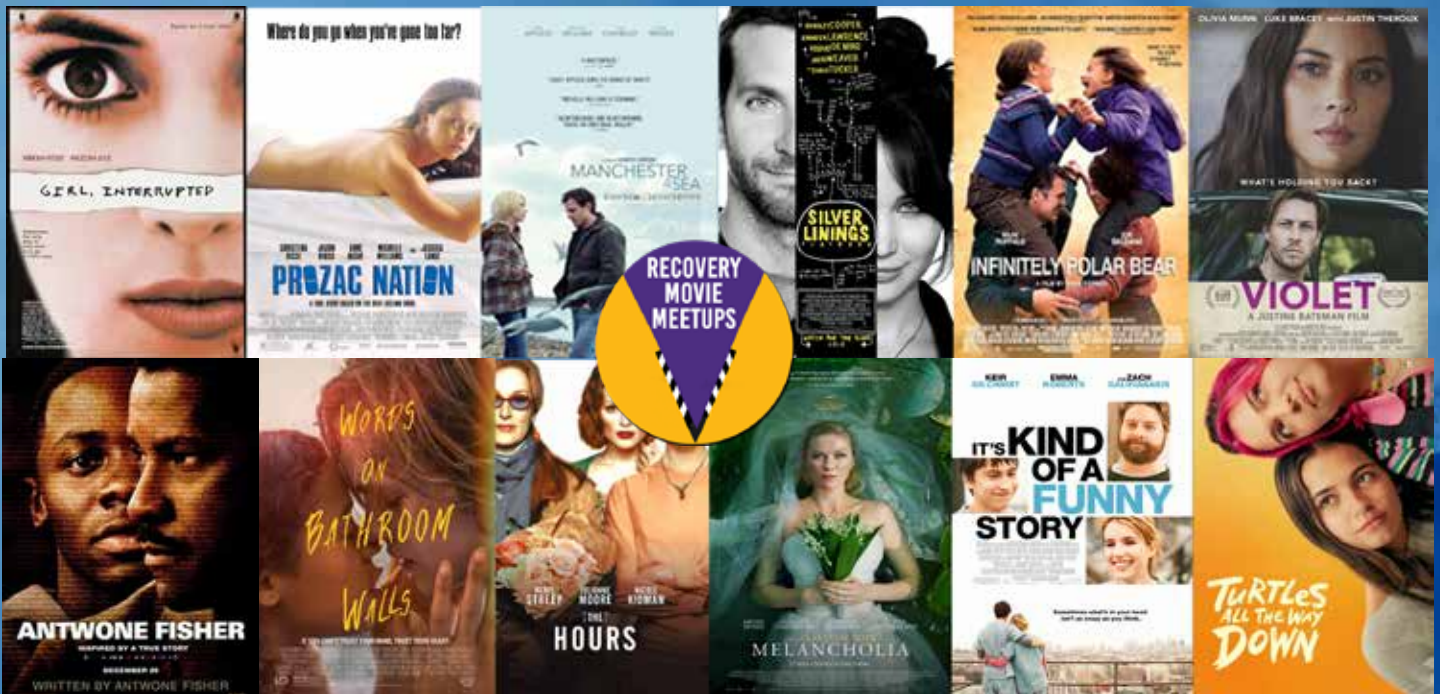


RECOVERY MOVIE MEET-UPS™



WORKBOOK MENTAL HEALTH EDITION

*Complete screening and discussion guide to use
Hollywood movies about mental health in mutual
support meetings or individual counseling sessions*

RECOVERY MOVIE MEET-UPS™

RECOVERY MOVIE MEET-UPS are facilitator or peer-led mutual support meetings where individuals come together to watch carefully-curated Hollywood movies that focus on themes of mental health related to anxiety, depression, OCD, bipolar disorder, BPD, etc.

The meetings create a dynamic and highly interactive environment for participants to connect, share their experiences, and discuss the movie's themes in relation to their own mental health recovery journeys - offering inspiration, hope, and a sense of community.

Meet-Ups include a discussion session after the movie guided by evocative questionnaires that encourage open dialogue and powerful self-analysis. The goal is to foster connection, reduce feelings of isolation, and reinforce the principles of recovery through shared experiences and storytelling.

Our easy-to-implement Program includes 24 curated movie exercises which are...

- Proven to generate increased participant engagement & interaction, and foster deep self-reevaluation
- Clinically-validated, peer reviewed and evidence-based
- Totally customizable and easy to integrate into your current schedule with minimal staff training (included at no cost)
- Great for Residential IP / PHP / IOP
- Billable to insurance
- Available in Teen & Young Adult Version



Ashley
Everything for Recovery


caron



DIAMOND
HOUSE

cumberland  heights

Cedars 

 **BHG**
behavioral health group SM



The Sylvia Brafman
MENTAL HEALTH CENTER



PINNACLE
TREATMENT CENTERS



ZIA RECOVERY CENTER



LEGACY
HEALING CENTER



CHRYSALIS HOUSE INC.
Empowering Women Through Recovery

VARP
INC.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Recovery Movie Meetups Program is dedicated to upholding the highest standards of review and oversight by licensed therapists, clinicians, researchers, and other leaders in the addiction and recovery field. We are proud to have the following individuals on our Advisory Committee:

John De Miranda, Ed.M

Former Executive Director, National Association for Addiction Professionals (NAADAC)
President & CEO, Peninsula Health Concepts

Carlo DiClemente, PhD, ABPP

Emeritus Professor of Psychology - UMBC
Creator of the Transtheoretical Model of Change (TMM)

