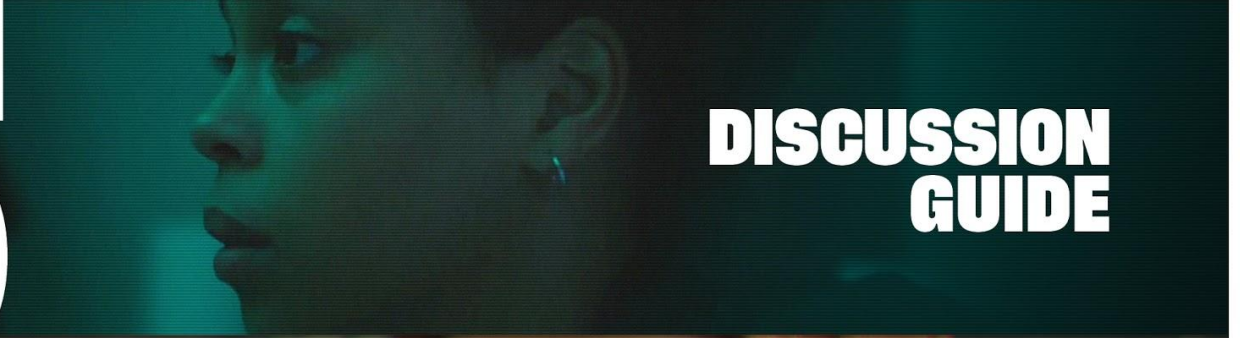


# THE FIRST STEPS OF US



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# Introduction

## About the Film

*The Rest of Us* is a narrative feature film about student resilience in the face of a mental health crisis on a college campus. The film candidly follows Amy, an introverted engineering student whose resistance — and resilience — provides inspiration to those who are left behind.

Learn more at <http://therestofus.live>.

### Please be aware.

If you feel that your mental health could be compromised by viewing a film about what happens at a university in reaction to student suicides on campus, please choose not to watch or watch with a family member or close friend. *The Rest of Us* is meant to galvanize even the most vulnerable among us. It is not meant to encourage self-harm. If you feel self-harm is an option or you are considering self-harm, please know that we care about you. We encourage you to call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-8255 or rely on other important resources provided below.

## Director's Statement

Set against the backdrop of 9/11, *The Rest of Us* captures the tectonic shifts that have occurred in the past 20 years in the divided world we often witness and its impact on youth mental health. Young adults have experienced anxiety and thoughts of suicide at unprecedented rates and technology has caused new levels of social isolation and depression across this traumatic landscape.

The impact of racism, including structural racism, on the emotional and economic wellbeing of students of color has led to further mental health inequities for these communities.



The script of the film was based on a devising process where a group of diverse student activists and socially engaged actors were invited to participate in several days of improvising and storytelling, in order to best capture the turn-of-the-century dynamics that have reshaped the boundaries of young people's lives. The devisers were instrumental in creating a story about collective trauma but also resilience, with a focus on a few key themes: suicide prevention, mental health, oppression, and social identity.

When we set out to make the *The Rest of Us*, we intentionally wanted to capture the struggle of the living, both to prevent another suicide, but also to encourage resiliency in a traumatized community. Knowing that suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people in the United States — and is often addressed in the media in ways that can promote contagion — the film focuses on those who used the power of their creativity and intelligence to discover the means for preventing devastating loss.

*-Linda G. Mills*

# How to Use this Guide

This guide is a tool to support house and community screenings of the film, *The Rest of Us*. The film, guide, and conversations it aims to foster are an opportunity for communities to address resilience, mental health, and suicide prevention, with an emphasis on the unique needs of students of color. Although the issues addressed in *The Rest of Us* are specific to the film, the themes are universal and can apply to students as young as middle school and beyond, as well as to parents and educators.

