

**COMMUNITY
DISCUSSION GUIDE**

ERNIE & JOE

CRISIS COPS

A film by Jenifer McShane

ernieandjoethefilm.com



"I LOVE THIS FILM. IT HUMANIZES THE REAL ISSUES OF CITIZENS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS AND ADDICTION INTERACTING WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT. THE FILM SHOWS ALL SIDES RESPECTFULLY AND WITH COMPASSION. THERE ARE TOUGH SCENES THAT ARE POWERFUL AND LOVING, ALONG WITH LIGHTER MOMENTS OF ERNIE & JOE'S AWESOME FRIENDSHIP. I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE IT AGAIN."

- Viewer, Kelly G. via Facebook

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ABOUT THE FILM

Ernie & Joe: Crisis Cops is an intimate portrait of two Texas police officers who are helping change the way police respond to mental health calls. The film takes audiences on a personal journey, weaving together Ernie and Joe's experiences during their daily encounters with people in crisis. These two officers are part of the San Antonio Police Department's Mental Health Unit.

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

This discussion guide is designed to give you the tools you need to host a screening of **Ernie & Joe: Crisis Cops** that meets your goals. With the resources included here, our goal is for you to engage in productive dialogue around the ideas presented in the film and established options for further action and education.

We hope screenings of **Ernie & Joe: Crisis Cops** will inspire reflection, bridge-building, and action that will lead to stronger police-community relations, improved mental health outcomes, greater awareness of officers' own mental health challenges, and more law enforcement and behavioral health systems change.

With a subject matter as personal as mental health, each screening will be unique to the needs and context of the community and audience. The resources and tips below are suggestions, but as an event host, you know your community best.

LETTER FROM THE FILMMAKER

*I believe strongly that my own contribution as a filmmaker can be in raising awareness of tough societal issues through relatable characters and their stories. While making my last film, **Mothers of Bedford**, it became evident to me that there were many people with untreated mental illness sitting behind bars. Upon learning of the innovative work of the San Antonio Police Department's Mental Health Unit and then meeting Ernie and Joe in person, I felt compelled to make this film. The jail diversion work we see these two officers practice is humane and desperately needed to improve not only the health of the mentally ill, but also of their families. We have seen many films illustrating the multitude of sins in police departments across the country. **Ernie & Joe: Crisis Cops** introduces us to two officers and one police department trying and succeeding in doing it right. My hope is that the film will inspire police departments, officers and communities to work together to reduce the criminalization of those with mental health challenges and find ways to support all community members to thrive.*

Jenifer McShane

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER AND FILM SUBJECTS

DIRECTOR/PRODUCER: JENIFER MCSHANE

Jenifer McShane is an independent filmmaker committed to using film to bridge understanding in situations where structural, cultural or religious divisions typically keep people apart. Her most recent film, the Emmy Award winning, **Ernie & Joe: Crisis Cops** received the Jury Award for Empathy & Craft at SXSW Film Festival in 2019 and is currently streaming on HBO. Jenifer spent nearly five years visiting Bedford Hills Correctional Facility to make her previous documentary, **Mothers of Bedford** (Hot Docs premiere), which reveals the impact of incarceration on jailed mothers and their children. Jenifer lives in Guilford, CT with her family and rescue dog, Finn.

ERNIE STEVENS

Ernest Stevens, who served as a police officer for over 28 years, recently retired from the San Antonio Police Department, where he served for 25 1/2 years. Stevens was a founding member of the San Antonio Police Department Mental Health Unit. He holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. Stevens has been featured on Nightline, NBC's A Different Kind of Force, and the Emmy award-winning HBO documentary **Ernie & Joe: Crisis Cops**. He currently shares his experience with other police departments across the country and is a law enforcement trainer for the Naval Security Forces.

JOE SMARRO

Joe Smarro is a decorated combat veteran from the United States Marine Corps. He honorably served two tours to Afghanistan and Iraq with the 1st Battalion 4th Marines. In 2005 he joined the San Antonio Police Department (SAPD), where he became one of the original members of SAPD's Mental Health Unit, which Joe helped to grow into a nationally recognized best practices policing unit. In addition to being one of the main subjects in the HBO documentary, **Ernie & Joe: Crisis Cops**, Joe has been featured in multiple media outlets including the TEDx talk "I See You." He is the founder and CEO of Solution-Point+, a national training and consulting firm that focuses on cultivating mental wellness to maximize human capital and promote safety within organizations.