Dr. Joe Gerstein, MD, FACP

Harvard Medical School Faculty (Retired)
Co-Founder of SMART Recovery USA

A. Tom Horvath, PhD, ABPP

President, Practical Recovery
Co-Founder and Former President of SMART Recovery USA

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Dr. Brandi Jordan, Ph.D., LMFT, LAADC, ICAADC

Chief Operating Officer
Pinnacle Health Group Network

John F. Kelly, PhD, ABPP

Elizabeth R. Spallin Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School
Director, MGH Recovery Research Institute
Associate Director, MGH Center for Addiction Medicine

Dr. Judith Landau, MD, DPM, LMFT, CFLE, CIP, CAI, CRS

Founder & President, Linking Human Systems, LLC, LINC Foundation, ARISE Network
Co-Founder of the International Recovery Institute

Molly Magill, PhD

Associate Professor, Department of Behavioral & Social Sciences
Director of Biostatistics
Brown University School of Public Health



“A Recovery Movie Meet-Up Mental Health session makes running groups more effective by preparing participants for deeper engagement. The discussion questions are the really tough ones a mental health professional would typically ask, but because they’re tied to a movie, many participants may find them much easier to answer in group.”

A. Tom Horvath, PhD, ABPP
Former President, American Psychological Association
Fellow, San Diego Psychological Assoc., ABCT, APA
Co-Founder, SMART Recovery

“Having conducted mental health groups for 40+ years, I have experienced my fair share of sterile stories and boring tales. But never when I used movies. They engage and energize the patients, getting even the typically reticent to participate meaningfully in group.”

John C. Norcross, Ph.D., ABPP
Renowned clinical psychologist, professor, and author
of 24 books about psychotherapy, behavior change, and
evidence-based treatments





"I am thrilled with the fun, innovative, and effective Recovery Movie Meet-Ups Program. It immediately increases client engagement, which ultimately improves outcomes."

J. Gregory Hobelmann, M.D., M.P.H.
Co-CEO, President
ASHLEY ADDICTION TREATMENT



"I love this idea and I'm happy to support it."

John F. Kelly, PhD, ABPP
Elizabeth R. Spallin Professor of Psychiatry
Harvard Medical School



"Movies have always been one of my passions, and I'm delighted to join the RECOVERY MOVIE MEET-UPS Advisory Committee because I truly believe there is an important place for movies as inspiration for recovery."

Dr. Judith Landau, MD, DPM, LMFT, CFLE
Founder, International Recovery Institute



"Recovery Movie Meetups provides an innovative way to engage and challenge patients' thinking and promote the self exploration and reevaluation needed for change."

Carlo DiClemente, PhD, ABPP
Emeritus Professor of Psychology -UMBC
Creator of the Transtheoretical Model of Change (TMM)



CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS



"I come from a family with a history of addiction and I'm glad that my movie THE GOOD HOUSE is included in this Program and is a source of encouragement and support for everyone working hard to recover successfully."

Sigourney Weaver
Award Winning Actress - AVATAR I & II, ALIEN I & II



"I think movies can definitely help people reflect on these tough issues. What a great idea."

Ben Affleck
Oscar-Winning Producer/Director/Writer - ARGO, THE WAY BACK



"I'm truly honored to be part of the Recovery Movie Meetups Community. I love the work you all are doing because, bottom line, I think movies are an amazing way to reach people in recovery deeply and with lasting effect."

Stuart Blumberg
Oscar-Nominated Director/Writer - THANKS FOR SHARING



SIMPLE SET-UP

HERE'S ALL YOU NEED:

- A Meeting Host / Facilitator
- A Common Area with a TV
- Rent or Buy the Movies to Screen
(Available on Amazon Video, iTunes, etc)
- Hand out Printed Copies of Each Movie's Workbook
Exercise to your Participants



MOVIES IN THE PROGRAM

ANXIETY / NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

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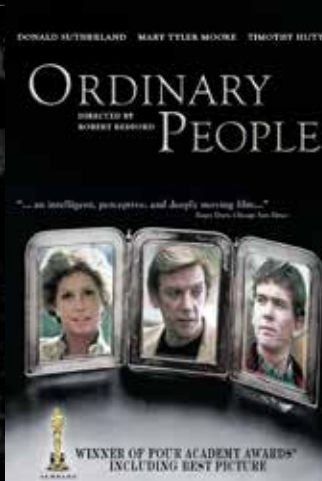
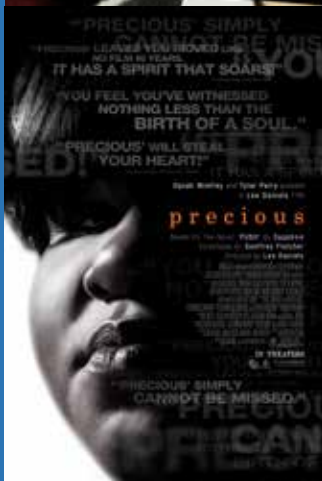
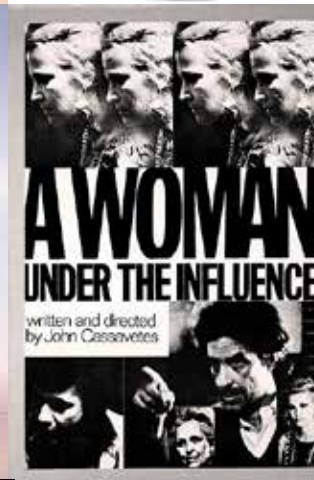
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TURTLES ALL THE WAY DOWN (2024).....	109
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WORDS ON BATHROOM WALLS (2020).....	119
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MOVIES BEING ADDED IN SEPTEMBER 2025



