



Facilitated Discussion Guide

National
Fatherhood
Initiative®

Contents

Introduction	3
How to Use the Film	3
How to Use the Guide	4
Questions about the Film for Everyone	6
General Questions	6
From Coley’s Perspective	7
From Ahmarr’s Perspective	9
The Reunion	11
Questions for Dads (Currently Incarcerated)	12
Questions for Dads (Formerly Incarcerated)	16
Questions for Children (Dad Currently Incarcerated)	20
Questions for Children (Dad Formerly Incarcerated)	22

Introduction

Thank you for acquiring the film *Out of the Ashes: Where a Seed Finds Life* (OA).

National Fatherhood Initiative® (NFI) is proud to partner with Out of the Ashes, LLC (Newark, DE) to offer this fantastic resource. If you've already reviewed the film, you already know how valuable a resource it will prove to be for your efforts to connect fathers and their children, heart to heart. If you haven't already viewed it, you are in for a treat.

Out of the Ashes is a powerful 32-minute film—a one-act play, of sorts—written by and that stars Ahmarr Melton and Coley Harris. In 1994, at the age of 21, Coley was incarcerated for 14 years in prisons within the Delaware Department of Correction. Ahmarr, Coley's son, was only 2 years old when Coley was incarcerated. They reunited in 2008 when Ahmarr was 16. This film chronicles the struggle both men faced as they navigated their separation and reunion. Consequently, it symbolizes the struggle faced by incarcerated fathers and their children.

How to Use the Film

This film and discussion guide is ideal for use by individuals and organizations that work with incarcerated fathers, children of incarcerated parents, and family members of incarcerated fathers (e.g. partners/wives and incarcerated fathers' parents) while fathers are still incarcerated or after their release (e.g. as part of a reentry program). Use the film and guide as a stand-alone resource or integrate them with curricula/programs, which the film and guide complement (e.g. NFI's [InsideOut Dad](#)® and [24/7 Dad](#)® programs).

You can also use the film and this guide for work with groups of fathers and children (or other family members) in which you facilitate a free-flowing discussion. You can also use them for individual work with fathers and children (e.g. in a case management or an individual coaching setting). If you want to use them for individual work, you could, for example, ask a father or child to watch the film with you (or alone) and then ask the father or child the questions of your choosing. You could also use the DVD and guide as a self-paced resource by having a father or child watch the film and then write their answers to the questions, all at their own pace or by a specific deadline. (You could copy and paste the questions of your choosing from this guide into a document for the father or child to use.) Then you could review the answers and discuss them with the father or child.

How to Use the Guide

This guide includes questions that help incarcerated fathers, their children, and family members explore the issues, thoughts, and feelings caused by the father absence associated with incarceration. The questions fall into three categories:

1) Questions about the Film for Everyone: Ask these questions of incarcerated fathers and children. These questions are non-threatening because they allow fathers and children to explore the issues, thoughts, and feelings expressed by Coley and Ahmarr rather than directly exploring their own issues, thoughts, and feelings about their own experience being incarcerated (in the case of fathers) or having a father incarcerated (in the case of children). Consider using these questions first to lay a foundation for fathers and children to explore their own experience as they answer questions from the other two categories, respectively. Use these questions if you show the film to family members of incarcerated fathers (other than their children).

The questions follow the flow of the film starting with general questions about viewers' reactions to the film. Those questions are followed by questions about the perspectives of Coley and Ahmarr and then about their reunion. Because some of the questions ask viewers about specific details of the film, those questions are followed by a "Facilitator Note" that provides the answer.

2) Questions for Dads: Ask these questions of incarcerated fathers or formerly incarcerated fathers. (The questions are divided into those two sub-categories. The questions in each sub-category are very similar, but there are some differences.) The questions help these fathers process their thoughts and feelings about the separation from their children, the quality of the relationships with their children and their children's main caregiver (e.g. mother or children's grandparents), what they've done to be a better father and partner, and what they've done (or did) to prepare themselves for reentering their children's lives.

