

# WRESTLING GHOSTS

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

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### A FEW QUESTIONS TO WRESTLE WITH AND DISCUSS WITH OTHERS:

#### PART 1: IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON INDIVIDUALS

##### REACTION TO THE MOVIE

1. Can you share some of the judgements you felt towards Kim during the movie? When did you judge her? Did you hold on to these judgements throughout the film, or did your attitude towards Kim evolve, change, or lift? If so, what prompted these changes?
2. What moment or moments in the movie spoke the most to you? Why?
3. Did you think about your own childhood while watching the film? Or about a loved one's?
4. Take a moment to close your eyes and feel whatever came up during the movie. Can you identify what you are feeling? Are you holding some of these feelings in your body? Where?
5. What questions, doubts, or concerns did the movie raise for you.
6. Do you think any differently about parenting, health, mental-illness, blame and punishment now, after viewing the film?

##### PARENTING / CARING FOR CHILDREN AND RELATIONSHIPS

7. Kim is very honest about her difficulty with being a parent. How did hearing and watching her struggle make you feel about how you were parented? Or about your own parenting? If you're not a parent, how did watching her story make you feel about parents you know or work with?
8. What concerns you most about your relationship with your children or the children in your care, with your students? Do you wish to transform your relationship with your loved ones or with yourself? How so?
9. If you are a parent, what is your parenting approach, if you have one? What is your greatest challenge? What do you see as the benefits of creating spaces for people to share and hear openly about their issues parenting?
10. Kim's journey seems to indicate that one way to help the children in our care is to help ourselves. What do you think of that?
11. Wrestling Ghosts highlights the generational cycle of childhood trauma. Have you heard about epigenetics and how our parents and ancestors' trauma can be passed down genetically from generation to generation? Do you know of any trauma that your ancestors experienced? How do you think these traumas are still impacting you and others in your community?

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### PART 1: CONTINUED...

#### ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EVENTS (ACES) AND HEALING

12. Did you already know about ACEs before watching Wrestling Ghosts?
13. Are you surprised by your score?
14. The ten ACEs question only covers some adverse childhood experiences. What other types of trauma did you experience in your childhood? Can you think of experiences not included in this survey? (eg. medical trauma, neighborhood violence, poverty, racism, immigration, etc.)
15. Have you explored some healing modalities such as therapy, somatic work, meditation, exercise, etc.)? Does your process resemble Kim's journey - i.e. trying multiple approaches, ups and downs, etc.?
16. What is trauma-informed therapy/counseling? Is trauma-informed learning part of the education and training of therapists and social workers? How so?
17. Are alternatives or add-ons to talk therapy -- such as EFT and neurofeedback among others -- still fringe or mostly unknown by the larger community? How can people become more aware of these different approaches? Could counselors train for or refer their clients to others who use these different approaches?
18. Do you know of any resources in your community that are trauma-informed or that could help people who are struggling and/or wanting more ease, joy and connection? (Organizations, community gardens, other groups. . .)
19. How have your attitudes towards therapy and acceptance of mental illness changed in your lifetime? Did you once feel averse to therapy but are now inclined to accept it as a healing process? Or vice versa? Also, have your ideas about medication changed as you come to understand the impact of individual trauma, family trauma, and community trauma?
20. What role should forgiveness play in the therapeutic process when coming to terms with those who hurt us in our pasts?
21. How can a variety of healing modalities become more available and more affordable?
22. How does the lack of access to health care (free/ affordable) impact the ability to heal?

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### **PART 2: BEYOND INDIVIDUAL HEALING:** A social justice approach to healing

#### **GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND OTHER COMMUNITY-WIDE PROGRAMS**

1. This movie focuses on what takes place at home, but a lot of factors affect our ability to parent. What kind of support do you think the government should be offering families? Longer maternity leaves? Paternity leaves? Free daycare? At-home visits from trained nurses or social workers? Free or affordable healthcare? What policies should we ask our representatives to support? (additional policies to consider: wealth redistribution, minimum wages that are sufficient to live on, universal income, changes in school-funding system, etc.)
2. What is the current impact of government intervention on families? What might be potential negative impacts of an increased role of government's intervention in families? Some Advocates argue that the child welfare system for Black women is like the prison system for Black men in terms of who is most likely to be "intervened with" and "helped." What do you think?
3. Childhood trauma is a silent epidemic. The cost to our society is very high. What should we do, as a society, to prevent or mitigate childhood trauma? What kind of initiatives can you imagine in your community? Mindfulness in schools? Free or affordable community gyms? Restorative justice initiatives? Should these be governmental initiatives or private ones? Why?
4. How is access to mental health care and health care a social justice issue? Why is the lack of access to health care a major barrier to ending the cycle of trauma? Is healing a privilege of the rich?
5. Healing from trauma requires a host of modalities: alternative trauma-informed therapies (not yet recognized or reimbursed), nutrition, exercise, meditation, massage, etc. These modalities are hard to find or afford in poor and marginalized communities. What can be done about this?