BASIC MEETING FORMAT

STEP 1: The Why (2-3 Minutes)

Gather all participants in a commons area with a TV, introduce the RECOVERY MOVIE MEET-UPS Program, and explain how they will use movies to:

- Evaluate what the characters, story and themes of a movie can teach them about various mental health challenges and strategies for overcoming them
- Watch stories that may mirror how mental health challenges have negatively impacted their life and the lives of those around them
- Examine how and why the characters in the movies succeeded or failed in their recovery
- Become inspired to make desired changes necessary to live a happy, healthy, successful life

STEP 2: Give All Participants a Workbook Exercise (2 Minutes)

- Hand out a movie exercise to each participant
- This exercise now becomes an important part of their recovery capital
- A workbook exercise full of thoughtfully completed questionnaires also becomes a resource the participant can refer back to at any time for inspiration

STEP 3: Meet-and-Greet (10 Minutes)

- Go around the room and have all participants do a quick check in if they wish
- A great ice-breaker is to ask each person what's their favorite movie of all time
- A great follow-up question is to ask them whether they already have a favorite movie about mental health

STEP 4: Introduce the Movie (5-10 Minutes)

- Using the Workbook Exercise as your guide, introduce the movie that will be screened in the meeting, and contextualize why it can be considered important in the exploration of mental health
- Provide a brief synopsis, introduce the main characters, and get people engaged by sharing some fun movie trivia about the movie they're about to see
- Most important of all, read out all the "Issues to Think About As You Watch the Movie" listed in the Workbook
- This helps participants to maximize their potential "take-aways" when they view the movie during the meeting

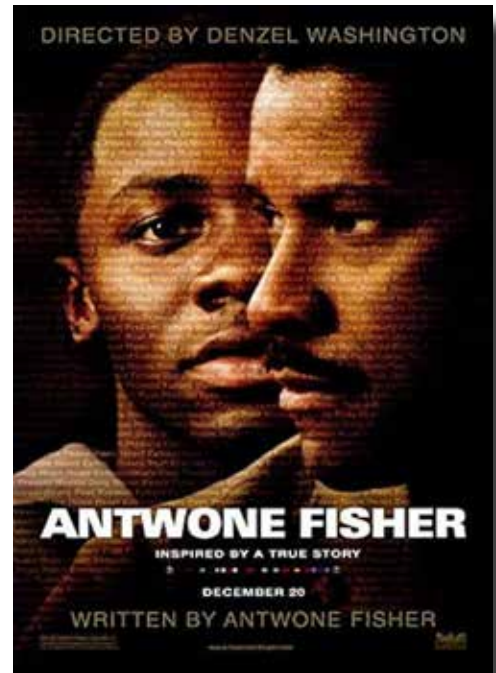
STEP 5: Watch the Movie (90-120 Minutes)

- The Facilitator may choose to pause the movie at certain points and solicit group feedback and assess their level of engagement or focus on a key element
- Some of the most teachable moments can come from re-watching key scenes as a way to highlight a particularly important story element or theme
- Depending on the needs of each facility and the time and frequency they can allocate to this programming, Facilitators may choose to watch one movie split over two sessions (great for IOP/PHP)

STEP 6: Open Discussion (30+ Minutes)

- Now the Facilitator invites the participants to delve into the discussion questions featured in the workbook exercise
- Inspired by Motivational Interviewing, the list of post-screening questionnaires have been shown to lead to powerful moments of group discussion and personal introspection
- The exercise also invites participants to pose their own questions for deeper, more personal analysis of the movie the group has just screened
- Participants may answer all the questionnaires during the group session, or fill out answers later during their free time, then discuss them in the next meeting

MOVIES INCLUDED IN THIS FREE SAMPLE





SILVER LININGS PLAYBOOK (2012)

KEY ELEMENTS:

- + Thoughtful and stigma-free portrayal of Bipolar Disorder
- + Exploration of family dynamics and codependency
- + How to seek emotional insight and build self-awareness
- + Ways to set and/or redefine goals and create new meaning
- + Telling people what the “*need to hear*” versus what’s true
- + Building a strong support network with therapists, family, and friends



WHY THIS MOVIE IS IMPORTANT

Silver Linings Playbook, written and directed by David O. Russell, is a rare cinematic achievement that manages to insert a powerful exploration of a challenging mental health issue within the narrative confines of an A-List Hollywood rom-com.

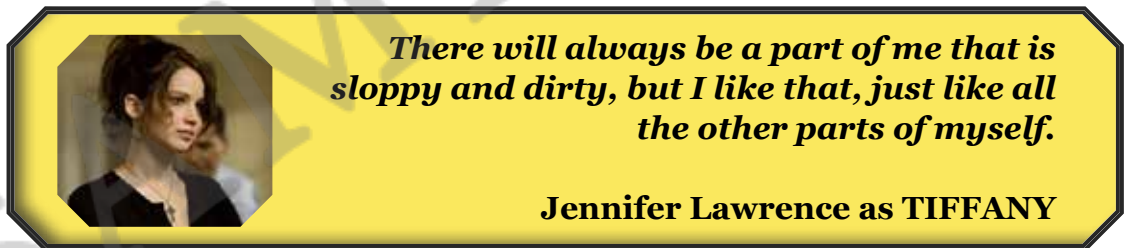
It features delightful dramatic/comedic performances by Bradley Cooper as Pat, a man struggling with bipolar disorder, and Jennifer Lawrence as Tiffany, a woman grieving over the recent death of her husband. The cast is rounded out with wonderful supporting turns by Robert De Niro as Pat’s father Pat Sr., Jacki Weaver as his mother Dolores, and Pat’s buddy he met at the psychiatric facility, Danny, played by the manic genius comedian Christ Tucker.