3) Questions for Children: Ask these questions of the children of incarcerated fathers or formerly incarcerated fathers. (The questions are divided into those two sub-categories. The questions in each sub-category are very similar, but there are some differences.) The questions help these children process their thoughts and feelings about the separation from their father, the quality of the relationship with their father, what they've done (or did) to cope with having an incarcerated father, and what they've done to avoid going down the same path that led their father to prison/jail.

INTRODUCTION

We designed this guide with flexibility and customization in mind. As a result, the questions are not numbered. You can ask any question from any category at any time. If you start by asking some questions in the “Questions about the Film for Everyone” category, for example, some questions in the second and third categories might become natural follow-up questions depending on how viewers respond. After you use the film and guide several times, build in new questions. You could add questions, for example, that explore the impact of having an incarcerated father on sons versus daughters.

In addition to primary questions (designated by **PQ**), this guide includes probing questions (designated by **PROBE**) that allow you to help fathers and children to more deeply explore issues, thoughts, and feelings based on how they answer the primary questions. The primary questions follow a natural flow (i.e. from general to specific and non-threatening to more intimate), but feel free to ask the questions in any order that seems to make sense based on how the discussion progresses.

There are a lot of questions, so don't expect or try to ask all of them. Your ability to ask them all will depend on the time you have for discussion and the dynamics of the discussion (e.g. how many participants and how gregarious they are). Therefore, we recommend you prioritize the questions to ask to ensure you cover the most important ones from your perspective.

Good luck! And please provide us with feedback on the film and guide by emailing us at webmaster@fatherhood.org. If after several uses of the film you begin to ask questions that are not in this guide and that work well, please send the questions to us so we can add them to the guide!

Questions about the Film for Everyone

General Questions

- PQ** As you watched the film, what was the first thought that came to your mind?
- PQ** What message or image comes to mind when you hear the title of the film: *Out of the Ashes: Where a Seed Finds Life*?
- PQ** What did you like most about the film?
- PQ** What did you like least about the film?
- PQ** Did anything in the film surprise you?
- PQ** What is the most important thing you learned from the film?
- PQ** When Coley first appears in the film, he sits in a chair with handcuffs around his wrists. What do the handcuffs symbolize about his situation?
- PQ** What did you think about the relationship between the son, Ahmarr, and his dad, Coley?
- PQ** How much contact did Ahmarr and Coley have while Coley was in prison?
 - FACILITATOR NOTE** Limited, so much so that they didn't really know each other; Only had periodic contact via letters and short phone calls that didn't last long enough.

From Coley's Perspective

PQ Was Coley angry at any point during the film?

PROBE (If so) Why was he angry?

PQ Was Coley sad at any point during the film?

PROBE (If so) Why was he sad?

PQ Was Coley afraid at any point during the film?

PROBE (If so) Why was he afraid?

FACILITATOR NOTE About becoming a dad.

PQ How did Coley feel about the relationship with his son?

PROBE What did he say they had to do to build their relationship after Coley was released?

FACILITATOR NOTE Establish trust, build rapport, and go slowly step-by-step.

PQ As Coley talks with a visitor, he remembers how surprised he was that his father and grandfather shook hands instead of hugged each other. What message did that send to Coley about being a man in general and the relationship between a dad and his son specifically?

FACILITATOR NOTE Stuff emotion; If express emotion, especially hurt, it's a sign of weakness; Stuffing emotion results in self-loathing.

PQ Coley talks about how people judge African-American/Black boys based on how tough they are as reflected in how well they suppress their emotions—that they shouldn't exhibit weakness. Is that judgment reserved just for African-Americans/Blacks? Are boys and men of other races and of different ethnicities also judged in that way? What impact does that judgment have on boys and men?

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FILM FOR EVERYONE

PQ Coley talks about his focus on providing for his child when he learned he was going to be a dad. What aspect of providing did he focus on? What do you think about that focus?

FACILITATOR NOTE Financially, not emotionally, intellectually, or spiritually.

PQ What sense did you get about the relationship between Coley and his dad? What impact did the relationship have on Coley?

FACILITATOR NOTE Distant; Afraid to speak with his dad; Judged his dad rather than talked with his dad; Turned to mother for emotional intimacy.

