

SESSION 2: FINDING COMMONALITIES

*How is your life similar to the characters in *The Amendment* movie? How are your life experiences similar to your groupmates'?*



The Amendment is based on the true story of Brooks and Leslie Douglass (left). Brooks co-authored the movie with director Paul Brown. Leslie worked with them and actress Taryn Manning to share her perspective of their story.

INTRODUCTIONS

Welcome to the Amendment Trauma Recovery Group. This class is dedicated to trauma survivors, people who have experienced intense fear, pain, and/or loss in the face of overwhelming force. Each chapter of this guide is designed to help you move from surviving to thriving and learn to enjoy the life you were born to live.

- ***Please tell us more about you. What is your name, occupation (if applicable), and something that you most enjoy doing (could be a hobby, profession, talent)?***

BEHIND THE SCENES

Many people who have experienced trauma and watch *The Amendment* say, “*That wasn’t just a movie. That was my life.*” *The Amendment* movie presents the raw stages of grief, loss and recovery, giving others the opportunity to objectively watch Brooks and Leslie live through many of the same emotions and roadblocks they have known since their own traumatic event(s). Within the movie, the audience watches Brooks and Leslie’s idyllic and innocent childhood followed by the tragic aftermath of a senseless crime.

Like many trauma survivors, Brooks and Leslie exhibit common symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), namely emotional numbness, nightmares and flashbacks, hyper-alertness/anxiety, and insufficient coping strategies.² The following chapters breakdown each of these aspects of trauma recovery into research-based discussions and activities designed to recognize symptoms of trauma damage and rebuild healthy habits of mind, body, spirit, and relationships.

Each class will start with a clip from the movie that relates to the lesson theme and additional “behind the scenes” info not included in the movie.

Before watching this session's movie clip, take a minute to look at the butterfly on the cover of this guide (also on the first PowerPoint slide).

- What do you notice about the pictures? How are the pictures on the left wing different than the pictures on the right wing? What do you see in the centerpiece?
- What do you remember of the butterfly from the movie?



This glass butterfly symbolizes the “before” and “after” of a painful event. The centerpiece is the event that changed the structure of the butterfly. Mathematician Edward Lorenz originally coined the phrase “butterfly effect” to describe the phenomenon when one small change sets off a chain of events that result in a significantly different outcome.

MOVIE CLIP — *Play Session 2: Finding Commonalities*

As you watch this clip, think about how many different ways Brooks' and Leslie's lives changed from loss they experienced.

FUN FACT: The blonde girl in the right wing is our [Julea's and Brooks'] real daughter. She and our son played Leslie's young kids in one scene. Though the right wing of this butterfly shows sad scenes of the Douglass Family's life—there have been many happy scenes since, many of which include Richard and Marilyn's grandchildren (Brooks' and Leslie's children ☺). Their love lives on in many ways.

THINK-PAIR-SHARE

[First, write responses to the questions below (*think*), then share your responses with a partner (*pair*) then discuss the questions as a group (*share*):

- 1) What was your overall impression of the movie, *The Amendment*? After the movie, what scenes stayed with you the most?

- 2) Which character did you relate to most in the movie—Brooks, Leslie, the reporter, or someone else and why?

- 3) Think back to the flashback scenes of Brooks and Leslie when they were children and teenagers.
 - a) How would you describe Brooks' personality when he was younger (before the crime)?

 - b) How would you describe Leslie's personality when she was younger (before the crime)?

 - c) What was their relationship like with each other when they were kids?

- 4) Now think about scenes of Brooks and Leslie when they were adults.
 - a) How would you describe Brooks' personality when he was older (after the crime)?

 - b) How would you describe Leslie's personality when she was older (after the crime)?

 - c) What was their relationship like with each other when they were adults?

CLASS DISCUSSION

Brooks' and Leslie's adult lives exhibit many of the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a common physical, biological, and psychological response to surviving traumatic experiences². Common symptoms of PTSD include:

- Nightmares or flashbacks of past traumatic events
- Trouble sleeping
- Emotional numbness (inability to feel intense emotions)
- Fear of the unknown and/or situations that remind them of the trauma
- Irritability or angry outbursts
- Difficulty staying focused or concentrating
- Isolation from others

Discuss as a class:

- ***Can you think of examples when Brooks or Leslie exhibited any of these characteristics in the movie?*** Please share examples from the movie.

In the upcoming meetings we will be discussing many of the characteristics of PTSD and will explore how these same patterns may be affecting your daily life.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION

Why did you sign up for this class? Please list three goals you have for this class.

Personal Goal #1:

Personal Goal #2:

Personal Goal #3:

- **Go around the room and share at least one of your personal goals from this class experience.**

CLASS GUIDELINES

This class is designed to be a cohesive and supportive group. It is important that all members feel valued, heard, and respected. To that end, **confidentiality is crucial**. What is discussed in this group, stays in this group. You can tell your story to others, but not your groupmates' stories. Those belong to them and need to be respected.

Also, **please share speaking time equally among all group members**. If there are 10 members in the group, everyone should talk 1/10th of the time. Which means, if you are a big talker, you

will need to challenge yourself to talk less and listen more. And if you are not a big talker, you will need to challenge yourself to speak up and share your viewpoint. Discussion groups can be a wonderful opportunity to learn from each other and develop new friendships.

HOMework

Please bring a picture of yourself from before the traumatic event(s) in your life occurred. Choose a picture that captures your personality and hopes for your future. If you can't find a picture, draw or write a description of what that picture would look like. We will share these pictures in the next class.

“FROM BROOKS” SECTION

Brooks has walked, and is still walking, on the road back from trauma and wanted to join you in your journey. Each session includes an interview with him reflecting on his own steps toward recovery.

What would you say to someone who is trying to recover from trauma or loss?



FROM BROOKS: *You can't rush getting through it. For a while it's about putting one step in front of the other—or trying to. For every two steps, you feel like you take one step backward. But you do get through it—one day at a time, one piece at a time. There are different things to overcome. Sometimes it's the physical part and sometimes it's the emotional part. You've got to pick one and get through it—first the physical then the emotional and psychological pieces. Then it's about trying to go forward and create a new life. If it's going back to work or to school, you've got to move forward. It's not just about the getting over what's happened but about trying to start new.*

I don't think it's time that necessarily heals—although that's part of it and it does help—but more than anything it's about trying to build good, positive, and happy experiences where you laugh and have fun. The more of those you can put between where you are now and what's happened, the more quickly I think you can rebuild.

*You've got to have the hope and the understanding that **there is good to come**. At the end of the day, it's about persevering, and if you do, it's worth it. It's not easy but it's worth it.*

²Herman, Judith. (1997). *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence--from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. Basic Books.