Critics praised Russell’s ability to dramatize Pat’s struggles in a way that was accessible, authentic, and at times laugh-out-loud funny. The movie also touches on how different people process grief and react to trauma, and how mental health challenges can be addressed through open communication, mutual support, empathy, planning, and the pursuit of unconventional goals to find new purpose and meaning in life.

Russell skillfully contrasts Pat’s struggles with his father’s eccentric, OCD-like obsession with superstitious rituals aimed at influencing the outcomes of Philadelphia Eagles games. While these rituals provide comedic moments, his father’s escalating compulsion to make increasingly risky bets underscores how even seemingly mild OCD can evolve into, or be indicative of, a significant mental health challenge.

The movie’s commercial and critical success helped elevate the national conversation about mental health disorders, and de-stigmatize those who are challenged by them in a way that had not been seen in a Hollywood blockbuster since the release of **A Beautiful Mind** a decade earlier. Apart from **Silver Linings Playbook’s** commercial success, the movie also garnered eight Academy Award nominations, and Jennifer Lawrence took home the Oscar for Best Actress.



There will always be a part of me that is sloppy and dirty, but I like that, just like all the other parts of myself.

Jennifer Lawrence as TIFFANY

PLOT OF THE MOVIE

Silver Linings Playbook follows the story of Pat Solitano after he’s released from a psychiatric facility and moves back in with his parents, determined to rebuild his life and win back his wife. Along the way, he meets Tiffany, a free spirit who is also trying to rebound after her husband’s death. The two form an unconventional bond, agreeing to help each other achieve their personal goals—Pat’s reconciliation with his wife, and Tiffany’s participation in a dance competition. Through their journey together, they discover healing, self-acceptance, and the possibility of finding love again.

A BIT OF MOVIE TRIVIA

+ Part of writer-director David O. Russell’s inspiration for the movie was his real-life son Matthew’s struggles with bipolar-obsessive compulsive disorder.



+ Russell originally wanted to make the movie with Vince Vaughn playing opposite Zooey Deschanel. He switched to Bradley Cooper after seeing his intense performance in **Wedding Crashers**. A myriad of different actresses (Elizabeth Banks, Angelina Jolie, Blake Lively, and Anne Hathaway, among several others) circled the role of Tiffany, until Russell settled on Jennifer Lawrence, at only 22 the youngest of them all.

+ After the film's release, Russell and the cast used the film's popularity to advocate for mental health awareness, participating in discussions and events about bipolar disorder around the country.

+ Despite its A-List cast, multiple locations, and complicated production design, the movie was shot in only 33 days at a cost of only \$21 million, a fraction of a typical Hollywood budget. It ended up grossing more than ten times that at the box office.



I'm gonna' take all the negativity and use it as fuel, and I'm gonna' find a silver lining.

Bradley Cooper as PAT

ISSUES TO THINK ABOUT AS YOU WATCH THE MOVIE:

- 1) The importance of setting goals and following a recovery strategy versus simply wishing that positive intentions will help you achieve mental wellness on your own
- 2) Some of the ramifications of when people try to “bend the rules” by skipping medications or avoiding therapy sessions
- 3) How family and friends with an earnest desire to help those struggling with mental health challenges may distort the truth, or even outright lie, in order to help them
- 4) How the lack of a “filter” when individuals communicate with others can have surprisingly positive outcomes sometimes, and hurtful negative outcomes other times
- 5) The value of showing emotional vulnerability, asking for others for help, and knowing and stating clearly what you are willing to give in return





WATCH THE MOVIE NOW

MY NOTES:

Silver Linings Playbook

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Barely 90 seconds into the movie, Pat lies to the nurse at his psychiatric facility and spits out the medication he's been prescribed. In the course of treatment for your mental health challenges - assuming you have ever been prescribed meds - have you ever done something similar?

YES **NO**

2. If you answered **YES** above, please explain the reasons for why you did this?

3. (If applicable) Please explain what positive or negative outcomes may have resulted from you skipping your meds.

4. When Pat's parents try to dissuade him from seeking a reconciliation with his wife Nikki, he believes they are just being negative. He views therapy as a negative. Relying on medications is negative. He believes that simply maintaining a relentlessly positive outlook ("*Excelsior*," he calls it) will solve everything. If applicable, please explain how you held similar beliefs, and what the outcomes were.



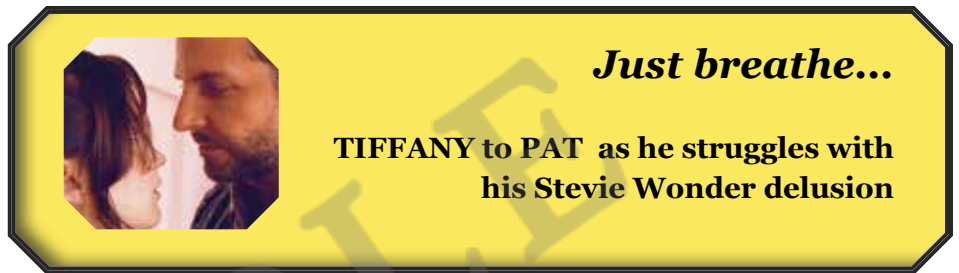
5. Further to Pat’s idea of “Excelsior,” his therapist Dr. Patek repeatedly insists that relentless positivity is no substitute for a “strategy.” If applicable in your case, please list some of the concrete strategies with measurable outcomes that you are pursuing while in treatment:

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____
- e) _____

6. One of the ways that Tiffany coped with grief over the tragic loss of her husband was to become sexually promiscuous. This compensating behavior could be viewed as risky, similar to when individuals medicate over their pain by using drugs and/or alcohol. Please explain some of the compensating behaviors you used to overcome any of your emotional challenges.



