The Children Next Door
A Study Guide for Social Work Educators and Students

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Foreword

This guide has been developed to assist social work educators and students in using films from the CSWE film festivals in their classrooms. It is one in a series of CSWE curriculum resources designed to enhance the teaching and learning of social work concepts.

We welcome your comments as the library of these resources is refined and expanded.

Michael A. Wright
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## Overview

**The Children Next Door**

### Film Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title: The Children Next Door</th>
<th>A Film by: Doug Block</th>
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<tr>
<td>Running Time: 36 minutes</td>
<td>Distributed by: <a href="http://thechildrennextdoor.com/">http://thechildrennextdoor.com/</a></td>
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### Context

The story chronicles one family’s resilience in the face of domestic violence perpetrated on one parent by another parent. The oldest child, Chelsea, is shadowed through much of the short film. Her change in maturity, perspective, and resolve punctuate a pattern of resilience. Other themes in the film include a call to end the cycle of violence learned by children of violent parents.

### Overall Themes:

1. Domestic Violence
2. Adverse Childhood Experiences (Trauma)
3. Family Dynamics
4. Adolescent Resilience

### Time Code

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<th>Salient Themes</th>
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<td>Domestic Violence Emotional Fearfulness</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“I knew I was going to die.” (02:29)</td>
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<td>“… It sometimes crossed my mind … he’ll come back for mom” (03:05)</td>
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<td>03:12–05:52</td>
<td>Roll Call</td>
<td>“Probably a dad.” (05:42)</td>
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<td>“He was my hero. I loved him … and I hated my mom.” (05:54)</td>
<td>Parental Manipulation Recovery Financial Strain Survivor Guilt</td>
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<td>08:47–15:37</td>
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<td>“Because of what you went through, you are stronger and more courageous …” (11:35)</td>
<td>School Services Parental Loss Suppression Trust Issues</td>
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<td>25:40–34:20</td>
<td>Origins of Abuse</td>
<td>“…They both thought they could change … but then they never got help.”</td>
<td>Retribution Cycle of Domestic Violence Fairytale Expectations Parental Affection Advocacy</td>
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Topics

Introduction

Central Quotes: “Actually, I remember everything.” (01:47)
   “I knew I was going to die.” (02:29)
   “… It sometimes crossed my mind … he’ll come back for mom” (03:05)

Themes: Domestic Violence, Emotional Fearfulness

Abstract: The film opens with a 911 call. This segment offers a teaser into the family’s story. It combines brief glimpses of the children and Penny, the mom, to introduce the perspective of the film. The film intends to present domestic violence from the children’s point of view.

Learning Objectives
   1. Define domestic violence.
   2. Define adverse childhood experiences.
   3. Identify challenges to resilience and risk factors present in the family environment.

Discussion Questions
   1. What do you know about domestic violence?
   2. What are adverse childhood experiences?
   3. What would you do for a child who has witnessed a traumatic event perpetrated by a parent on another parent?

Suggested Readings


Roll Call: Time Code: 03:12–05:52

Central Quote: “Probably a dad.” (05:42)

Themes: Family Dynamics, Birth Order, Childhood Trauma

Abstract: Each of the four children is introduced by another family member. Emily is described by mom as the center of attention. Elijah is the only boy surrounded by sisters. Chelsea is a mix of emotions. Ashley is unique and unpredictable.

Learning Objectives
1. Explore the impact of birth order on the functioning of the family.
2. Identify patterns of socialization that differ by gender and impact behavior in sibling cohorts.
3. Explore the reactions of children who experience the loss of a parent.

Discussion Questions
1. Do you think that birth order has anything to do with the personalities of the children? Why or why not?
2. Consider what it must be like growing up as the only male in a household of females. What benefits and costs might Elijah experience?
3. How do you explain Emily’s comment that she would want a dad?
4. At this point in the film, what information would be useful in constructing an ecomap of the Waldroup family?
5. Compare and contrast the reactions of children who have lost a parent to incarceration versus death or divorce.

