



SHE WENT TO PRISON. THEY DID THE TIME.

# the sentence

facilitator and discussion guide

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# forward

Dear Screening Host,

Thanks so much for taking advantage of a great opportunity to change hearts and minds about our criminal justice system. You're joining a great team of people all over the country hosting watch parties of Rudy Valdez's award-winning documentary, **THE SENTENCE**.

When FAMM first heard about this movie, we knew it was a perfect fit with our work. It's a close-up look at one family struggling with the consequences of having a loved one in prison for far too long. After Cindy Shank began serving a 15-year mandatory minimum sentence for her part in a drug conspiracy headed by her then-boyfriend, her brother Rudy picked up his handheld camera and began recording his three nieces' lives. The hundreds of hours of footage soon became a feature-length film, which went on to win enormous praise at the Sundance Film Festival and a Creative Arts Emmy for Exceptional Merit in Documentary Filmmaking.

This film is a great way to explain to the people in your lives—family members, neighbors, colleagues, friends—how our criminal justice system affects real people. It's impossible to watch **THE SENTENCE** and not feel a deep and emotional understanding of the issue, as well as gain greater knowledge about how our criminal justice system fails.

By hosting a screening you'll be playing a big part in helping us communicate our message. And for that, we are so grateful. We want to make it as easy as possible for you to get the discussion started, and this guide covers many of the logistical details of how a screening works.

We're excited to have you join us in what should be a great event! Let's fight, together.

Thanks,  
FAMM

## introduction

By choosing to screen THE SENTENCE, you are now part of a nationwide Social Impact Campaign. This grassroots movement utilizes Cindy Shank's story to educate, engage, and activate the public around the rising number of incarcerated mothers in America.

As part of this campaign, we encourage you to use THE SENTENCE as a tool for training, lobbying, and/or teaching, keeping in mind the following campaign goals:

1. Promote the de-stigmatization of having an incarcerated parent, and particularly, an incarcerated mother.
2. Educate audiences of the unique, long-term needs of children with an incarcerated mother.
3. Inspire audiences to support and facilitate communication and visits between incarcerated mothers and their children in order to maintain the mother-child connection.
4. Uplift the voices of those who have been directly impacted by parental incarceration.

This document is simply meant to be a guideline that offers ideas and questions you might consider as you prepare for your screening. We invite you to make it your own by tailoring it to the specific needs of your community. Our only request is that you uplift the campaign goals listed above.

Screening THE SENTENCE is only the first step in making this change. The story within the film is a springboard to larger discussions you can have within your community about children with incarcerated parents, mandatory minimum sentencing, and mass incarceration.

Use Cindy Shank's story to inspire and mobilize your audience. In doing so, your community will lend its voice to the national conversation on these issues.

Thank you for bringing THE SENTENCE to your community. Now let's get to work!

Sincerely,  
The Odyssey Impact Team

## 10 easy steps to host a screening

### **Before:**

1. Determine the time and place.
2. Make a plan.
3. Plan an event agenda.
4. Arrange event supplies.
5. Determine and test your technology.

### **During:**

6. Ask the audience to complete the pre-screening survey.
7. Take pictures and videos!

### **After:**

8. Make everyone complete the post-screening survey.
9. Engage in a post-screening activity.
10. Send Odyssey Impact pictures and complete the host survey.

**OVERALL: ENJOY THE SCREENING!!!**

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## step **ONE** determine the time and place

Decide the date and time you would like to show THE SENTENCE. Once you know when you'd like to host your screening, secure an event space. An "event space" can be as simple as a local bar or restaurant, a place of worship, library, educational institution, or town square. Be sure to check to see if you need permits/reservations!

## step **TWO** make a plan

A Sample Plan:

- Decide if your screening will be public or private
- Publicize your event using the templates in the social press kit
- Contact Odyssey Impact, which will publicize your event using *THE SENTENCE* social media channels
- Decide your post-screening activity. Popular options include a panel, talkback, or Q&A.
- Make a recruitment plan

First, decide whether your screening will be open to the public or kept private. If it will be a public screening, Odyssey Impact can publicize your event using THE SENTENCE's social media channels. Next, decide your post-screening activity. Options can include a panel, talk back, or facilitated discussion.

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If you choose to invite formerly incarcerated individuals and/or their family members to participate, please be sensitive to their experiences and avoid identifying these individuals unless they choose to be identified.

Lastly, determine your recruitment plan. A recruitment plan isn't complicated!

Simply:

- Set a goal for the size of your screening
- Invite your family, friends, colleagues, local community groups, and/or house of worship
- Track your RSVPs

When setting your goal, keep in mind the capacity of your event space. Be sure to determine a method for tracking your RSVPs, too. You can use an online tool or form (EventBrite or Google form), a spreadsheet you maintain, or even a good old-fashioned pen and paper list.

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## Sample Outreach Message

Join us for a screening of **The Sentence**



**Presented by [YOUR ORGANIZATION HERE]**

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**The Sentence** explores the story of Cindy Shank, a mother of three young children serving a 15-year sentence in federal prison for her tangential involvement in a Michigan drug ring years before. A lyrical, intimate story documented over 10 years by Cindy's younger brother, filmmaker Rudy Valdez, **The Sentence** follows Cindy's struggles to be present in her children's lives from behind bars and her daughters' experiences growing up without their mother at home, while her husband, parents and siblings fight for her release before the last months of the Obama administration's Clemency Project. After winning the 2018 Audience Award at the Sundance Film Festival **The Sentence** was acquired by HBO and went on to win a Primetime Emmy for Exceptional Merit in Documentary Filmmaking.