7. Pat experiences delusions about his wife conspiring with the history teacher, that she is being shielded from the “truth” about him, and that a Steve Wonder song is playing when it’s not. Have you ever experienced thoughts that were considered delusions? What were they? How did that feel? How did you overcome them?



Just breathe...

TIFFANY to PAT as he struggles with his Stevie Wonder delusion

8. During an argument with his family, Pat says “*people like Tiffany, or Danny, or me...maybe we know something that you don’t know.*” His assertion here, mirroring what many writers and philosophers have posited over centuries, is that people with mental health challenges can have a clearer, more correct picture of “reality” than those who don’t. What do you think of this assertion?

9. Pat admits to Tiffany that he “*doesn’t have a filter.*” Have you ever considered yourself to not have a filter? Were there negative results because of this? Or on the flip side, did total honesty help you?

10. Pat is lied to by both Tiffany and his parents. But these “*white lies*” are intended to help him. As his father Pat, Sr. explains in the movie: “*We need to leave a trail of breadcrumbs so he can live his life without ruining it.*” Can you recall any instances when someone trying to help you withheld the full truth about a difficult situation for what they believed was “*your own good*?” (Circle one)

ALL THE TIME SOMETIMES NEVER

11. If you circled *ALL THE TIME* or *SOMETIMES* above, please explain to what extent these “calculated dishonesties” may have helped or hurt you.

12. At the climax of the movie, Pat walks over to his wife Nikki and whispers something into her ear. What do you think he said to her?



13. Suggest your own question(s) for group discussion.

List some of your key takeaways from watching **Silver Linings Playbook**:

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____
- e) _____

GROUP OPEN DISCUSSION

Share how your personal mental health journey is (was) similar to that experienced by Pat and/or Tiffany

Or...

Share what you may have learned about bipolar disorder that you didn't know before you watched this movie



QUOTES FROM THE MOVIE

PAT

Couples fight. We would fight, we wouldn't talk for a couple of weeks. That's normal...

TIFFANY

Time after time after time I do all this shit for other people, and then I wake up and I'm empty; I have nothing...

PAT

Look, I'm not the explosion guy...

PAT

The only way you can beat my crazy was by doing something crazy yourself. Thank you.

PAT

You have to do everything you can, you have to work your hardest, and if you do, if you stay positive, you have a shot at a silver lining...

TIFFANY

You're afraid to be alive, you're afraid to live. You're a conformist. You're a hypocrite. You're a liar. I opened up to you and you judged me...

DR. PATEL

Get a strategy; you need one...

PAT

They put me on medications, which I felt ashamed of...



Silver Linings Playbook not only entertains us, it shows us how alike we all really are.

**Katrina Gay, Director of Communications
NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS**

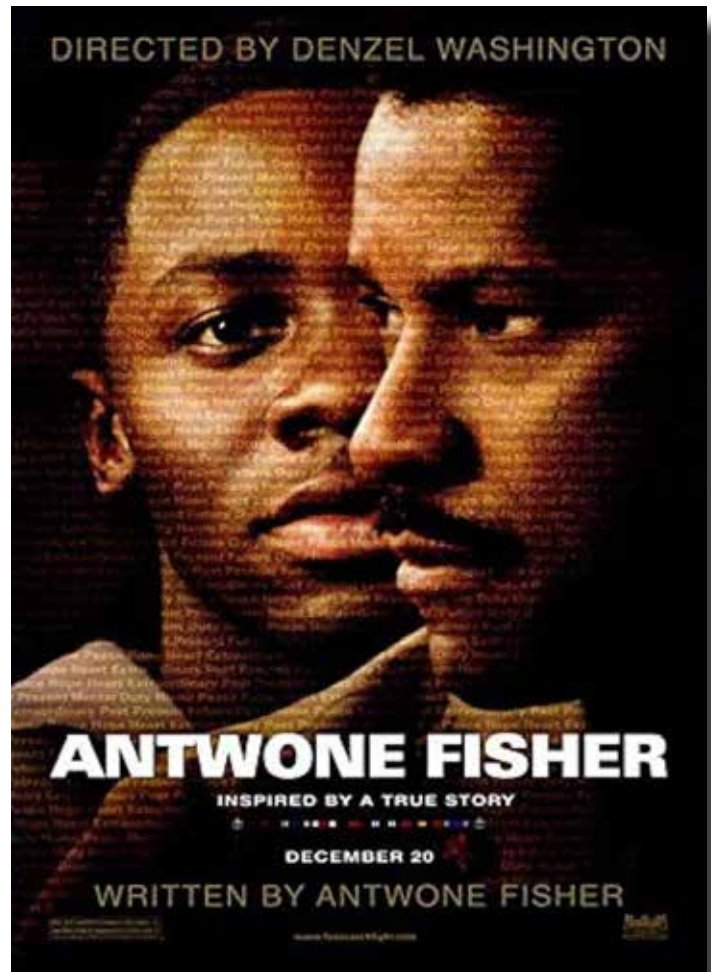




ANTWONE FISHER (2002) **PG-13**

KEY ELEMENTS:

- + The impact of childhood abandonment, neglect, and abuse on a young adult's mental health
- + How individuals with traumatic experiences may externalize their pain through aggressive behaviors instead of processing their emotions healthily
- + The transformative power of honesty and transparency in therapy, even when confronting painful memories
- + Fear of intimacy and trust issues caused by experiences of abandonment and betrayal



WHY THIS MOVIE IS IMPORTANT

Denzel Washington's directorial debut, **Antwone Fisher**, is an inspiring story that follows a young man's struggle to confront his childhood trauma, reconnect with his roots, and rediscover his identity. The film's authenticity is heightened by the fact that it is based on a true story, offering a rare and powerful depiction of mental health treatment and the transformative bond that can develop between a patient and their therapist.