PQ Coley said that when he was released, he needed to be a father to Ahmarr rather than a friend. Do you agree?

PROBE Why or why not?

From Ahmarr's Perspective

PQ When Ahmarr first appears in the film, there is rain in the background. What does the rain symbolize about his situation?

PQ How did Ahmarr feel about the relationship with his dad?

PQ Was Ahmarr angry at any point during the film?

PROBE (If so) Why was he angry?

PQ Was Ahmarr sad at any point during the film?

PROBE (If so) What was he sad about?

PQ What does Ahmarr say about the role of a dad in his son's life?

FACILITATOR NOTE First coach and role model; Protector and provider; First person aspire to be when grow up.

PROBE Do you agree?

PROBE (If so) Why?

PROBE (If not) Why not?

PQ What were some of the biggest questions Ahmarr had about his situation?

FACILITATOR NOTE Why was he in it?; Why did life choose it for him?; What did he do to deserve it?

PQ Ahmarr's primary caregivers were his mother and grandparents. What can you imagine they thought and felt about Coley being in prison?

PROBE Why would they have had those thoughts and feelings?

PQ Ahmarr's grandparents and mother provided a lot of love, and, yet, Ahmarr felt something was missing in his life. How did the missing element—his father—make him feel despite all of the love from his parents and mother?

FACILITATOR NOTE It made him feel lonely.

PQ Ahmarr says that his dad asked him in letters whether Ahmarr wanted to know why Coley was in prison. Why did Ahmarr tell his dad he didn't want to know?

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FILM FOR EVERYONE

FACILITATOR NOTE He already knew, and he was afraid that he might follow in his dad's footsteps.

PQ Ahmarr recounts a time when he was 13 and visited his dad. What did that visit make him realize that was so profound for Ahmarr?

FACILITATOR NOTE That his dad made a mistake, but a mistake that both of them had to pay for. He realized his dad was human and in pain, just like he was.

PQ Ahmarr talks about how no one wants to hear from a child of an incarcerated father how sad they are. So he learned how to cope with his situation. How did he cope with it?

FACILITATOR NOTE He convinced himself he understood the situation; Told himself stories to keep sane; Turned to other fatherless boys to help alleviate the poverty, anger and stress he felt because he thought those boys offered a blueprint for how to cope.

The Reunion

PQ When Ahmarr and Coley meet right after Coley's release, what struck you the most about this reunion?

PROBE Why did that strike you the most?

PQ What did you notice about both men?

PROBE Were they comfortable or nervous?

FACILITATOR NOTE Nervous.

PROBE Did Coley know a lot or a little about Ahmarr's current life?

FACILITATOR NOTE A little.

PQ Did you notice anything about Ahmarr's body language?

PROBE (If so) What, and what did it indicate?

FACILITATOR NOTE Looked down with little eye contact. Indicated he was nervous and, perhaps, angry or ashamed.

PQ Did you notice anything about the length of the answers Ahmarr gave to his dad's questions?

PROBE Probe: (If so) What did you notice, and what did that indicate?

FACILITATOR NOTE Mostly one-word answers, and other answers were very short (i.e. just a few words). Indicated he was nervous, cautious, overwhelmed, and, perhaps, angry.

PQ Coley does most of the talking. As the conversation progresses, what happens to Coley?

FACILITATOR NOTE Becomes frustrated and, perhaps, angry with Ahmarr's one-word and short answers, and his overall lack of response. Coley cuts off Ahmarr at one point.

PQ What does Ahmarr eventually say to Coley about their relationship that is so significant and breaks the ice in their conversation?

FACILITATOR NOTE He knows Coley is his father, but he doesn't know Coley as a person, which leads to a much more in-depth, emotionally intimate discussion.