## TIPS FOR FACILITATING CONVERSATIONS

*The Rest of Us* arrives at a time when college students in our country experience rising rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. The hope is that this film and the conversations will galvanize both new and engaged audiences to understand the importance of diverse representation regarding student mental health and how to take action in addressing equity. Reviewing these guidelines beforehand will help you prepare for a productive conversation.

- **Give Space to Process:** View the film before your event and give yourself time to reflect so you aren't dealing with raw emotions at the same time that you are trying to facilitate a discussion. You may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen as well.
- **Create a Space for Cultivating Self Care and Resilience:** As a facilitator, you are creating a space for self care and resiliency. It may be important to have a mental health or student affairs professional present.
- **Establish a Respectable Space:** Be open, honest, present and willing to learn, actively listen, unconditionally respect one another, hold no judgments of each other, and ALWAYS have mental health resources available in case people need them.

# Key Themes

***The Rest of Us*** explores a range of issues that may need time to process. As a facilitator, you may give viewers an opportunity to begin the conversation by focusing, as the film does, on the characters' backgrounds and on the themes of Resilience and Self-Care, Combating Loneliness, and Communication and Technology. All of these are timely topics that are universally being explored regarding student mental health and suicide prevention.

## Resilience and Self-Care

Personal resilience has [proven](#) to be effective in positively impacting mental and physical well-being and fostering development. Practices of self-care are vital to building resilience towards managing trauma, stress, and anxiety among youth.

***The Rest of Us*** tackles suicide among young people in a way that is designed to focus on the resilience of those who are left behind and on the power of their creativity, intelligence, and resistance to discover the means for preventing suicide.

## Combating Loneliness

According to a report from the World Economic Forum, loneliness is a growing issue with serious health concerns. Young adults who are [18-22 years old](#) score the highest in feeling alone and isolated from others. However, having positive social interactions contributes to happiness, decreased stress, and lower levels of depression.

A key theme explored in ***The Rest of Us*** is how the value of creating meaningful relationships and communities of support can contribute to students feeling they are not alone in their struggles.

## Communication & Technology

[Studies](#) have confirmed that social media is associated with increases in depression and anxiety. With teens' "real" self in conflict with their "virtual" self, meaningful communication is sometimes lost. ***The Rest of Us*** serves to remind us that meaningful communication can help people find community and healing.

# Talking Points and Important Facts

## Relevant Statistics

- As of [2018](#), suicide became the second leading cause of death in Black children aged 10-14, and the third leading cause of death in Black adolescents aged 15-19.
- Among college students with clinically significant mental health problems, [nearly half of white students](#) received treatment as compared to 25% of African American and Asian students and nearly 33% of Latinx students.
- [Students of color](#) face increasing challenges to college persistence with lower graduation rates, which has been linked to mental health issues. It is essential to understand the mental health and wellbeing needs of racially diverse students to ensure their academic success.
- American Indian/Alaska Native adults were at highest risk for suicide attempts in [2018](#), followed by Black and Hispanic adults. Among AI/AN populations, suicide rates peak during adolescence and young adulthood.
- In [2019](#), 46% of LGBTQ youth reported wanting psychological or emotional counseling from a mental health professional, but were unable to receive it in the past 12 months.
- [52%](#) of Arab/Arab American students reported knowledge of mental health resources on campus, compared to 70% of White students. It is critical to rethink mental health initiatives on college campuses to ensure that student resources are accessible and without harmful stigmas.
- [Recent data](#) found that 46% of students of color are significantly more likely to agree with the statement, “I often feel isolated on my campus,” compared to 30% of White students. Schools should reconsider how they can foster a sense of belonging for students of color through a philosophy that emphasizes community and related programming.
- Over the last decade, the [percentage of students seeking mental-health care](#) has almost doubled. The need for care may outweigh the resources of college counseling centers. Professors and other school professionals can play an important role in recognizing students at risk and stepping in with help and support.