As compelling as the movie itself is the almost fairy-tale story of how Fisher, then



working as a security guard at Sony Pictures in the late 1990s, casually shared his life story with Hollywood producer Todd Black. Impressed, Black hired Fisher—who had no experience—to write the screenplay. The script eventually made its way to Denzel Washington, whose interest in starring **and** directing the movie led Fox Searchlight Pictures to quickly greenlight the project. Anyone struggling to break into the film industry knows how rare such a perfect confluence of events can be. But Hollywood is, after all, a dream factory—and Fisher’s dreams certainly came true with this film.



I hope that after seeing the movie and reading my memoir that people will see that every child has value and boundless potential.

ANTWONE FISHER
Screenwriter, Poet, Lecturer, Best-Selling
Author, Children’s Rights Advocate

The movie powerfully reinforces the idea that strong men—such as a Navy serviceman immersed in a hyper-masculine military culture—can and should embrace their emotions and show vulnerability, even in an environment that often discourages such expressions as signs of “weakness.” In many ways, the movie was ahead of its time: Today, more men in the military and first responder roles are becoming increasingly comfortable seeking mental health care. Additionally, access to these services has expanded, with more coverage provided by insurance plans.

Washington also weaves themes of masculinity into a tender love story between Fisher and fellow Navy servicewoman Cheryl Smolley (played by Joy Bryant). This adds another layer to Fisher’s journey, as he learns to trust and experience intimacy for the first time without the fear of abandonment that has shaped his past. It also reinforces the idea that young men do not need to define their masculinity by the number of people they’ve hooked up with.

PLOT OF THE MOVIE

Based on a true story, Antwone Fisher follows the difficult and emotional journey of a young Navy sailor, played by newcomer Derek Luke, who struggles with unresolved trauma from his abusive childhood. After frequent violent outbursts, he is ordered to see a Navy psychiatrist, Dr. Jerome Davenport (Denzel Washington), who helps him confront his painful past of abandonment, neglect, and emotional scars.



Through therapy, Antwone learns to process his anger, build trust, and open himself up to love, particularly in his relationship with fellow sailor Cheryl Smolley (Joy Bryant). Determined to find closure, he also embarks on a journey to reconnect with his biological family, ultimately discovering that his true strength lies in self-acceptance, resilience, and ultimately forgiveness of past sins.



You've got the right to be angry. But you also need to learn to channel that anger, to use it constructively.

Denzel Washington as Dr. DAVENPORT

A BIT OF MOVIE TRIVIA

- + Under producer Todd Black's guidance (and at his expense) Fisher wrote a total of 41 drafts of the screenplay before 20th Century Fox finally purchased it as a vehicle for Denzel Washington to star in and direct.
- + In one scene, Washington deliberately highlights the book **The Slave Community** by historian John W. Blassingame, which explores the concept of intergenerational trauma as a contributing factor in the abuse Fisher endured as a child. This emphasis on inherited trauma predates the now widely recognized discussions on the subject, later popularized by books like **The Body Keeps the Score** by Dr. Bessel van der Kolk.
- + In another Hollywood fairytale twist, Fisher met struggling actor Derek Luke, who was also working on the Sony lot, and encouraged him to audition for the role. Luke impressed Denzel Washington, who made the decision to cast fresh talent over big stars like Will Smith, Cuba Gooding Jr., and Mekhi Phifer, who had shown interest in the role.
- + While filming scenes of Fisher's childhood and homecoming in a Cleveland neighborhood, the production team took steps to improve the area, renovating buildings like the one where his mother's character lives. They also provided job opportunities to local residents, with Washington personally meeting and thanking them for their support.

ISSUES TO THINK ABOUT AS YOU WATCH THE MOVIE:

- 1) How openly sharing painful memories, whether in one-on-one therapy or mutual support meetings can be a profoundly cathartic experience
- 2) How anger subverts a person's sense of free will, making them feel as though they have no choice in their reactions
- 3) Whether reconnecting with someone who inflicted emotional or physical abuse necessary or beneficial for achieving closure
- 4) How past trauma shapes a person's ability to love and trust others in the present, and form romantic relationships



I do not cry easily at the movies; years can go past without tears. I have noticed that when I am deeply affected emotionally, it is not by sadness so much as by goodness.

**Roger Ebert
Film Critic (1942-2013)**

Antwone Fisher

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. When Antwone first meets Dr. Davenport, he insists he doesn't have a problem and refuses to speak during their initial sessions. If you once felt the same way when first meeting with a counselor(s)—resistant to engaging or opening up—what ultimately changed your mind?

2. (Optional) We see Antwone endure severe physical and emotional abuse from his foster mother, Mrs. Tate. If you feel comfortable and it applies to your experience, you're welcome to share any similar challenges you faced in childhood.