Questions for Dads (Currently Incarcerated)

- PQ** How old were your children before you went to prison/jail?
- PQ** How long has it been since you have seen your children?
- PQ** How often do you see or have contact with your children?
- PROBE** How do you feel about seeing/having contact with your children that often?
- PQ** (If see /have contact with children) Have you told them why you're in prison/jail?
- PROBE** (If no) Why not?
- PROBE** (If no) Do you plan to tell them?
- PROBE** (If no) Why not?
- PROBE** (If so) When?
- PROBE** (If so) What did you tell them? How did they react?
- PROBE** (If so) Did you keep anything from them?
- PROBE** (If so) What was it, and why did you keep it from them?
- PQ** How do you feel about being separated from your children?
- PQ** What do your children think and feel about you being in prison/jail?
- PROBE** How do you feel about their thoughts and feelings?
- PQ** Do your children want a relationship with you?
- PROBE** How do you feel about them wanting/not wanting a relationship with you?
- PQ** What do people say to your children about you being in prison/jail? (or) What can you imagine people might say to your children about you being

QUESTIONS FOR INCARCERATED DADS

in prison/jail?

PROBE How do you feel about what people (might) say to your children?

PQ What kind of relationship do you expect to have with your children while in prison/jail?

PROBE Why do you expect to have that kind of relationship?

PROBE Is it realistic to expect to have that kind of relationship?

PQ How do you stay connected to your children (e.g. phone calls, visits, letters, etc.)?

PQ Is there anything more you can do to develop a deeper connection with your children while you're in this facility?

PROBE (If no) Why not?

PROBE (If so) What?

PQ What kind of relationship do you have with your children's mother (or main caregiver)?

PROBE How does she (or the main caregiver) think and feel about you being in prison/jail?

PROBE What do you feel about her (or the main caregiver's) thoughts and feelings?

PROBE What does she (or the main caregiver) tell your children about why you're in prison/jail?

PROBE (If nothing) Why do you think she (or the main caregiver) hasn't told them anything?

PROBE (If told something) Are you okay with what she (or the main caregiver) told them?

PQ Do you need to improve your relationship with the mother (or main caregiver)?

PROBE (If so) What can you do to improve that relationship?

QUESTIONS FOR INCARCERATED DADS

PQ One thing we know about Ahmarr that isn't in the film is that there were other men who stepped up and filled the role of a father figure, such as his grandfather. Who serves as a male role model for your children?

PROBE How do you feel about another man/other men stepping into that role?

PROBE Do you have a relationship with that man/those men?

PROBE After your release, what do you hope will happen with the role that man/those men have provided?

PROBE Why do you hope that will happen?

PQ Other than the restrictions of this facility on the ways in which you can contact your children—and how often you can contact them—is there anything or anyone that restricts or prevents contact with your children?

PROBE (If so) Why does that thing/person restrict or prevent contact with your children? Have you tried to do anything to address that issue?

PQ Do you need to improve as a dad?

PROBE (If no) Why not?

PROBE (If so) What do you need to improve?

PROBE (If so) Have you done anything to improve the relationships with your children?

PROBE (If no) Why not?

PROBE (If so) What have you done? How well has it worked?

PQ Have you participated in a program in this facility that helps you to be a better dad?

PROBE (If no) Why not?

PROBE (If so) Has that program helped you create or maintain a connection with your children?

PROBE (If no) Why not?

PROBE (If so) How?

QUESTIONS FOR INCARCERATED DADS

PQ Have you participated in a program in this facility that will help you reenter the lives of your children?

PROBE (If no) Why not?

PROBE (If so) How will what you've learned help you reenter their lives?

PQ Have you started to put a plan in place for how you will reenter the lives of your children after your release?

PROBE (If so) What have you put in place? How will those things help you reenter their lives?

PROBE (If not) Why have you not started to put a plan in place?

PQ What are the two most important things you can do while you're still in prison/jail to successfully reenter the lives of your children after your release?

PROBE What do you have to do to make those two things happen?

PQ What are the two most important things you can do after your release to successfully reenter the lives of your children?

PROBE What do you have to do to make those two things happen?