TIPS FOR FACILITATION

Ernie & Joe: Crisis Cops raises issues that may provoke difficult conversations. As a facilitator, you can create an atmosphere in which people feel safe, encouraged and respected, making it more likely that they will be willing to share their ideas openly and honestly. Here's how:

Preparing Yourself:

- Identify your own hot-button issues. View the film before the 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.
- Be knowledgeable. You don't need to be an expert on the issues, but knowing the basics can help you keep a discussion on track and gently correct misstatements of fact. [Here is a list](#) of suggested websites and organizations.
- Be clear about your role. You may find yourself taking on several roles for a single event, including host, organizer—even IT support. If you are also planning to serve as facilitator, be sure that you can focus on that responsibility and avoid distractions during the discussion.
- Know your group. Issues can play out very differently for different groups of people. Is your group new to the issue or have the members of the group dealt with it before? Factors like geography, age, race, religion, gender identity and socioeconomic class all can have an impact on comfort levels, speaking styles and prior knowledge. Take care not to assume that all members of a particular group share the same point-of-view.

- Think about what biases you might possibly have and then examine them, knowing that you may not recognize them all. Be honest and open to discovery.

Before facilitating a discussion:

- Watch the film beforehand and think about what questions and prompts might be most meaningful and effective for your community. If you are inviting others to facilitate a discussion, set up a preview screening for them beforehand.
- Think about who would be best to facilitate or co-facilitate a discussion. Reach out to local and online resources and experts to see who else might be available to join the discussion. Tip: Local journalists or radio hosts make great moderators.
- Set specific goals to help you design a powerful experience for your community and then refresh yourself on your goals prior to the discussion.

PROGRAMMING YOUR EVENT

Ernie & Joe: Crisis Cops is an excellent tool for dialogue and reflection for law enforcement and public safety agencies, first responders, medical professionals, social service providers, mental health organizations, city officials, direct-service groups, and legislative bodies. Your audience and the context of the event will inform whether it makes sense to convene a post-screening panel or talkback, and who you should invite to be a part of that. Here are some suggestions of types of panelists to help with brainstorming:

- A representative from your local chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness
- A local official focused on behavioral health services
- A CIT-trained police officer
- A person with lived experience of mental health challenges

If you are interested in hosting Ernie Stevens or Joe Smarro for a virtual or in-person discussion following the film, or have any questions, please contact: eandjoutreach@gmail.com.

TIP: The film deals with topics that may be close to home for many in your audience and includes body camera footage of a police-involved shooting, as well as discussion of suicide. We therefore recommend that you consider having a designated person at your event that individuals can talk to if they find the content of the film or discussion triggering or upsetting. This person should feel comfortable in this role and have local resources on-hand to share.

Here is some language you can customize to make your audience aware of the content of the film and support available: “The film we are about to watch addresses difficult subject matter which may be upsetting or triggering, including body camera footage of a police-involved shooting, which happens in the first 45 seconds of the film, and discussion of suicide. We encourage you to practice self-care and do what you need to do to care for yourself - whether that means leaving the room, closing your eyes and ears, and/or speaking with [NAME] who is available should anyone want to talk.”

RESOURCES FOR YOUR EVENT

To aid in the promotion of your event, we have created a promotional kit which includes:

- Promotional resources
- Selected Viewer Feedback
- Poster and photos from the film
- Biographies and headshots of the film subjects and the filmmaker

The promotional kit is [available here](#) to download.

Here are some additional helpful links for promotion:

- [Ernie & Joe: Crisis Cops trailer](#)
- [Official Ernie & Joe: Crisis Cops website](#)

We ask that you share [our online survey](#) with your audience after the screening - this feedback helps us improve our work and continue the campaign. If you are hosting a screening for law enforcement, we have a special audience survey [available here](#).