#### **POVERTY, PATRIARCHY, RACISM, AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST - LGBTQIA**

6. In a question above, we asked what other categories of trauma are not included in the ACEs questionnaire. Childhood trauma doesn't discriminate and can be experienced by any one of us, no matter our background. Nevertheless, the impact of trauma is compounded by other factors and traumas. What are some of these factors and how are they traumatic and/or increase the impact of the trauma on a child's life.
7. The narrative that poverty and trauma are linked and therefore poor children and families are always at risk isn't accurate. Some wealthy children have trauma and some poor children do not. That said, poor communities and families in general are more burdened and less resourced. Can you give examples of how poverty, at times, can increase the risk of trauma? Can you identify some of the policies discussed above that could help reduce the number of children living in chronic poverty.
8. How does patriarchy impact children? Families?
9. How does patriarchy limit gender expression and affect people who don't identify with the gender binary?
10. How does patriarchy affect mothers? And girls? What are the gender stereotypes and expectations on girls that impact their ability to thrive and can lead to trauma as they grow up? Is there a certain stigma around women (mothers, particularly) "putting themselves first" at times? Is it seen as selfish when a mother prioritizes her own mental health or seems to seek fulfillment outside of her children? Why does this stigma exist for women, but much less so for men? And how does it impact our ability to break the cycle of trauma?

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### PART 2: CONTINUED...

11. How does patriarchy impact fathers? And boys? What expectations on boys and men impact their ability to connect and to have healthy and fulfilling relationships, including with their children.
12. Systemic racism creates a toxic and dangerous environment for POCs which could render the concept of regulating one's nervous system a form of gaslighting<sup>1</sup>. If you are in fact NOT safe, how can you not be in fight and flight mode (see Part 1 of Exploring Childhood Trauma to learn more about the flight and fight response and its impact on the body and relationships). Some experts argue that if a person is in a threatening environment (such as an abusive relationship, a war zone, etc), healing their nervous system cannot happen until that situation is changed. What do you think?
13. Do you believe that we can separate individual healing from social justice and support people in their personal healing while working separately on transforming society? If so, how do we support individual' healing without dismissing their lived reality (gaslighting them)?
14. Many social justice activists now urge their peers to prioritize their own mental and emotional health in order to be able to do this work without further traumatizing themselves. What can be done to support this idea?
15. Often the media discusses trauma as happening to "others" and especially poor and minority communities. Well-meaning documentaries and news reports use footage of Black Communities for instance when discussing the impact of childhood trauma. How does this perpetuate racist stereotype of POCs?
16. The director of Wrestling Ghosts believes that focusing on trauma as happening to others reinforces our culture of judgement and punishment. Why would that be so? Do you agree? How does focusing on our own experience of trauma and developing compassion for ourselves and loved ones differ as an approach? What do you think is the best way to move from a culture of blame and punishment to a culture of understanding and compassion?
17. Bullying and violence of LGBTQIA youth is widespread. What kind of policies or support should be provided to reduce and end bullying and violence against LGBTQIA youth?
18. What are the additional traumas faced by LGBTQIA youth and adults, and specifically LGBTQIA POCs?
19. How does the message of shame (from family, community and peers) experienced by LGBTQIA youth affect their ability to thrive? How is rejection of who they are a form of trauma?
20. What are the barriers to treatment/ support affecting LGBTQIA's youth? What were the Transgender medical protections that were reversed by the Trump administration? How does this affect Trans youth?
21. What are other social justice issues affecting other individuals, groups or communities ? What are the particular issues facing people dealing with immigration, war, religious orthodoxy, disabilities, chronic or dramatic illness, etc."

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<sup>1</sup> Gaslighting refers to a specific type of manipulation where the manipulator is trying to get someone else (or a group of people) to question their own reality, memory or perceptions. In this case, creating the expectation that people living in constant and real threat should be able to self-regulate without addressing systemic issues.

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### **PART 3: CREATING TRAUMA-INFORMED SCHOOL, INSTITUTIONS, AND COMMUNITIES**

1. If you are a parent, a teacher, or work with children in some capacity: In what way, if any, do you think this movie will transform your approach to working with kids?
  2. Should understanding childhood trauma and its impact on development have an impact on the way schools do their work? How so? Do you have knowledge or examples of schools or classrooms that are trauma-informed?
  3. Often trauma-informed programs focus on helping the kids learn self-regulation, such as mindfulness in the classroom programs. Although these are important, they are only a very small portion of the children's day. How can self-regulation become a central part of a child's day?
  4. What are the limitations of trauma-informed programs focusing on children's self-regulation? Can a non-regulated adult support children self-regulate? Do you believe the focus should be in supporting the healing of care-takers in order to best support children?
  5. Healing from trauma requires a host of modalities: alternative trauma-informed therapies (not yet recognized or reimbursed), nutrition, exercise, meditation, massage, etc. These modalities are hard to find or afford in poor and marginalized communities. What can be done about this?
  6. What about the justice system? Do you know about restorative justice? What are the pros and cons of a restorative justice approach?
  7. The narrative that poverty and trauma are linked and therefore poor children and families are always at risk isn't accurate. Some wealthy children have trauma and some poor children do not. That said, poor communities and families in general are more burdened and less resourced. Can you give examples of how poverty, at times, can increase the risk of trauma? Can you identify some of the policies discussed above that could help reduce the number of children living in chronic poverty.
  8. What about the police? What would it mean for a police department to become trauma-informed? How would it impact the way the police interact with the population?
  9. Besides schools and law enforcement, what other organizations and systems would benefit from becoming trauma-informed?
  10. Often trauma-informed initiatives become yet another top-down mandate and more demands on teachers / nurses / etc. How do we change the culture within institutions instead? What are the problems with a top-down approach?
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