Questions for Dads (Formerly Incarcerated)

- PQ** How old were your children before you went to prison/jail?
- PQ** How long was it from the day you walked into prison to the day you saw or had your first contact with your children?
- PQ** How often did you see or have contact with your children while you were in prison/jail?
- PROBE** How did you feel about seeing/having contact with your children that often?
- PQ** (If saw/had contact with children) Did you tell them why you were in prison/jail?
- PROBE** (If no) Why not?
- PROBE** (If no) Do you plan to tell them?
- PROBE** (If no) Why not?
- PROBE** (If so) When?
- PROBE** (If so) What did you tell them? How did they react?
- PROBE** (If so) Did you keep anything from them?
- PROBE** (If so) What was it, and why did you keep it from them?
- PQ** How did you feel about being separated from your children?
- PQ** What did your children think and feel about you being in prison/jail?
- PROBE** How did you feel about their thoughts and feelings?
- PQ** Did your children want a relationship with you while you were in prison?
- PROBE** How did you feel about them wanting/not wanting a relationship with you?

QUESTIONS FOR FORMERLY INCARCERATED DADS

- PQ** Do your children want a relationship with you now that you're out of prison?
- PROBE** How do you feel about them wanting/not wanting a relationship with you?
- PQ** What did people say to your children about you being in prison/jail? (or) What can you imagine people might have said to your children about you being in prison/jail?
- PROBE** How did you feel about what people (might have) said to your children?
- PQ** What kind of relationship did you expect to have with your children while in prison/jail?
- PROBE** Why did you expect to have that kind of relationship?
- PROBE** Was it realistic to have expected to have that kind of relationship?
- PQ** How did you stay connected to your children (e.g. phone calls, visits, letters, etc.)?
- PQ** Is there anything more you could have done to develop a deeper connection with your children while you were in prison/jail?
- PROBE** (If no) Why not?
- PROBE** (If so) What?
- PQ** What kind of relationship did you have with your children's mother (or main caregiver) while you were in prison/jail?
- PROBE** How did she (or the main caregiver) think and feel about you being in prison/jail?
- PROBE** What did you feel about her (or the main caregiver's) thoughts and feelings?
- PROBE** What did she (or the main caregiver) tell your children about why you were in prison/jail?
- PROBE** (If nothing) Why do you think she (or the main caregiver) didn't tell them anything?
- PROBE** (If told something) Are you okay with what she (or the main caregiver) told them?

QUESTIONS FOR FORMERLY INCARCERATED DADS

- PQ** Do you need to improve your relationship with the mother (or main caregiver)?
- PROBE** (If so) What can you do to improve that relationship?
- PQ** One thing we know about Ahmarr that isn't in the film is that there were other men who stepped up and filled the role of a father figure, such as his grandfather. Who served as a male role model for your children while you were in prison/jail?
- PROBE** How did you feel about another man/other men stepping into that role?
- PROBE** Did you have a relationship with that man/those men while you were in prison/jail?
- PROBE** After your release, what did you hope would happen with the role that man/those men have provided?
- PROBE** Why did you hope that would happen?
- PROBE** What has happened with his/their role since your release? How do you feel about that? Why do you feel that way?
- PQ** Do you need to improve as a dad?
- PROBE** (If no) Why not?
- PROBE** (If so) What do you need to improve?
- PROBE** (If so) Have you done anything to improve the relationships with your children?
- PROBE** (If no) Why not?
- PROBE** (If so) What have you done? How well has it worked?
- PQ** Did you participate in a program while you were in prison/jail or since your release that helps you to be a better dad?
- PROBE** (If no) Why not?
- PROBE** (If so) Did that program helped you create or maintain a connection with your children?
- PROBE** (If no) Why not?
- PROBE** (If so) How?
- PQ** Have you seen your children since your release?

QUESTIONS FOR FORMERLY INCARCERATED DADS

PROBE (If no) Why not?

PROBE (If so) What was it like when you saw them for the first time? How did you feel? How did they react?

PQ Since your release, how easy or difficult has it been for you to reenter the lives of your children?

PROBE Why has it been easy/difficult?

PROBE (If difficult) What more can you do to make it easier to be involved with your children? What are the two most important things you can do to successfully reenter the lives of your children? What do you have to do to make those two things happen?

PQ What are the two most important pieces of advice you'd give to an dad in prison/jail about how to successfully reenter the lives of his children?

