

Strength through Community

SOCIAL CAPITAL
CONVERSATION
GUIDE



// SOCIAL CAPITAL

About the film:

Through Colby and her experience with the Open Table program, we learn about the importance of social capital in helping families thrive. Social capital is the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular community, enabling that community to flourish.

Colby is a young mom experiencing economic challenges who, due to her past experiences, is hesitant to build new relationships. She becomes connected to the Open Table program which helps people experiencing social isolation and other barriers to well-being connect with community resources and develop a network of social support around them. The program connects her with mentors and through trusting and caring relationships, she gains the confidence to advocate for herself and her family and is inspired to help other families like hers.

We also meet Dory, one of the mentors, whose reflections on how the program has positively impacted her life, show us why creating programs that prioritize relationships and see value in every family benefits the whole community.



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How to use these questions:

These critical questions are designed for child welfare professionals, advocates, and community leaders of all backgrounds to ignite and facilitate critical conversations around the importance of seeing, listening, and hearing from families as part of imagining family-centered systems change. We hope these questions help create brave, inclusive spaces for critical conversations where we can come together to challenge the prevailing stereotypes and barriers that prevent us from seeing the value in each and every individual and hold so many families back from reaching their full potential. Most critically, with the goal of keeping more children at home with their families as our north star, we hope communities will utilize these questions to gain wisdom and knowledge about the universal experiences of all families and move towards a path of co-creation with families as guides and experts.

More specifically, here is a list of ways to utilize the guide to build shared understanding, challenge assumptions and uncover new ways of thinking:

- **Create an inclusive space for the film screening.** Think intentionally about who to invite to the screening so a diverse range of voices are present. A welcoming space can encourage people to share about their lived experiences and can help strengthen community bonds. These rich discussions can further inform solutions that put family first and fit specific community needs.
- **Promote an upstream, prevention focused mindset.** During the discussion, encourage screening attendees to think about the family-focused solutions that would allow their communities to act now rather than react later.
- **Invite experts, local leaders, and grassroots organizations into conversations and to screenings.** These individuals are currently doing the work and can enrich conversations by providing concrete data and context to further educate your audiences.
- **Increase cross-sector collaboration.** Invite advocates from various backgrounds —child welfare, education, law, policy, healthcare, substance use programming, etc. —to be a part of the discussion. Encourage them to think about the partnerships that can be built that will help improve conditions for families.
- **Focus on community planning.** After watching the film and using the questions for a guided discussion, brainstorm as a group how communities can empower families and encourage greater community investment. Encourage the audience to think about current resources, potential challenges, gaps in services, and community needs. Use findings to create a community action plan that outlines next steps.

// CRITICAL QUESTIONS

We hope that the following critical questions highlight the importance of centering empathy, compassion, and understanding in your work with families to ensure they are seen, heard, and listened to without judgement. Most importantly, we encourage you to engage families in ways that center them as the architects of their own well-being.

// LET'S GET INTO IT.

- From watching the film, what are the different ways you think having a supportive community are helping Colby and her family? Why do you think she was hesitant in the beginning and what helped her trust the women in the Open Table program? What lessons can other communities take from a program like Open Table that prioritizes relationship building as part of supporting families?

- Relationships can provide families with a sense of self-worth, trust, and compassion. They can also motivate them and provide them with the confidence they need to enhance conditions for themselves and their families. Think about these types of affirming relationships in the lives of the families you are working with. What were the situations or experiences that allowed these relationships to form? What do you think needs to happen in your community to facilitate connections and trusting, supportive relationships between families that will bring value to more families and the community as a whole?

- Reflecting on Colby's journey, how do you think her connection to the Open Table program and the relationships she has built there have benefitted her community? Now think more broadly. What is the collective benefit for society when we have programs and conditions that provide networks of support for families? How do we bring awareness to this collective benefit and inspire more people to want to engage in these programs?