## Terminology Guide

USE THIS	NOT THIS	WHY?
'non fatal' or 'made an attempt on his/her life'	'unsuccessful suicide'	to avoid presenting suicide as a desired outcome or glamorising a suicide attempt
'took their own life', 'died by suicide' or 'ended their own life'	'successful suicide'	to avoid presenting suicide as a desired outcome
'died by suicide' or 'deaths by suicide'	'committed' or 'commit suicide'	to avoid association between suicide and 'crime' or 'sin' that may alienate some people
'concerning rates of suicide' or 'cluster of deaths'	'suicide epidemic'	to avoid sensationalism and inaccuracy

**\*NOTE:** For more information and guidance when messaging to the public about a suicide, please refer to these specific [Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide](#) and the guiding [framework](#) by the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention.



## Responses to Common Questions About Suicide Contagion and Mental Health

### What is the best way for schools to address issues related to suicide on college campuses?

According to the National Association of School Psychologists', memorials after suicide [should](#) be “temporary, nonrenewable, or in the form of a living memorial (e.g., monetary donation to charity or research, purchase of a suicide prevention program for students).” Compared to permanent memorials that may highlight the event, this kind of acknowledgement will help turn the focus to a benefit that supports surviving students.

### Why are suicide memorials unhelpful?

Certain types of memorials can cause suicide contagion because they can inadvertently encourage vulnerable people to seek a similar outcome, hoping that they too will be celebrated because they have died.

### How should schools deal with students and parents that demand memorials?

Encourage students to contribute to a memory book. The Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide [describes](#) them as a book held at a counselor or wellness center office where students can write and share memories about the deceased, to be gifted to the family members.

Parents of the deceased often find solace by connecting with “survivor parents” who share the experience and can provide deeper understanding. [Local chapters of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#) can help identify survivor parents to engage in these important and sensitive conversations.

### Why should faculty and students care about the *The Rest of Us*?

Recent studies have shown that [1 in 5 college students](#) are so stressed that they considered suicide. This is amplified further for Students of Color / LGBT students. Colleges and universities can provide clear structured policies and systems to help support students' mental health and identify students at risk, in order to get them the help they need. We can work together to build response systems that work.

Students face a variety of mental health challenges in their own lives and in the lives of their peers. A campus' reaction to a death by suicide can be frustrating to students. *The Rest of Us* is helpful viewing for students, administrators and faculty because it shows the prevalence and seriousness of mental health concerns, encourages thoughtful responses and addresses the issue of contagion.

# Post-Screening Discussion

## Character Guide

### Amy

*“For a wireless communications major, you’re pretty bad at communicating.”*

Amy is an introverted college student who struggles to communicate her feelings and at times, comes off stoic. In the face of a campus mental health crisis in which two people close to her take their own lives, she’s forced to grapple with her inner turmoil. Together with her new photographer friend Cal, Amy uses her thesis project to find her self-confidence. In the end, we see Amy as strong and resilient, having found her voice amidst the trauma she resists.

### Stayci

*“Sometimes I wish I could get hit by a Mack Truck, you know? Just to stop time a little bit.”*

Stayci is Amy’s close friend and is dating Chris. However, in the first part of the film, it is revealed that she harbors romantic feelings for Amy. Stayci feels the pressure to excel in her studies and create the perfect thesis. Her death is the first to send the campus into a mental health crisis and eventually a contagion.

### Chris

*“Don’t patronize me.”*

Chris is Stayci’s boyfriend who struggles to process his emotions after Stayci dies. He is determined to find a way to memorialize her, but argues with Dean Patterson over how to do so. When his feelings are misunderstood, he’s locked in his own world of loss. Chris reminds us that we have an obligation to try to reach everyone affected by a tragic death, even those reluctant to seek help.

### Cal

*“I’m...Callie if you...like to name people from where they’re from...California.”*

Cal is an aspiring photographer and “super senior” with quick-witted reactions and a sarcastic streak. He becomes Amy’s best friend, encouraging her to be unapologetic and bold. Always looking to make a dramatic statement, Cal shakes up the campus with “Smile Series,” his own uninformed but well-intentioned response to the traumatic events.

