



A FACILITATOR'S DISCUSSION GUIDE to Accompany the Film *Paper Tigers*

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Prepared by



Prevent Child Abuse
America®



PAPER TIGERS

One high school's unlikely success story.



Prevent Child Abuse America®

Prevent Child Abuse America is proud to be the non-profit partner of the producers of the film,

Paper Tigers. Together, Prevent Child Abuse America and state chapter experts on the impact of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study developed this guide to promote action by viewers of Paper Tigers on behalf of children and families experiencing ACEs. Survey results after initial viewings indicate that this film motivates people to want to take action; an effective post-film discussion can help show viewers specific actions they might take in their own families and communities.

Please read this guide (including the Appendices!) thoroughly before facilitating a post film discussion. For additional assistance, please contact any member of our project team, listed below.

PROJECT TEAM

Prevent Child Abuse America - *Paper Tigers* Working Group

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INTRODUCTION

“Paper Tigers captures the pain, the danger, the beauty, and the hopes of struggling teens—and the teachers armed with new science and fresh approaches that are changing their lives for the better.” The “new science” referred to by the producers in this description of their film is the findings from the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, known as the ACE Study. You can find resources to learn more about the ACE Study in Appendix A.

Prevent Child Abuse America chapters and our local partners are in an ideal position to promote the core message of Paper Tigers. Our intent with the discussions after the screenings of Paper Tigers is to engage the participants and motivate them to take action on behalf of children, their families and the communities in which they live.

To accomplish this we will need to appeal to their “heart” and “head” by leading a discussion that:

- (1) Speaks to their heart by introducing them to the students and faculty of Lincoln High School, the concepts behind the ACE Study and the life-long impact of exposure to multiple ACEs, and the normalization of ACEs in all of our lives; but then,
- (2) Engages their head through a guided discussion about the role they can play in the lives of the children and family in their lives and communities who are similarly impacted by ACEs, encourage others to do so, support community members already playing a role, and obtain the tools they need to do so.

During the screening of the film, it’s important to watch how the audience reacts to different characters and, where possible, learn why they reacted that way and then use that feedback for future discussions. We also want to help audience members see the supporting characters – like the counselors or the doctor – as community players or members who also have the opportunity to make a difference.

Note that even as one person initiated the change at Lincoln High School and that one person’s actions can make a big difference, an important thing we learned from our work with the FrameWorks Institute (see Appendix B for more information on FrameWorks) is that instead of focusing on one person, *the most effective means for engaging the audience is to focus on the school, because the audience may not be able to connect with any specific individual’s story.*

Utilizing the Core Story of Child Development that Prevent Child Abuse America developed with FrameWorks, summarized in Appendix B we seek to create common messages that focus on the need to understand brain structure, and the idea that supporting healthy child development cannot all be on one person’s shoulders; it takes a community of engaged community members to support the healthy development of children. The messages of Paper Tigers offer an ideal opportunity to engage community members in this discussion. Our goal is to elevate the dialogue to that of a whole population or system, not just any particular teacher, child or family, and to focus on how the administrators who created Lincoln High School created something that was interconnected.

Some viewers may not see the teens featured in Paper Tigers as “children;” teens using foul language may appear much less sympathetic than a cooing toddler. We can use a Pay Now or Pay Later premise – getting prevention right early is less costly to society, and to individuals, than trying to fix things later – and reinforce the fact that we saw teen behavior change with the love and support from caring adults.

Our hope is that holding a discussion between community members, built on this research and focused on “head” and “heart” messages that are also centered around ACEs, can both create a relationship that was not there and lead to broader culture change. If everyone takes a step, like everyone at Lincoln Alternative High School, then we all move together to create a thriving community.

As discussion leaders, our role is to encourage everyone to do their part now that they see how ACEs impact everyone in the community.