PROBE Why those two pieces of advice?

Questions for Children (Dad Currently Incarcerated)

- PQ** How old were you when your dad went to prison/jail?
- PQ** How long has your dad been in prison/jail?
- PQ** What memories, if any, do you have of your dad before he went to prison/jail?
- PQ** How often do you see or have contact with your dad?
- PROBE** How do you feel about seeing/having contact with your dad that often?
- PROBE** (If see/have contact with dad) Has your dad told you why he's in prison/jail?
- PROBE** (If no) Why do you think he hasn't told you?
- PROBE** (If so) What did he tell you? How did you react?
- PQ** How do you feel about being separated from your dad?
- PQ** How have you learned to deal/cope with not having your dad involved in your life?
- PROBE** How well has that worked for you?
- PQ** Do you want a relationship with your dad?
- PROBE** Why do you want/not want a relationship with him?
- PQ** What do other people say about your dad being in prison/jail?
- PROBE** How do you feel about what people say/said?
- PQ** Do you tell people your dad is in prison/jail?
- PROBE** (If tell) Why do you tell them that?
- PROBE** (If no) What do you tell people about your dad?
- PQ** What kind of relationship do you expect to have with your dad?
- PROBE** Why do you expect to have that kind of relationship?

QUESTIONS FOR CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED DADS

PROBE Is it realistic to expect to have that kind of relationship?

PROBE Do you expect to see him at all after his release?

PROBE How do you feel about that?

PQ One thing we know about Ahmarr that isn't in the film is that there were other men who stepped up and filled the role of a father figure, such as his grandfather. Are there other men who provide a good male role model for you?

PROBE How do you feel about that man/other men providing that role?

PROBE After your dad is released, what do you hope will happen with the role that man/those men have provided?

PROBE Why do you hope that will happen?

PQ How will you avoid going down the same kind of path that led to your dad going to prison/jail?

Questions for Children (Dad Formerly Incarcerated)

- PQ** How old were you when your dad went to prison/jail?
- PQ** How long was it from the time your dad went to prison/jail and the first time you saw or had contact with him?
- PQ** What memories, if any, do you have of your dad before he went to prison/jail?
- PQ** How often did you see or have contact with your dad while he was in prison/jail?
- PROBE** How did you feel about seeing/having contact with your dad that often?
- PROBE** (If saw/had contact with dad) Did your dad tell you why he was in prison/jail?
- PROBE** (If no) Why do you think he didn't tell you? Has he told you since his release?
- PROBE** (If so either before or after release) What did he tell you? How did you react?
- PQ** How did you feel about being separated from your dad?
- PQ** How did you deal/cope with not having your dad involved in your life?
- PROBE** How well did that work for you?
- PQ** Did you want a relationship with your dad while he was in prison/jail?
- PROBE** Why did you want/not want a relationship with him?
- PQ** Do you have a relationship with him now that he's out of prison/jail?
- PROBE** (If so) How would you describe the relationship?
- PROBE** (If not) Why not? Do you want a relationship with him?
- PQ** What do/did other people say about your dad being in prison/jail?
- PROBE** How do/did you feel about what people say/said?

PQ Did you tell people your dad was in prison/jail either when he was in prison or now?

PROBE (If tell) Why did you tell them that?

PROBE (If no) What did you tell people about your dad?

PQ What kind of relationship did you expect to have with your dad while he was in prison/jail?

PROBE Why did you expect to have that kind of relationship?

PROBE Was it realistic to have expected to have that kind of relationship?

PROBE Did you expect to see him at all after his release?

PROBE How did you feel about that at the time?

PQ One thing we know about Ahmarr that isn't in the film is that there were other men who stepped up and filled the role of a father figure, such as his grandfather. Were there other men who provided a good male role model for you while your dad was in prison/jail?

PROBE How did you feel about that man/other men providing that role?

PROBE After your dad was released, what did you hope would happen with the role that man/those men provided?

PROBE Why did you hope that would happen?

PROBE What has actually happened with the role that man/those men played?

PQ How will you avoid going down the same kind of path that led to your dad going to prison/jail?