

WE ARE ALL NEWTOWN



DISCUSSION GUIDE

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WELCOME

Dear Screening Partner,

Thank you for bearing witness to the stories of loved ones lost to gun violence. We Are All Newtown is a call to come together in loving support for gun violence survivors.

Your screenings of the film are an opportunity to invite people into the movement for change and healing. Educators, students, community organizers, and faith leaders are all relevant audiences to invite to your discussion. This resource will help guide you through a community conversation with viewers.

The goal of film events for We Are All Newtown is to build bridges across communities. We encourage you to be purposeful about inviting people from different neighborhoods and backgrounds who share the common experience of gun violence.

Not all communities receive the same attention or resources when the tragedy of gun violence hits. Your screenings are an opportunity to create a forum for people to share equally, and find opportunities to work together to create change.

We thank you again for creating a space for people to build relationships and heal the pain of gun violence.

Sincerely,
The Odyssey Impact Team

ABOUT THE FILM

We Are All Newtown takes viewers to Hartford, Connecticut in the weeks after the mass shooting at nearby Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012. Hartford is miles apart from suburban Newtown. Pastor Sam Saylor, whose own son died of gun violence in the streets of Hartford, has a message for America. He wants the country to grieve all sons and daughters lost to gun violence the way they grieved the children lost at Newtown. Join in the conversations among faith leaders as they discuss the impacts of gun violence on their communities.

Runtime: 19:39 minutes



Pastor Sam Saylor.

GOALS FOR THE FILM CAMPAIGN



EDUCATE

audiences about the ways
suburban and urban
communities experience gun
violence differently.

CHALLENGE

representations of race in
mainstream media coverage
and the national discourse
about gun violence.

LIFT UP

the stories of gun violence victims and survivors whose
lives have been under-acknowledged by mainstream
media.

CREATE

opportunities for communities to
work together and build bridges
to advance their common goals
for change.

COLLABORATE

with trauma-informed partners
to facilitate healing
conversations and activities.

WE ARE ALL NEWTOWN



Pastor Sam Saylor.

**“I’M SICK
AND TIRED
OF HEARING
ABOUT
NEWTOWN.”**

“Newton this, Newtown that. I don’t want to hear about it. I want you to know about Shane. On October 20th, in this zip code, my son lost his life at the age of 20. What a nightmare.

Violence did not happen in Newtown, it did not start in Newtown. It happened on the streets in Hartford, Bridgeport, and New Haven. We had to sit there and cry until we could not cry anymore, asking: ‘What’s the sense of this all?’

And I realized something sitting next to a father from Newtown... when I was sitting next to him, he was crying. He cried like I cried, his tears were wet. Like I’ll be darned if I let anger or publicity separate me from a father in his time of need. I realized that I am Newtown. We Are All Newtown. We need a “new town” where we can live safe for our children to go to school. We are all Newtown, and we should let no one separate us.”

Sermon delivered by Pastor Sam Saylor at the rally featured in the film.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION



316

is the average number of people that are shot in the United States each day.

36%

is the percentage of gun deaths from homicide.

Three hundred and sixteen is the average number of people that are shot in the United States—one third die.¹ Of the nearly 40,000 precious lives lost each year to gun violence, more than half die from suicide.¹ Homicides represent about 36 percent of all gun deaths—about 25 times the rate of other high-income countries.²

Mass shootings, defined by having four or more casualties, make up a relatively small fraction of gun homicide deaths. They are the most heavily covered by media outlets, however. The national media coverage of the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut on December 14th, 2012 prompted an entire nation to collectively grieve the loss of loved ones that day.

Not all gun violence survivors have that level of support in their times of sorrow. Urban communities, such as Hartford, Connecticut, experience gun homicides far more frequently than suburban communities like Newtown. The pain of urban gun violence survivors goes under acknowledged by the media, politicians, and the outside public.