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### **The Sentence**

A documentary by Rudy Valdez

Followed by a (discussion, panel discussion, Q&A, etc.)

**When: [INSERT HERE]**

**Where: [INSERT HERE]**

**Directions: [INSERT HERE]**

**RSVP and Contact: [INSERT HERE]**



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## step **THREE** make an event agenda

Follow or customize the sample below!

**Introduction** – 5 - 10 minutes: Welcome your guests, introduce the documentary, explain that the discussion will take place afterward, provide ground rules for viewing the film and maintaining a safe space, and distribute the pre-screening survey.

**Ex: Ask your group.** “How do parents maintain relationships with their children while incarcerated?” or “What is the impact of mandatory minimum sentencing guidelines?” Give everyone a chance to write or at least consider his/her responses before the film.

**View** – 1 hour 20 minutes: Watch THE SENTENCE (Make sure there’s Kleenex.)

**Discussion** – 30 - 45 minutes: Lead a discussion with the group about parenting while incarcerated, sentencing and advocacy.

Sample questions:

- What, if anything, surprised you about what you just watched?
- What impact did mandatory minimum sentencing have on this family?
- How did the children’s demeanor change from the beginning to the end?
- Cindy says that she violated the law as written but didn’t deserve 15 years in prison. Do you agree? If so, what do you think would have been an appropriate sentence?
- At one point, Cindy is moved to a prison in Florida. Were you surprised to learn that people who are incarcerated can be sent so far from home? What did this move mean for the frequency of visits between Cindy and her daughters?

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- Autumn says that she does not tell her friends why her mother is in Florida. Why do you think Autumn does not share that her mother is incarcerated? Do you think there is social stigma associated with having an incarcerated parent?
- Throughout the film, we see Cindy's attempts to stay involved in her daughters' lives. How did Cindy manage to do this? What support did Cindy need to have phone calls and visits with her daughters?
- In addition to phone calls and visits, what other means could Cindy and her daughters have used to maintain their relationship while she was incarcerated? How could new technology help or hinder this?
- Cindy's father collects metal in order to pay for the cost of her phone calls from prison. Were you surprised to learn how high the costs of phone calls are from prison?
- Cindy's mom says that when a loved one is locked up, the whole family does the time. Do you think courts should consider how incarceration might affect a person's children and other family members when sentencing him or her?

## **Call to Action** – 5 minutes:

- Sign up with FAIMM to Become an Advocate at [www.faimm.org](http://www.faimm.org).
- Host a screening of THE SENTENCE within schools, houses of worship, or community-based organizations.
- Support organizations facilitating communication between children and their incarcerated parents by donating time, funds, and/or resources.
- Display the Children of Incarcerated Parents Bill of Rights in schools, houses of worship, or community-based organizations. Alternatively, make it available online.
- If you are a faith leader or associated with a faith-based organization or house of worship: deliver a sermon on The SENTENCE, organize screenings across a denomination's regional and/or national network, start a prison ministry, or incorporate THE SENTENCE into an existing ministry.

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## step **FOUR** arrange event supplies

Once you have an idea of how many people are going to come to your screening, decide what supplies you need for the event, including food and drink if you'd like to provide it. Also, consider contacting local restaurants or stores for donations.

## step **FIVE** determine and test your technology

The film is available to be streamed digitally. Before your screening, test the [indeetv.com](http://indeetv.com) streaming link. Ensure screens and speakers work as well.

## step **SIX** ask the audience to complete the pre-screening survey

To measure the impact of the film, please ask your guests to text "CINDY" to 55444 to complete the Pre-Screening Survey. A PowerPoint slide with this information has been included in the screening toolkit.

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## step **SEVEN** take pictures and videos

Before, during, and after the screening, make sure to take pictures and videos. Let your guests know that you will be taking pictures and posting to social media and that they should, too! Use the hashtag: #TheSentence

Be sure to post during and after the screening!

## step **EIGHT** make sure everyone completes the post-screening survey

Share the link to the Post-Screening Survey with your guests. If they texted “CINDY” to complete the Pre-Screening Survey, then the Post-Screening Survey should be sent to them automatically.

## step **NINE** engage in a post-screening activity

See Section Three for discussion questions that can generate conversation. One of our main goals is to make people aware of these issues and to facilitate conversation. Here are some sample tips:

- Create a safe space so that attendees feel respected and willing to engage in conversation.
- Feel comfortable to gently correct any misinformation.

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- Supplement the discussion with background information and facts when necessary, but make sure not to dominate the conversation.
- Be conscious of time and kindly remind guests to keep their comments brief so that everyone has the chance to speak.
- If you have an audience Q & A, gauge how many audience members would like to speak by asking them to raise their hands and ensure that the pacing of the conversation allows time to field as many questions as possible.
- Listen carefully to find the right moments for follow-up questions.

If there's a question you're stumped on, we'll be on social media that day so send us the question using the hashtag #TheSentence. Above all, share the calls to action with the guests!

## step **TEN** send Odyssey Impact pictures and complete the host survey

Once your event is over – first, give yourself a HUGE pat on the back! You hosted a screening and we're thankful! We also want to see how the event went, so make sure to send us pictures and complete the host survey!

*Thank you for hosting a screening of THE SENTENCE!*