BEFORE STAFFING A SCREENING

- View Paper Tigers at least one time and learn the name and back-story of each character.
- Read this discussion guide and the Core Story of Child Development in Appendix B at least once. Contact jrosenzweig@preventchildabuse.org, btanzer@preventchildabuse.org or any member of the project team for advice.
- Learn as much as you can about the audience and choose the most applicable discussion points from this guide.
- Learn about ACEs-related programming in your community; contact them for resource materials.
- Get copies of the post card printed with the website for viewers to download handouts. Contact btanzer@preventchildabuse.org for more information.
- Decide if you want to ask viewers to complete a post-film survey. Contact jrosenzweig@preventchildabuse.org for more information.

OPENING THE EVENT: POSSIBLE TALKING POINTS

- Paper Tigers follows a year in the life of Lincoln Alternative High School which has radically changed its approach to disciplining its students after the principal learned about the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study.
- “Stressed brains can’t learn.” That was the nugget of neuroscience that Jim Sporleder, principal of Lincoln - which was riddled with violence, drugs and truancy - took away from an educational conference in 2010.
- Three years later, the number of fights at Lincoln had gone down by 75% and the graduation rate had increased five-fold.

- Despite the upheaval in their home lives, the students find the support they need at Lincoln to make academic progress and find less destructive ways of coping.
- As you watch the show tonight we want you to pay attention to:
 - What do you think key messages are? What stands out to you?
 - Are there individuals, scenes, images or lines that stand out for any particular reasons?
 - What feelings does it bring up?
 - What ideas for action does it bring up?
 - What resources are you familiar with that can help?

AFTER THE FILM: POSSIBLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

There may be some strong emotions in the room as the film ends. Acknowledge that by reflecting back to the audience what you're sensing.

I. (Raise your hands, or shout out- choose the format to best fit the size and mood of your audience) What are some different feelings the film raised in you?

NOTE: Always repeat individual comments or questions so all can hear. You don't need to comment on each but simply repeat or summarize so there is no frustration about others not hearing and so the speaker knows they were heard.

- What stood out?
- What do you believe the key messages in the film were?
- What is one thing you heard or saw that touched you?
- What one thing surprised you the most?
- How did learning about ACEs and the changes made at Lincoln impact how you look/feel about your work or life?
- What do you think you can do to play a role reducing ACEs and supporting healthy child and family development?

II. Linking Scenes in Paper Tigers to the key discussion points

How might we inspire community members of all kinds to stand-up and be an ally for those kids who are labeled as dysfunctional or different?

Teachable moment/example - Towards the end when Steven sends angry texts cursing everyone out, but the teachers know not to take it personally. Not taking the kids' actions personally is a key to being able to stay supportive to such angry kids, who do things to make people reject them to prove to themselves that their low self-image is accurate.

How can we help community members recognize trauma and build resilience for the children – and adults – impacted by ACEs through everyday actions?

Teachable moment/example – “The moment on the college visit trip where a young man (Steven) talks about what has happened and you see the potential.”

How do we help parents know that it’s okay to ask for help? And how do we ensure that community members offer it even when parents don’t ask, but obviously need it?

Teachable moment/example – “Science teacher Mr. Gordon teaching about ACEs Study, one student said ‘I’m already different’ and then teacher thought about it and said that your parents said that too... explaining that intergenerational cycle will perpetuate.”

What can we do to build social connections in our neighborhoods and communities?

Teachable moment/example – “When the film talks about co-location of clinic and high school and how that model works.”

What can we do if there is a child we know that needs our support, for example, one of your child’s friends?

Teachable moment/example – “One of the most important messages of this film is that rather than label kids for their behaviors, these teachers take the time to understand the underlying causes of the behavior.”

Ask people if they remember where the title *Paper Tigers* came from – this can help remind them how the damage done by experiencing ACEs changes children’s’ thought processes and behavior.

Also ask them if they think understanding the underlying causes for the behavior is enough to actually help people.

What do you think parents can do specifically to build strong bonds with their children?