Urban communities are more likely to have high poverty rates and its residents

are more likely to identify as Black—two groups whose concerns are too frequently ignored by U.S politicians. Black Americans are ten times more likely than White Americans to die by gun homicide.² Black children and teens are the most frequent victims—they are fourteen times more likely than White children and teens of the same age to die by gun homicide.²

The trauma that the community of Newtown experienced in 2012 reoccurs regularly in urban neighborhoods. According to Everytown Research & Policy, “Community trauma is not only the sum of the hurt and suffering of individuals who have had traumatizing experiences. It is also a collective trauma experienced in communities with elevated levels of violence.” This level of trauma can permeate every aspect of life making residents feel unsafe and on-edge in their own communities.³

After the public outrage over the Newtown shooting, politicians vowed to pass reforms on gun laws. Connecticut and several other states did, but two bills failed in Congress: a ban on assault rifles and a bill requiring background checks for all gun buyers. The failed bills were a blow to gun violence survivors who expected action.⁴ In the absence of political will, community organizers refocused their efforts on gun violence prevention programs, like the one Pastor Saylor leads in the film.

Violence prevention is a community-driven public safety approach that focuses on directing resources toward addressing the root causes of violence—including systemic racism and historic community disinvestment. Violence prevention initiatives often involve gun violence survivors in developing solutions, who bring authentic experience that can reach people in volatile situations. Prevention initiatives rely heavily on mentorship and relationship building to interrupt conflicts before they escalate to violence.

10

are the times Black Americans are more likely than White Americans to die from gun homicide.

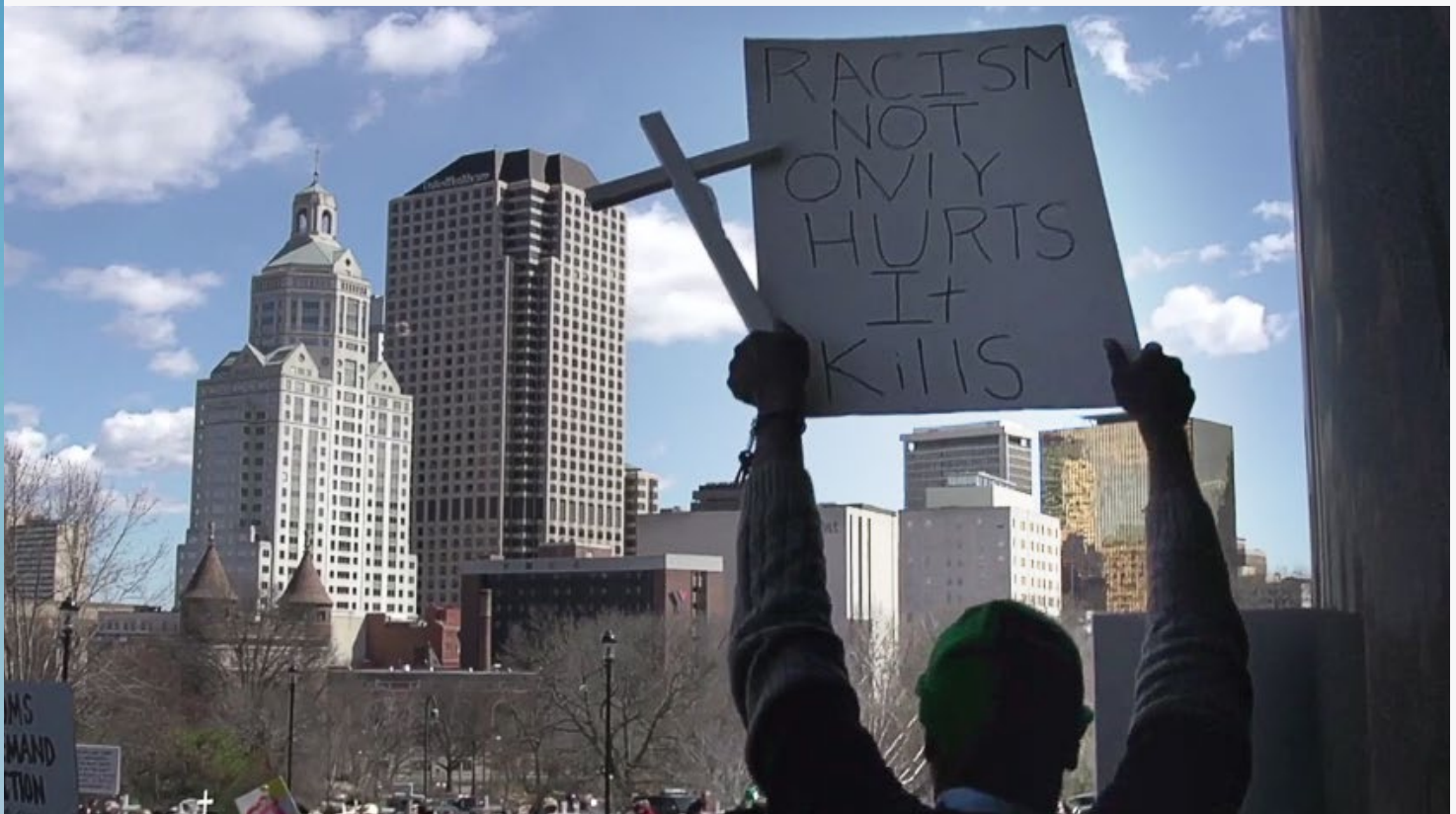
Black children and teens are the most frequent victims.

