



FAQ



Suicide and mental illness can be sensitive and difficult topics to discuss. Oftentimes, the challenge of having meaningful dialogue stems from a lack of vocabulary and understanding of the issues. It's a struggle that we faced throughout production of *Scattering CJ*. To help us make a film that addressed these issues responsibly and effectively, we relied on an advisory board of experts, advocates, and mental health practitioners to weigh in on rough edits of the film for months leading up to the final version. This list includes some of the more difficult questions that emerged through these conversations and forced us to think critically about not only the film, but how we present the takeaways from CJ's story.

Does *Scattering CJ* glorify suicide?

One of the toughest challenges we faced in making the film was avoiding the inadvertent glorification of CJ's suicide. Our concern (and one raised by every single one of our advisors) was that someone at risk could see CJ's story and think to themselves, "If I kill myself people will care about me more." We worked very closely with our team of experts to avoid any messaging that presents CJ's death as a positive outcome.

To avoid this glorification, *Scattering CJ* focuses less on CJ's travels and more on the Twomey family's healing process and the impact CJ's story had on people who have been touched by suicide or have struggled with suicidal ideation. There are multiple moments in the film where Hallie discusses her conflicted feelings about the *Scattering CJ* project. While she recognizes how many people she's helping through sharing her family's story, we also hear her say, "I hate what I'm doing. It sucks." Connor and John discuss their feelings about the project in the film, too, noting that what matters most as they move toward a place of healing is how CJ's story is impacting other people's lives.

At its core, *Scattering CJ* is a story about a family that was deeply and painfully impacted by the heartbreaking loss of their loved one to suicide. It is a story of how that family healed with the support of a global community, that rallied to reduce the stigma around mental illness, and inspire a meaningful dialogue about mental health and suicide prevention.

Does the film and Facebook page exploit CJ's death?

One of the biggest criticisms that Hallie has received about the project from Facebook trolls is that she's using CJ's death as a way of growing her own brand and fame. But what we found is that she's taken a horrific, personal trauma and found a way to heal not just herself but also transform her experience into something that helps others.

From the promotional side, a big challenge in making a film like *Scattering CJ* is maintaining a healthy balance between respecting CJ's memory and the family's trauma while also encouraging people to see the film. A lot of this comes down to the language we use when we speak about the film. For example, whenever we post on social media about an upcoming screening or festival, we try to avoid overly positive language like "excited" or "thrilled" and instead use words like "honored" or "proud".

It's also important to note that while we're selling *Scattering CJ* branded items, proceeds are going directly toward our mental health and suicide prevention awareness building efforts, including mental health awareness boot camps and community screenings of the film. We have also gotten feedback from scatterers that wearing the t-shirt or hanging up the poster has inspired people to ask questions about CJ's story, thereby opening the opportunity for dialogue about mental wellness in an organic way.

Is guilt an effective way of preventing suicide?

The goal of *Scattering CJ* is not to shame and guilt already-struggling people into not attempting suicide. **Guilt is not an effective means of supporting someone who is thinking about suicide.** Even with the best of intentions, telling someone in crisis that they're going to hurt their loved ones or that it's a cowardly way of avoiding their issues can do more damage than good.

While guilt is not an effective deterrent, we have seen anecdotally through many of the scatterer testimonials, both in the film and on the Facebook page, that CJ's story has inspired them to rethink a plan to take their own lives. We believe that this is in part because of the way Hallie presents her message on the *Scattering CJ* page. Instead of speaking about loss with a message like, "Don't do this to your loved ones," Hallie simply focuses inward and speaks truthfully about how she and her family were impacted by losing a loved one, without projecting that experience on others. This allows people to empathize with her experience and make decisions for themselves rather than being shamed.

Why did we include details about CJ's suicide in the film?

Most media guidelines for reporting on suicide will mention that it's best to avoid unnecessary details about a death, including method and location. In the case of the *Scattering CJ* story and the Twomey family's healing, method and location are integral to understanding the full picture. It's the explanation for Hallie's unrelenting guilt that led to the creating of the *Scattering CJ* project and the ultimate driving factor behind the family's difficult decision to move from their home in Maine.

We worked closely with our advisory board to be sure that we presented information about the day of CJ's passing in a way that provided context to the story and limited unnecessary details as much as possible. Given the upsetting nature of the family recalling the events of that day, we include a disclaimer at the beginning of the film that lets audiences know there is graphic discussion about suicide in the documentary. The language of this trigger warning was reviewed and approved by our advisory board.

Does *Scattering CJ* address the statistics surrounding firearms and suicide?

Access to firearms is something that needs to be addressed in any conversation about reducing the rate of suicide in the United States. The numbers are staggering. According to the CDC, over half of deaths by suicide in the United States are caused by a firearm. Suicides also account for 66 percent of all gun deaths in the United States.

If this is a conversation that you would like to have in your community, we encourage you to do so in a way that is constructive and explores well thought-out solutions to the problem, including Red Flag laws and universal background checks.

Why isn't there more diversity in the film?

It's important to remember that *Scattering CJ* is not meant to represent everyone's experience, but rather focuses on one individual family. However, there are takeaways from the film that can be applied to anyone and everyone regardless of race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation:

- (1) Don't be afraid to ask someone if they are in need of support. They might be waiting for someone to start the conversation with them.
- (2) We need to start taking mental health as seriously as physical health.
- (3) If you are worried about a loved one, don't wait until it's too late. Seek help. There are resources available that are willing to offer support.

The film itself is only one part of our outreach efforts surrounding mental wellness. As we continue to bring the film to more communities, we will tailor conversations and resources to the needs of that specific community, since every group has its own sensitivities to conversations about mental health and suicide. Those differences need to be respected and understood before attempting to make meaningful and lasting impact.

How do you respond if someone, due to their personal beliefs, feels uncomfortable with cremation and/or the scattering of ashes?

We understand that some people may be uncomfortable with the scattering of human remains for religious, cultural or personal reasons. While it is impossible to separate scattering CJ's ashes from the story and the Facebook page, it is important to remember that the core of this project is deeper than the act of scattering itself. Of the approximate 22,000 followers on the Facebook page, only 1,000 have participated in the physical act of scattering. Tens of thousands joined the project to be part of a supportive community that is welcoming and inclusive.

Scattering CJ is about connections and the willingness of strangers to support a grieving family and offers a vision of hope that healing is possible in the wake of losing a loved one to suicide. Through Scattering CJ, the Twomey family is remembering CJ and spreading a message of suicide prevention in a way that is meaningful for their family.