Teachable moment/example – “Aron’s mother’s mental illness made it difficult, if not impossible, for her to parent well much of the time. Other parents had burdens too.”

How can we ensure that people exposed to multiple ACEs don’t lose hope?

Teachable moment/example – “The ‘aha’ moment in the film when kids realize they are not alone and so many of their peers have high scores.”

How can organizations change their systems to enhance healthy child development, for example, like the changes at Lincoln High related to their disciplinary actions and suspension policies?

Teachable moment/example from the film – “ ‘Aha’ moment for me was the discussion of in-school suspension, where suspending is saying ‘we don’t care about you - go home.’ In-school suspension says ‘we want you here; we want to know what is going on with you.’”

How do we support those community members – teachers, counselors, law enforcement – who are already playing a role in the lives of children and families?

Teachable moment – If folks know that principal Jim Sporleder left Lincoln Alternative High School, this is a good place to talk about the support he might have needed to continue. It’s important to be able to process the fact that many of the staff gave much more of their personal and emotional life than is typical. Discussion around boundaries, staff support and vicarious trauma are important additions.

In test screenings, some teachers have responded by saying this is expecting far too much from them. Use Paper Tigers as a call-to action for any and every organization serving children and youth to be trauma informed, making it clear that while this story is centered on an educational institution, there are roles for everyone to play, agreeing that the burden should not fall solely on the educational system.

CLOSING/CALLS-TO-ACTION – THE KEY TO OUR SUCCESS!

One of the reasons we showed Paper Tigers is to show the incredible value that loving, caring and nurturing relationships can have on kids who have experienced ACEs. We hope every viewer leaves feeling inspired to think about the role that they can play, as a citizen, a parent, a professional, a member of a civic or faith-based organization to ensure that every young person has access to what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) calls SSNRs – safe stable nurturing relationships. Note that the very high credibility of the CDC brand may be useful here.

Highlight and compliment ideas for action mentioned in response to questions you posed earlier in the discussion, add others that you may recall from past discussion groups.

Closing: explain....

- Where to get more information in your community.
- The content of the handouts you’re providing; what they will find at www.preventchildabuse.org/take-action/papertigers– where to get more, suggestions for distributing them.
- Who to contact to get involved.

- That you have their email addresses on the sign-in sheet to keep them apprised of the work in your community/state.

And remind them that they can...

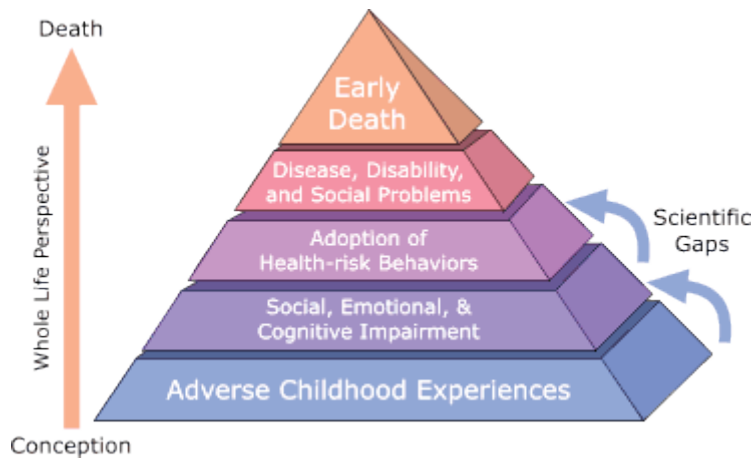
- Advocate for investments in prevention and treatment to build resilient communities.
- Be part of the solution in your personal and professional life.
- Speak up for children.
- Shape our future.
- Make a difference.

Thanks on behalf of your chapter and the communities and families you serve.

APPENDIX A:

Resources to Learn More about the ACE Study

WWW.ACESTUDY.ORG



WWW.ACESCONNECTION.ORG

ACEs Connection is a social network that accelerates the global movement toward recognizing the impact of adverse childhood experiences in shaping adult behavior and health, and reforming all communities and institutions – from schools to prisons to hospitals and churches – to help heal and develop resilience rather than to continue to traumatize already traumatized people.