### Dean Patterson

*“I’m not an institution. I’m a person.”*

Dean Patterson is the head of Blair University who oversees the response to the suicide contagion on campus. Though seemingly composed, she worries about how to address the events, particularly how memorials might impact the mental health of her most vulnerable students. She feels responsible for each student’s death and helpless to prevent future tragedies from her position. Patterson’s character reminds us that even authority figures don’t have all the answers and

that they are just as susceptible to emotional outburst as anyone else.

## **Maddie**

*“She was always smiling.”*

Maddie is a transfer student from New York City who lived near the World Trade Center when 9/11 happened. Unbeknownst to her peers, she suffers from depression, insomnia, and a family history of death by suicide. Though she appears to be “always smiling,” she feels increasingly isolated, vulnerable, and anxious as the mental health crisis on campus unfolds. Her character evokes the question: How do we better detect suicidal thoughts in young people?

## **Reina**

*“I’m not going back.”*

Reina is one of the few Muslim students at Blair University. Ostracized by her peers after the 9/11 attacks, she struggles to cope with constant name-calling and bullying related to her hijab. Reina feels alone in her situation and subsequently drops out of school. Her character reminds us that many suffer in silence, and we need to not only identify those who might feel marginalized, but also create mechanisms for their support.

## **Professor Perzada**

*“I’m Muslim...or um... my parents are.”*

Professor Perzada, who is just starting as a faculty member at Blair University, is a Muslim but hasn’t shared that part of his identity more broadly, given the threats he feels post-9/11. He is torn between his desire to protect his students and concerns for his own safety.

## **Marcus**

*“You may have heard the extremely sad news that one of your classmates, Marcus Jaffe, died by suicide.”*

Marcus is the second student to die; students never actually meet him. Students are informed of his death via a Dean’s memo slipped under their doors. This is another example of what “not” to do in addressing a suicide on a college campus.

## **Ted Harrison**

*“If you or anyone you know is experiencing these symptoms, I encourage you, please come see me. My door is open.”*

Ted Harrison is the head of counseling and mental health services at Blair University, but most students have no idea he exists until he begins to visit classrooms after a student death. He informs students of the recent deaths but only helps by offering pamphlets. His insensitivity towards students and inability to facilitate any meaningful discussion around mental health prompt Dean Patterson to fire him. Harrison’s character suggests that leadership is tested during crises, and we must not be afraid to act decisively to protect our communities.

## Themed Discussion Questions

Discussion questions are broken down into the three major themes of the film. You do not have to ask all questions during your session. You should select and tailor questions that are most relevant to your group. Having a mental health professional present or available can be very helpful in this kind of group discussion.

### Resilience & Self-Care

- How does Cal's art and his proactivity to find a solution garner a sense of purpose and an opportunity for self-discovery for him and his peers?
- In what ways do you see Amy's vulnerability as an opportunity for self-discovery that helps her keep things in perspective?
- In the wake of a traumatic event, such as 9/11, how do we build positive community relations, particularly for vulnerable populations that are already facing adversity?
- How can schools promote inclusive, self-care principles and practices to self-regulate?

### Combating Loneliness

- In what ways does Amy and Cal's friendship facilitate support and care for one another, recognizing that humor and play is a useful respite?
- What can parents, like Amy's father, and loved ones do to support and address the loneliness that their student is combating?
- How do we encourage people who are experiencing emotional isolation to seek help? How do we help them believe that their needs can be met?
- How can campuses cultivate a culture of connection and wellbeing that is accessible to all races, ethnicities, abilities, socioeconomic statuses, ages, sexual orientations, gender expressions, religions, cultures, and languages?