Suggested Readings


**Central Quote:** “He was my hero. I loved him … and I hated my mom.” (05:54)

**Themes:** Parental Manipulation, Recovery, Financial Strain, Survivor Guilt

**Abstract:** Chelsea and Penny’s relationship is revealed in the context of Brad’s interaction with them both. The economic struggle of the family is highlighted. Penny’s injury, recovery, and the hole left in the family are hinted, including physical, financial, and emotional factors.

**Learning Objectives**
1. Review the Domestic Violence Wheel of Power and Control.
2. Outline the challenges that may face a single mother of four children.
3. List the services and interventions that may be appropriate for the Waldroup family.

**Discussion Questions**
1. Why do you think that Brad attempted to provide that view of the mom to Chelsea?
2. What services would you consider are warranted for a family in this situation?
3. How many intersecting challenges can you identify affecting the physical, financial, and emotional health of the Waldroup family?
4. Explain Penny’s anger directed toward herself for staying in the relationship as long as she did.

**Suggested Readings**


Realization Chelsea

Central Quote: “Because of what you went through, you are stronger and more courageous ...”
(11:35)

Themes: School Services, Parental Loss, Suppression, Trust Issues

Abstract: The Waldroup family is introduced to a helper. Chelsea finds her anger after the family appears on the Dr. Phil TV program. At school, Chelsea gets help from a psychologist.

Learning Objectives
1. Identify ego defenses that are useful in response to trauma.
2. Compare and contrast the role of a psychologist versus a school social worker in your area.
3. List community services, including school services, available to adolescents in the community.

Discussion Questions
1. Do you think that it is normal that Chelsea doesn’t get close to anyone?
2. What indicators do you look for to balance typical adolescent behavior in relationships and Chelsea’s behavior?
3. Do you think the counselor had anything to do with Chelsea wanting to visit her dad?
4. What do you think is the source of the mom’s ambivalence? Chelsea thinks her mom fears that Chelsea will hate her again.

Suggested Readings


New York and Other Visits

Central Quote: “It’s taken me 5 years.” (19:04)

Themes: Anger and Motivation, Visitation in Prison, Resilience, Gaining a Parent, Poverty

Abstract: Chelsea explains how anger motivates her. Mom makes a decision to allow Chelsea to visit her dad in prison. The film documents the change in Chelsea after the trip to New York.

Learning Objectives
1. Compare and contrast Penny’s view and Chelsea’s view of Brad.
2. List observation skills that may be important during home visits to clients.
3. Explore mental health explanations for reactions to trauma.

Discussion Questions
1. What do you make of the lack of physical engagement by mom?
2. What would you think Chelsea would say to her father if she met him in prison?
3. Beyond Chelsea getting to see her father, what do you think explains the difference in Chelsea’s behavior after returning from New York?
4. Notice the condition of the trailer home at minute 23:41. What do you think explains the condition of the home?
5. Why do you think Penny has been unable to read the letter from Brad all the way through?

Suggested Readings


Origins of Abuse

Time Code: 25:40–34:20

Central Quote: “…They both thought they could change . . . but then they never got help.”

Themes: Retribution, Cycle of Domestic Violence, Fairytale Expectations, Parental Affection, Advocacy

Abstract: Chelsea is heartbroken after learning that her father refuses to see her. Penny seems uncertain about how to console her. The awareness project the family has undertaken is highlighted. Chelsea voices another level of resilience, purpose, and learning gained through the domestic violence awareness project.

Learning Objectives
1. Explore the services available to children of domestic violence in your area.
2. Articulate how purpose and learning can support resilience.
3. Identify vital statistics on domestic violence specifically in regard to children.

Discussion Questions
1. What type of help do you think would have benefitted Penny and Brad prior to marriage?
2. What type of help do you think would help Penny and Brad after they were married?
3. How do you explain the awkwardness of mom not knowing how to console Chelsea after she found out her father refused to see her? (30:07)
4. Why do you think that children of domestic violence are more likely to repeat the cycle of violence?

Suggested Readings