1. <https://www.bradyunited.org/key-statistics>

2. <https://everytownresearch.org/report/gun-violence-in-america/>

3. <https://everytownresearch.org/report/invisible-wounds-gun-violence-and-community-trauma-among-black-americans/>

4. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/29/us/politics/newtown-parkland-guns.html>



DISCUSSION AND QUESTIONS

As part of your classroom or community screening, ask viewers to share their thoughts about the topics raised in the film. You could lead a facilitated group conversation or ask guest speakers to share their thoughts on a selection of relevant questions below.

GENERAL AUDIENCES

1. How has gun violence affected you and your community?

2. What did Pastor Sam Saylor mean when he said, “I’m tired of hearing about Newtown” in the film?

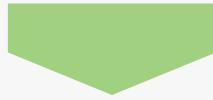
3. What messages do you hear about gun violence in urban areas from mainstream media?

4. How does racism influence the way gun violence is treated in suburban vs urban communities?

5. How does the political and media coverage—or lack thereof—affect the survivors of gun violence in urban communities?

6. What does “We are all Newtown” mean to you?

STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS



1. What messages about guns do you see in movies or popular culture?

4. What are the signs to look for when a student needs emotional help?

2. How does it feel to do active shooter drills in school?

5. What would you do if you knew a student brought a gun to school?

3. Do you feel safe in your school and neighborhood?

FAITH COMMUNITIES



1. How can faith leaders support people who have lost loved ones to gun violence?

4. What role do you think faith leaders should play in the gun violence reform movement?

2. What passages from scripture do you draw on for resilience?

5. How can faith leaders work across communities to support each other in healing and preventing gun violence?

3. What healing practices do you recommend for communities that experience collective grief?



Pastor Sam Saylor, Rev. Matt Crebbin and Rev. Henry Brown.

ACTIVISTS



1. What are the root causes of gun violence, from your perspective?

4. What is your vision for a “new town” as Pastor Saylor calls it?

2. What intervention strategies have you seen work to reduce gun violence?

5. How could your work benefit from partnering with other communities doing work to prevent gun violence?

3. How do you stay motivated to continue your work when you experience a setback?

ACTIVITIES

You can also organize an activity that brings deeper meaning to your discussion about the film. These suggested engagement activities could be organized in addition to a facilitated discussion.

HOST A TOWN HALL LISTENING SESSION

Local elected officials need to hear from gun violence survivors and their supporters. A town hall listening session is an open forum event that invites local leaders to hear from constituents about community concerns. The goal is for the people to do the talking, and the elected leaders to do the listening.