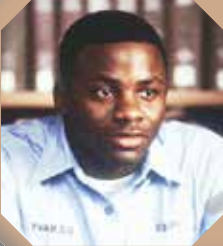
3. Antwone initially hides the true reason for his medical unit visits from Cheryl, possibly out of shame or fear of appearing weak. Have you ever concealed your own mental health struggles to avoid judgment from others?

YES

NO



4. If you answered **NO** (above), please share any negative or positive effects you experienced from being open and transparent with others. Alternatively, if you answered **YES**, please share whether there were any positive or negative consequences that resulted from not being transparent with others.



You think it's possible for somebody that had problems all their life not to stay that way?

Derek Luke as ANTWONE

5. Despite Antwone's lack of progress and his insolence, Dr. Davenport persists with his treatment because he believes in him. If applicable, please share any similar experiences in which a therapist or mental health professional could have reasonably given up on you, but chose not to.

7. Antoine's fellow sailors are adept at provoking him and eliciting reactions. If you've ever experienced others intentionally baiting you, please list any tools you may have used to overcome their provocations without resorting to aggression.

1) _____

2) _____



3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

8. Upon returning to his childhood foster home, Antwone encounters Mrs. Tate, the foster mother who had subjected him to abuse. As she attempts to dominate the conversation, Antwone responds:


“This is my time. You understand me? It didn’t matter what you tried to do, you couldn’t destroy me.”

If you have ever considered confronting individuals who have harmed you in the past, what would you want to say to them?

9. Antwone meets with his birth mother and asks her why she never came to get him after being released from prison. She stays silent. If you could rewrite this scene, what do you think she would/could/should have said to him?



10. When Dr. Davenport asks Antwone if he has found emotional closure after meeting his birth mother, Antwone responds, “*In my heart I forgive her, but if I never saw her again...*” If applicable in your case, discuss the reasons why you would or wouldn’t be willing to forgive people from your past who have hurt you.



Because of you Antwone, I’m a better doctor, and I’m learning to be a better husband.

Dr. DAVENPORT

11. Mental health treatment is a collaborative process, and sometimes a therapist can be positively impacted by their work with a patient. If you believe this has happened (or is happening) in your case, share the situation and what the therapist might have gained from working with you.

12. Suggest your own question(s) for group discussion.

List some of your key takeaways from watching *Antwone Fisher*:

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____
- e) _____

GROUP OPEN DISCUSSION

Share how your personal mental health journey is (was) similar to that experienced by Antwone Fisher

Or...

Share what you may have learned about overcoming past trauma that you didn't know before you watched this movie





IT'S KIND OF A FUNNY STORY (2010) **PG-13**

KEY ELEMENTS:

- + Suicidal ideation brought upon by the stresses of conforming to other people's expectations
- + The benefits of honestly sharing one's mental health struggles with others instead of always internalizing them
- + How engaging in creative exercises like drawing, painting and music can become conduits towards healing
- + How to reframe problems by embracing a lighthearted and humorous perspective on daily struggles



WHY THIS MOVIE IS IMPORTANT

It's Kind of a Funny Story, based on the novel by Ned Vizzini, manages to explore the serious topic of suicidal ideation and depression in a lighthearted, often humorous, and in an altogether authentic way. Although the central character, Craig (played by Keir Gilchrist), is a teenage boy, his struggles derive from similar existential and mental health challenges of people of any age or gender.

Hollywood often struggles to portray psychiatric facilities accurately, often resorting to tired clichés. While the hospital where Craig self-admits is depicted as an idealized



and sanitized version of a typical facility, the movie manages to show that psychiatric institutions are not inherently dreadful or terrifying. Instead, they are vital spaces where mental healing can occur, even in the most challenging cases.

By portraying a teenager who takes the bold step of admitting himself to a psychiatric facility, the movie offers valuable encouragement to young people struggling with mental health challenges who might otherwise avoid seeking professional help due to fear of embarrassment of being “outed” by their peers.

Outstanding performances by Viola Davis as the compassionate clinical director, Dr. Minerva, and Jeremy Davies as Smitty, the intake manager, highlight how clinicians and staff in fast-paced and demanding facilities still manage to provide care with empathy and kindness.

The film’s directors, Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck, brought together a diverse and engaging cast, featuring comic actor Zach Galifianakis as Bobby, who takes Craig under his wing, and Emma Roberts as Noelle, a young suicide survivor who becomes the object of Craig’s affection.

The eclectic ensemble of characters showcases the diversity of individuals in mental health facilities generally, each facing unique challenges, yet united in their shared commitment to the work of recovery.



Sometimes I wish I had an easy answer for why I’m depressed.

Keir Gilchrist as CRAIG

PLOT OF THE MOVIE

Craig Gilner is a teenager struggling with anxiety and depression who checks himself into a psychiatric hospital after seriously contemplating suicide. Once there, he is placed in the adult ward due to renovations in the teen unit. Over five days, Craig forms unexpected bonds with other patients, including Bobby, a witty yet troubled mentor figure, and Noelle, a fellow teen working through her own struggles. Through his interactions with others and with the support of the hospital staff, Craig gains a new perspective on the underlying reasons for his mental health struggles, as well as a fresh set of tools to overcome them.

A BIT OF MOVIE TRIVIA

+ Co-directors Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck are well-acquainted with themes of mental health and addiction. They previously directed **Half Nelson**, a film that earned Ryan Gosling an Academy Award nomination for his portrayal of a high school teacher battling a cocaine addiction.