### Communication & Technology

- Throughout the film, how do you see Amy use technology as a frontier for mental health support and data collection to ensure a better understanding of student needs?
- How do you see technology impact the way you communicate and the authentic relationships you are able to create?
- Many characters in the film struggle to communicate their feelings and mask their emotional distress. Why is it important to reach out and have open communication with others? What kinds of technology can be helpful in facilitating this effort?
- In what ways do you see faculty and administrators building a network of support for students through both technology and human communication?

## TAKE ACTION

### Share the Film

*The Rest of Us* is a great tool to spark important discussions about addressing inequity in mental health, encouraging connectivity, and raising awareness about suicide prevention, with a particular focus on the needs of students of color.

The film is available via [iTunes](#), [GooglePlay](#), [Amazon](#), [VUDU](#) and [FandangoNow](#), DISH, and Comcast OnDemand.



# Rethink Mental Health Equity

A screening of *The Rest of Us* is an opportunity to bring people - students, parents, educators, administrators - together to rethink how to address mental health inequities among college students.

There are many resources available to help facilitate these discussions and provide practical, actionable strategies for mental health professionals, educators, administrators, and parents:

<b>Equity in Mental Health Framework</b>	The JED Foundation and The Steven Fund have created a <a href="#">comprehensive set of recommendations and implementation strategies</a> that colleges and universities can use to face disparities and support the mental health of students of color.
<b>“Widening the Lens”: A Racial Equity Toolkit</b>	The MCSP (Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention) Alliance designed a <a href="#">toolkit</a> , incorporating a social justice and racial equity lens, to address suicide prevention and mental health.
<b>Improving Cultural Competencies Guide</b>	SAMHSA curated a <a href="#">report</a> on how to build cultural competence designed for prevention professionals, behavioral health clinicians, educators, and other healthcare and social service professionals.
<b>Adapting &amp; Innovating to Promote Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing of Young People of Color</b>	The Steve Fund created an <a href="#">implementation guide</a> for both higher education institutions and workplaces to promote wellbeing among young people of color.
<b>Young, Gifted, @ Risk and Resilient Toolkit</b>	This <a href="#">video toolkit</a> by practitioners and scholars provides faculty and staff to foster a learning environment that supports students of color.

# Resources for Support

## Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)

<b>The Steve Fund</b>	An organization dedicated to supporting the mental health and emotional well-being of young people of color, including adolescents, college students, and young adults and their families.
<b>Ourselves Black</b>	A biannual, mental health resource platform providing information on promoting mental health and developing positive coping mechanisms within the Black community through a podcast, an online magazine, and online discussion groups.
<b>Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective (BEAM)</b>	An organization fostering education, training, advocacy, and the creative arts with the goal of removing the barriers Black people experience gaining access to or staying connected with emotional health care and healing.
<b>Dear Black Women Project</b>	An affirmation movement for Black women by Black women, offering a care package of over 400 mental health resources, affirmation letters, healing playlists, and moments of Black Girl Love and Joy.
<b>One Sky Center</b>	A national resource center for American Indigenous and Alaskan Indigenous communities for access to health, education, and research, with current initiatives such as a Native-to-Native Mentorship program.
<b>AVAILABLE 24/7 Stronghearts Native Helpline 844.762.8483</b>	A safe, confidential, and anonymous domestic, dating, and sexual violence helpline for American Indians and Alaska Natives, offering culturally-appropriate support and advocacy.

### **Indian Country Child Trauma Center**

A space established to develop trauma-related treatment protocols, outreach materials, and service delivery guidelines specifically designed for American Indian and Alaska Native children and their families.

## **Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI)**

### **The Asian Mental Health Project**

Aims to educate and empower the Pan-Asian community seeking mental healthcare by de-stigmatizing mental illness and providing resources such as educational programming, community events, and partnerships.

### **Asian American Suicide Prevention & Education**

A resource dedicated to aiding the Asian American community in identifying suicide factors, debunking myths about mental health, and offering educational resources and places to seek professional help in New York.