Reach out to your local community leaders—elected officials, faith leaders, business leaders, and school administrators—to attend the listening session. Ask them to invite their communities with them to join in a conversation together.

It can be helpful to invite an experienced facilitator to moderate your town hall discussion. **Some community agreements for a successful conversation include:**

Put away phones and other distractions if possible to focus on the conversation.

Use respectful language when talking to and about others.

Use “I statements,” such as “I believe” and “I feel” to speak from personal experiences. Don’t assume anyone else shares your experience.

Don’t interrupt when others are speaking.

Ask permission before hugging, touching or consoling others.

Check out this guide for how to organize a Town Hall:
<https://www.aqeny.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/How-to-Organize-a-Town-Hall.pdf>

See if your mayor is part of the Mayors Against Illegal Guns network:
<https://mayors.everytown.org/who-we-are/#coalition-members>.

ORGANIZE AN ACTIVISM WORKSHOP

Invite community organizers to train local activists to speak out on the issue of gun violence. For example, every good activist needs to know how to tell an impactful story to persuade people to care about an issue. Your screenings of *We Are All Newtown* could review the basics of storytelling for a cause.

Organizer and educator, Marshall Ganz, offers resources on creating a “public narrative,” which is a persuasive story. **It includes three components:**

A story of self explains why someone is personally called to an issue.

A story of us describes the shared purpose, goal and vision of the collective.

A story of now is the challenge a community faces now, the choices it must make, and the hope it aspires to.

For more information and resources for leading a public narrative workshop, see this overview from Working Narratives: <https://workingnarratives.org/article/public-narrative/>

Recommended organizations you can collaborate with on planning an activism workshop include:

Mom’s Demand Action

is a grassroots movement of Americans fighting for public safety measures that can protect people from gun violence. Find local chapters here: <https://momsdemandaction.org/about/chapters/>

Black Youth Project 100 is a member organization for Black youth activists creating justice and freedom for all Black people.

Find local chapters: <https://www.byp100.org/chapters>

Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ)

organizes White people to support the work of communities of color who are leading the movement for racial justice. Find a local chapter: <https://surj.org/network/>

March For Our Lives was created after the school shooting in Parkland, Florida to support and center the people and communities most impacted by gun violence.

<https://marchforourlives.com/chapters/>

Fund for Peace develops practical tools and approaches for reducing conflict.

<https://fundforpeace.org/>

Fund Peace Now brings communities together to hear concerns related to community and gun-related violence in cities and provides information about advocacy efforts and grant funding opportunities for organizations.

<https://www.fundpeacenow.com>

CONVENE A HEALING CIRCLE

The collective work of healing is an important step to creating change. The weight of trauma that comes after gun violence is a threat to the well-being of individuals and the spirit of the community. Rituals of healing can lift that unbearable weight. When survivors see the community show up with care and concern, it can be a truly transformative experience for everyone involved.

Consider partnering with interfaith leaders, healthcare providers or violence interrupters to organize a healing activity as part of your screening. **Some examples of healing rituals include:**

A candlelight vigil.
You can ask people to bring candles or have them download a virtual candle app that simulates candlelight.

Altar making to honor loved ones lost to gun violence, such as the alters of flowers and photos shown in the film.

Gospel singing with a local church or youth choir.

Art therapy with a facilitator that invites participants to paint, draw, or write poetry about emotions that can be difficult to express.

Community prayer led by a faith minister or a survivor.

A memorialization of loved ones lost to gun violence, such as reading names or creating a photo exhibit.

A sage burning ceremony led by an Indigenous elder as a healing practice for trauma.

A group mindfulness exercise led by a facilitator to help people meditate and ground themselves amidst feelings of grief.