+ Having achieved worldwide fame for his breakout comedic roles (**The Hangover I, II, III**), Zach Galifianakis' performance in this movie showcased his dramatic range and was widely praised by critics.

+ The filmmakers were deeply dedicated to portraying mental health issues with sensitivity, working closely with professionals to ensure the characters' struggles were depicted accurately and authentically. The movie was shot in an actual facility in Brooklyn.

+ Ned Vizzini, the author of the book on which the movie is based, played an active role in the development process, drawing from his own lived experiences with mental health challenges and his time as a patient in a psychiatric facility.

ISSUES TO THINK ABOUT AS YOU WATCH THE MOVIE:

- 1) That although suicide can be a challenging topic to discuss openly and honestly, it is a vital conversation that should not be avoided due to embarrassment, stigma, or fear of being judged as inferior or “broken”
- 2) How to recognize when one is “Catastrophizing” and become overwhelmed by “worse case scenario” problems that are rarely as severe as they seem
- 3) Whether the expectations placed on someone by parents, peers, or society may not be as rigid or unchangeable as they appear
- 4) How “imposter syndrome” is more common than most people realize, and can be successfully overcome through honest conversations with one's peers
- 5) The role that playfulness, curiosity and creativity can often play in helping people overcome their mental health challenges

It's Kind of a Funny Story

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Craig has a very specific suicide fantasy where he jumps off the Brooklyn Bridge. If you feel comfortable enough to provide details, please share what your suicide fantasy(ies) look like.

2. Part of Craig anxiety stems from his belief that “*everyone else, they just seem to handle everything.*” If you ever (or always) feel the same way, list some of the successful coping strategies you believe other people have that you lack.

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____
- e) _____

3. After interacting with other patients and observing their seemingly more severe challenges, he tells Dr. Minerva, the facility director, that he feels out of place and wants to leave. Have you ever felt, or do you currently feel, that your mental health struggles aren't significant enough to justify being in treatment? (Circle one)

YES

NO



4. Please explain why you chose your answer above.

5. Craig believes his acceptance into an elite high school was a mistake, feeling he doesn't measure up in intelligence or achievements. In other words, he feels like an imposter. If you've ever experienced (or currently experience) similar feelings (at school or work), list the reasons why you think this.

1) I'm an imposter because _____

2) I'm an imposter because _____

3) I'm an imposter because _____

6. Now explain why the reasons you listed may be irrational.

1) But I'm not an imposter because _____

2) But I'm not an imposter because _____

3) But I'm not an imposter because _____



I thought you guys could do something quick, like give me some medication to make me feel better...

Keir Gilchrist as CRAIG

7. Craig engages in “awfulizing,” a form of irrational thinking where he imagines ending up “*depressed, alone, and homeless.*” Describe the worst-case scenario you fear about how your own life might turn out:

8. Now list three reasons why this worst-case scenario will never happen:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

9. Dr. Minerva challenges Craig to tell her “*about a time that you remember being happy, carefree?*” Describe what such a time in your own life was like.

I won't be here that long. I have school tomorrow...

Keir Gilchrist as CRAIG



10. Craig’s friend Bobby confides that he has attempted suicide six times and expresses a wish to “*just live, like it meant something.*” Many mental health struggles stem from a fear that one’s life—or life itself—lacks meaning. Which of the following statements resonate with you? (Circle all that apply):

I look forward to achieving great things in my life, and I’m certain they will be quite meaningful

Even though I may achieve some good things in my life, they won’t mean very much when compared to the achievements of other people

Chances are I won’t ever achieve very much in life and I wonder why I should even try at all

I know for a fact that I’ll never achieve anything in life and when I die my life will have had no meaning at all

All life, the earth, the sun, other stars, and everything in the universe will eventually get swallowed up by black holes and then slowly evaporate into nothingness, so everything that anybody ever does is utterly meaningless in the greater scheme of things

11. Which statement would you most agree with? (Circle one)

***THE MEANING OF MY LIFE IS OUT THERE
JUST WAITING FOR ME TO DISCOVER IT***

***I HAVE TO CREATE MEANING IN MY LIFE
THROUGH MY OWN WILL AND DAILY ACTIONS***


12. Explain your answers to Questions 10 & 11 (above).



13. The movie never explains why Noelle self-injures herself (the cuts on her face and forearms). If you had to guess her reasons for doing this, what would they be?

14. Similarly, we never learn why Bobby tried to commit suicide six times. If you had to guess his reasons for doing this, what would they be?

15. In his last session with Dr. Minerva, he tells her: *“There are so many people, you know, not just at this hospital, but in the whole world, who are struggling hard just to live. And, it’s like, self-indulgent for me not to appreciate what I have.”* What things do you most appreciate in your own life?



He who isn't busy living is busy dying.

**Zach Galifianakis as BOBBY
(Quoting singer BOB DYLAN)**



16. Suggest your own question(s) for group discussion.

List some of your key takeaways from watching *It's Kind of a Funny Story*:

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____
- e) _____

GROUP OPEN DISCUSSION

Share how your personal mental health journey is (was) similar to that experienced by Craig (or Noelle or Bobby)

Or...

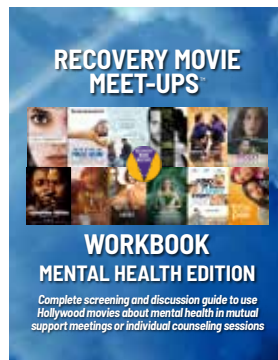
Share what you may have learned about suicidal thoughts, anxiety and depression that you didn't know before you watched this movie



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