### **Asian Mental Health Collective**

Aspires to normalize and de-stigmatize mental health within the Asian community by addressing culturally specific barriers, with the help of online and in-person support groups.

### **South Asian Mental Health Initiative & Network**

A nonprofit that addresses the mental health needs of the South Asian community in the U.S., providing resources on South Asian culture and mental health, as well as programs such as the Janani Suicide Loss Survivor Support Group and South Asian Alcoholics Anonymous.

### **Chinese Community Helpers Program**

A community peer support program providing services such as emotional support, referral, help to establish goals such as better self-care and social engagement, and knowledge on problem solving, mental health and community resources.



## LGBTQ+ Community

<b>Family Acceptance Project</b>	A research, intervention, education, and policy initiative that works to prevent health and mental health risks for LGBTQ+ children and youth, including suicide, homelessness, drug use and HIV – in the context of their families, cultures and faith communities.
<b>I'm From Driftwood</b>	An archive of LGBTQ+ stories from all over the world, with the aim of helping LGBTQ+ people learn more about their community through the power of storytelling and story sharing.
<b>It Gets Better Project</b>	A nonprofit organization that uplifts, empowers, and connects LGBTQ+ youth around the globe with inspiring media programming and access to an arsenal of community-based service providers.
<b>LGBT National Youth Talkline 800-246-7743</b>	Free and confidential peer support for the LGBTQ+ and questioning community ages 25 and younger to discuss concerns including gender and/or sexuality identities, bullying, isolation, family issues, HIV/AIDS concerns, suicide, and much more.
<b>The Trevor Project</b> <small>AVAILABLE 24/7</small> <b>The Trevor Lifeline 866-488-7386</b>	A nonprofit organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services for LGBTQ+ youth and young adults, as well as guidance and resources to parents and educators in order to foster safe, accepting, and inclusive environments for all youth.
<small>AVAILABLE 24/7</small> <b>Trans Lifeline</b>	A hotline available in the U.S. and Canada staffed by transgender people for transgender people. Primarily for trans people in a crisis,

**(U.S.) 877-565-8860**  
**(Canada) 877-330-6366**

from struggling with gender identity to thoughts of self-harm.

## General

AVAILABLE 24/7

**National Suicide Prevention  
Lifeline**  
**1-800-273-8255**

A national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.

**Jed Foundation**

A nonprofit organization that protects emotional health and prevents suicide for teens and young adults, partnering with U.S. high schools and colleges to strengthen their mental health, substance misuse, and suicide prevention programs and systems.

**Active Minds**

A nonprofit organization dedicated to raising mental health awareness and education among college students, as well as the building of stronger families and communities, via peer-to-peer dialogue and interaction.

**Anxiety and Depression  
Association of America**

A nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing awareness and improving the diagnosis, treatment, and cure of anxiety and stress-related disorders in children and adults.

**S.A.F.E. Alternatives**  
**800-366-8288**

A nationally recognized treatment approach, professional network, and educational resource base committed to helping people achieve an end to self-injurious behavior.

<p><b>The Alliance for Eating Disorders Awareness</b></p>	<p>A national nonprofit organization dedicated to outreach, education, early intervention, support, and advocacy for all eating disorders; offers programs and services including educational presentations, free weekly therapist-led support groups, and referrals.</p>
<p><b>Eating for Life</b></p>	<p>A resource for universities, their students, and families dedicated to connecting college communities to eating disorder information, protocols, and national experts in the field.</p>
<p><b>Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance</b></p>	<p>A comprehensive resource for people in the U.S. who live with mood disorders, providing education, tools, peer support, and a wealth of inspiring stories to help people pursue their own path to wellness.</p>

**\*NOTE:** For a more comprehensive list of resources and national and state-specific hotlines, visit the [Suicide Prevention Resource Guide](#), produced by the Central East Prevention Technology Transfer Center.



## COLLABORATORS



Central East (HHS Region 3)

**MHTTC**

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network  
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration



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