Before planning your healing circle, make sure to talk to survivors about how they'd like their loved ones honored, and be mindful to choose an activity that is culturally appropriate and relevant to your audience. **Recommended organizations you could partner with to host a healing circle include:**

Cure Violence Global is guided by clear understanding that violence is a health issue. It works to reduce violence globally using disease control and behavior change methods. <https://cvg.org/>

Youth Alive is a faith-based peer outreach group for students in the Assemblies of God National Youth Ministries. <https://youth.ag.org/participate/youth-alive>

Advance Peace is dedicated to ending cyclical and retaliatory gun violence in American urban neighborhoods by investing in the development, health and wellbeing of those at the center of the crisis. <https://www.advancepeace.org>

Black Mental Health Alliance develops, promotes, and sponsors trusted culturally-relevant trainings that support the health and well-being of Black people and their communities. <https://blackmentalhealth.com>

CALLS TO ACTION



ESTABLISH A SISTER COMMUNITY

Work with your community group to build a sister relationship with other communities. A sister city is a mutually beneficial relationship between two communities. Traditional sister cities pair communities that are similar together, however you can structure yours differently if you like. You can pair your community with another community that has similar gun violence experiences, or you could establish a relationship between an urban neighborhood and a suburb. Reach out to community leaders in the community you'd like to establish as a sister community and invite them to a conversation to talk about opportunities for mutual aid. If all parties agree to the sister community relationship, draw up an agreement for both community leaders to sign. For inspiration, you can review this guide from SisterCities International:

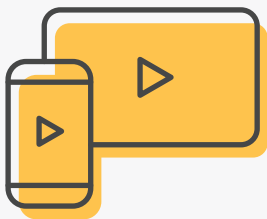
<https://sistercities.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Guide-to-establishing-a-sister-city-relationship.pdf>



BE A YOUTH MENTOR

The presence of a reliable mentor in a young person's life can change their future dramatically. Strong, healthy relationships can break down the walls built by trauma and set a young person on a path of nonviolence. You can be that person. As a youth mentor, your role is to provide a consistent voice of support, model healthy behavior, and provide an empathetic ear when needed. Mentoring relationships are often mutually beneficial in providing a lifelong connection that can feel like family. To learn more, check out the Mentoring Center to learn more about their Transformative Mentoring programs:

<http://mentor.org>



CREATE MEDIA

When mainstream media under-reports and misrepresents stories of gun violence in communities, grassroots media makers can take the narrative into their own hands. Make your own short film about the ways gun violence has affected your community. Most smartphones come with high-definition cameras that can take quality footage, and low-cost apps, such as iMovie or TikTok, enable you to edit short films directly on a smartphone. As a media maker, your most important responsibility is to follow a code of ethics to respect the people you feature in your project. You should always ask for people's consent before interviewing them on camera, and check with them to make sure they feel comfortable with how they are represented in your work. For more advice on how to make media, see this Youth Media Guidebook from Vision Maker Media:

<https://sites.google.com/view/youth-media-guidebook/home>

RESOURCES

- ▶ **Newtown** is a documentary filmed over the course of nearly three years to tell a story of the aftermath of the deadliest mass shooting of schoolchildren in American history on December 14, 2012.
<https://newtownfilm.com>
- ▶ **Healing the Healers** is a multimedia video resource collection showcasing intimate peer-to-peer conversations with exceptional faith leaders on the issues of crisis and trauma.
<https://healingthehealers.org/>
- ▶ **“Living In New England’s Murder Capital”** by Sam Saylor. Hartford Courant, Aug 10, 2015.
<https://www.courant.com/opinion/insight/hc-insight-sam-saylor-life-in-new-england-murder-capital-20150810-story.html>
- ▶ **FACT SHEET: More Details on the Biden-Harris Administration’s Investments in Community Violence Interventions | The White House**
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/07/fact-sheet-more-details-on-the-biden-harris-administrations-investments-in-community-violence-interventions/>
- ▶ **On the Front Lines: Elevating the Voices of Violence Intervention Workers | Giffords**
<https://giffords.org/lawcenter/report/on-the-front-lines-elevating-the-voices-of-violence-intervention-workers/>
- ▶ **Please see Odyssey Impact Screening Toolkit for these additional resources:** Trauma-Informed Approach to Screening Guide by Odyssey Impact and Conducting Purposeful Conversations Guide by Odyssey Impact and Tanenbaum.

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