THE UNITED STATES CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

<http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/>

THE PHILADELPHIA URBAN ACE STUDY

<http://www.instituteforsafefamilies.org/philadelphia-urban-ace-study>

Appendix B:

The Core Story of Child Development from The FrameWorks Institute

Prevent Child Abuse America sought to reframe its messaging to be more engaging based on research commissioned by the FrameWorks Institute. One outcome of these efforts is that Prevent Child Abuse America established a “Core Story of Early Child Development” as the foundation of all organizational communication. The FrameWorks research showed that this core story has the power to engage the public and help “move the dial” on policies that support all children and families.

This story is shared in more detail in Appendix B, but here we demonstrate how Paper Tigers can be used to illustrate key concepts of the core story:

1) **Frameworks Concept:** *Prosperity*

Child development is important for community development and economic development. According to this view, society’s ability to build capacities that are developed during childhood becomes the basis of a prosperous and sustainable society – from positive school achievement to work force skills to cooperative and lawful behavior.

Example from Paper Tigers: Kids that were at risk of dropping out of high school make it to college, careers and the promise of a brighter future!

2) **Frameworks Concept:** *Brain Architecture*

Neuroscience tells us that the basic architecture of the brain is constructed through an ongoing process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood. Much like the construction of a home, the architecture of the developing brain begins with laying the foundation, framing the rooms, and wiring the electrical system; and continues with the incorporation of distinctive features that reflect increasing individuality over time. As it emerges, the quality of that “brain architecture” establishes either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for all of the development and behavior that follows.

Example from Paper Tigers: The story behind the title of the film expresses how stress changes the brain. But the acts of caring, teaching and learning – which are highlighted throughout the film – further illustrate the possibility of change.

3) **Frameworks Concept:** *Skill Begets Skill*

Children’s brains are built “from the bottom up,” with simple circuits and skills providing the scaffolding for more advanced circuits and skills over time. According to this view, the circuits that underlie the ability to put words together to speak in phrases form a foundation for the subsequent mastery of reading a

written sentence in a book.

Example from Paper Tigers: Children are not born fully formed, we have the opportunity to build their brains through love and stimulating reciprocal relationships – or undermine that growth through neglect and lack of exposure to love, the world, healthy stable environments and learning.

4) **Frameworks Concept:** *Serve and Return*

Interactive influences of genes and experience shape the developing brain. The active ingredient is the “serve and return” relationships with their parents and other caregivers in their family or community. Like the process of serve and return in games such as tennis and volleyball, young children naturally reach out for interaction through babbling and facial expressions. If adults do not respond by getting in sync and doing the same kind of vocalizing and gesturing back at them, the child’s learning process is incomplete. This has negative implications for later learning.

Example from Paper Tigers: Kids learn from people they trust, but more than that, kids learn – and grow – when connections are made between them and adults they can trust – and like a tennis match, share ideas and support back and forth between them.

5) **Frameworks Concept:** *Can’t Do One Without the Other*

Paying attention to young children’s emotional and social needs as well as to their mastery of literacy and cognitive skills has the maximum impact on child development. According to this view, because the brain is a highly integrated organ and its multiple functions operate in a richly coordinated fashion, you cannot focus on developing just one part of the child without paying equal attention to the other capacities.

Example from Paper Tigers: School has to be more than standardized tests and having the ability to ace math. Not being given the opportunity and guidance to enhance social emotional learning leaves a child with only half of what is needed to grow and prosper.

6) **Frameworks Concept:** *Toxic Stress*

“Toxic stress”, or the over exposure of a developing brain to stress hormones in early childhood is associated with such things as extreme poverty, abuse, or severe maternal depression and damages the developing brain. It is important to distinguish among three kinds of stress. We do not need to worry about positive stress which is short-lived stress, like getting immunized. Tolerable stress is made tolerable by the presence of supportive relationships, like a strong family when a loved one dies. But toxic stress lasts longer, lacks consistent supportive relationships and leads to lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and both physical and mental health.

Example from Paper Tigers: The students in Paper Tigers are all exposed to either violence, poverty, mental and physical healthy challenges, unstable homes, or some combination thereof. Our challenge is to prevent these things from occurring in the first place. School is one place to do so, though it needs to start sooner than high school.

7) **Frameworks Concept:** *Pay Now or Pay Later*

Trying to change behavior or build new skills on a foundation of brain circuits that were not wired properly when they were first formed requires more work and is less effective. According to this view, remedial education, clinical treatment, and other professional interventions are more costly and produce less desirable outcomes than the provision of nurturing, protective relationships and appropriate learning experiences earlier in life.

Example from Paper Tigers: Kids were thinking of going on public assistance and a lifetime of public assistance is surely more expensive than supportive, remedial serves. And yet, even more than that, these students are all at risk of mental and physical challenges that are a drain on services, result in lower productivity on the job and being less prepared to be the responsible, productive adults.

COMMON MESSAGE

Utilizing this story, we can create common messages that focus on the need to understand brain structure, and the idea that supporting healthy child development cannot all be on one person's shoulders – it takes a community of engaged community members to support the healthy development of children, promoting a healthy prosperous future both for the child and the community.

APPENDIX C:

Potential Responses to Difficult Audience Members or Questions

*Consider responses to Difficult Audience Members/Questions.**

- **Stuck/Repeated Point:** If someone is stuck on a point that is not helpful to the discussion, acknowledge you've heard them but need to move on.
- **Dominator:** If someone is dominating the discussion, try stating: "Thank you for your input. We've heard from you, I'd now like to hear from more people here. Are there others who have a question or a point to make?"
- **Anger/Intense Emotion:** If someone is really angry or expressing another strong emotion: try "reflective listening," that is reflecting back the emotion that is being expressed. For example: "I can see/hear that you are really _____. These issues can tap into really strong feelings. (If the person is combative). I respect your feelings and your point of view, but I want to make sure this is a space where everyone feels safe and respected so we need to move on. If you'd like, we can chat after the event."
- **Left Field:** If someone came to make a certain point that has little or nothing to do with the film and/or discussion, remind them that people came to watch Paper Tigers and discuss the ACE Study and you need to bring the discussion back to the point. If you want or feel a need, offer to meet with the person later.
- **Disclosures:** If someone says "that happened to me too," acknowledge that can be difficult to talk about, there are likely others who've also experienced traumatic events who haven't mentioned it and –depending on the situation one or more of the following may help:
 - There are people here who you can talk to more (note the information in preparing for the discussion on identifying helpers).
 - I'm here for a while after the discussion if you want to talk more.
 - Thank you for acknowledging your truth. One prevention strategy is allowing for those who want to talk about what happened to them to not be silenced and to know their voices matter in building a movement to end the harm.



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Prevent Child Abuse America, founded in 1972 and based in Chicago, works to ensure the

healthy development of children nationwide. The organization promotes that vision through a network of chapters in all 50 states and over 660 Healthy Families America home visitation sites in 39 states, and the U.S. territories. A major organizational focus is to advocate for the existence of a national policy framework and strategy for children and families while promoting evidence-based practices that prevent abuse and neglect from ever occurring. To learn more about what we're doing to prevent child abuse and neglect and how you can help, please visit our websites **www.preventchildabuse.org** and **www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org**.

Paper Tigers depicts the dramatic transformation in troubled teens when the staff at their school incorporates the findings from the ACE Studies into their education and support services. Prevent Child Abuse America is proud to partner with the producers because we believe that every child – and teen- deserves a great childhood because all children - and teens - are our future!

Download resources related to Paper Tigers and the ACE studies; please visit: **www.preventchildabuse.org/take-action/papertigers**