These examples of events hosted by other organizations may spark ideas for your event:

- John Jay College of Criminal Justice - [Panel Discussion](#)
- Global Law Enforcement & Public Health Association - [Mental Health & Policing Webinar](#)
- League of Women Voters of Dane County - [Public Issues Forum Discussion](#)
- NAMI Vermont - [Event Landing Page Example](#)
- NAMI Wisconsin - [Post Screening Q&A](#)
- The University of Chicago Crown Family School of Social Work - [Event Landing Page Example](#)

If your screening is open to the public, please tag our social media handles in your promotion - we'd love to amplify your event on our channels:

Twitter

twitter.com/ernieandjoe

Facebook

facebook.com/ernieandjoethefilm

Instagram

[@ernieandjoethefilm](https://instagram.com/ernieandjoethefilm)

OPTION: BRING IT ONLINE

As we all do our part to slow the spread of COVID-19, event organizers across the world are hosting events online. While nothing can recreate the intimacy of an in-person event, virtual gatherings can still be powerful, can sometimes enable greater accessibility, and still leave attendees with new information and a collective sense of action.

Here you will find some tips and tricks for successful online events. When considering in-person events, we encourage all event organizers to prioritize the health and safety of their community.

Designing a program: When programming a virtual event, it is helpful to consider that our collective attention span for virtual events is generally less than an in-person event. Capping your online event time at 1.5 hours is generally recommended - of course, you know your audience best, so this may differ if you are facilitating more in-depth programming like a training or small group break out sessions.

The virtual platform that will work best for you will depend on the run-of-show for your event. Each of the virtual event platforms below has Q&A and polling functionality that can be used creatively to prompt audience interaction. Starting with a poll or question to the audience is often a great way to foster interactivity and communication with the audience that you may not be able to see. Here are some of the platforms that our team has used and can recommend:

Zoom: A flexible platform that can reliably handle large crowds and is customizable for different formats - especially handy if you need to utilize breakout rooms, or want to foster intimacy with a small event where the audience can see each other on video.

Zoom Tutorial

CrowdCast: Also handles large events well with tools for audience interaction like polls and Q&As - however the audience is not able to be on video or speak.

CrowdCast Tutorial

OVEE: This platform is made by ITVS and popular with PBS stations - OVEE can incorporate videos reliably from Youtube, Vimeo or the PBS media player.

OVEE Tutorial

SAFETY TIP: Be sure to secure your event against bad actors who may want to interfere with your program. [This useful article](#) explains how to protect yourself from “Zoom-bombing.”

Thank you for bringing **Ernie & Joe: Crisis Cops** to your community. It is an honor to support you!

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION PROMPTS

What feelings came up for you when you watched the film?

What did you find most interesting about the documentary? What scene stood out to you the most and why?

If you have had direct contact with law enforcement, did Ernie and Joe's approach differ from your experience or were there similarities?

In general, did Ernie and Joe's approach to their job differ from your assumptions about police officers? If so, how?

The work Ernie and Joe do diverts individuals struggling with mental health issues away from jail and prison. How do you think that strategy benefits individuals and society?

Do you think that access to community mental health needs to be improved in your city or town? If so, how?

Does your local police force use a Crisis Intervention Team approach? If not, do you think this is something that you would advocate for? Why or why not?

In the course of watching the film, did you realize any preconceived opinions you held about those struggling with mental illness? If so, what were they and where do you think they came from?

What are some of the factors that might make some law enforcement respond differently to different populations? What can your community do to address this?

In the film, Joe says, “I respect the fact that they have a mental illness and they don’t want law enforcement interacting with them. If it takes 20, 90, 120 minutes to convince them that 1) We aren’t going to hurt them and 2) They are coming with us, it’s just a matter of how they’re going to come with us. If that takes me all day long. I will take all day long.” How do you react to this statement? What do you think Joe is trying to communicate about how he approaches his job?

After Ernie and Joe’s initial interaction with Kendra, they remain in touch and connect her with social services. Do you think this makes sense or is it “above and beyond the call of duty”?

In the film, Joe shares his own struggle with PTSD. “I was 18 years old and I remember just shutting down.” How can we better support veterans and frontline responders with regards to behavioral healthcare?

Ernie frequently says, “It’s okay to be not okay, but it’s not okay to stay that way.” What does this mean to you?

How do you think we as a society can better support each other with regard for mental illness?

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT PANELISTS:

What resonated for you about the film? Can you relate to any of Ernie and Joe's experiences, and if so, which ones?

What do you see as law enforcement's role in the mental health care of our community?

Does CIT training exist in your community? If so, please describe why you think it is important? If not, what are the challenges?"

Communities across the country are experimenting with a variety of approaches to mental health crisis response, some are training police, some are adding clinicians, some are having non-police crisis teams. What is your opinion on these different approaches and what is your community using, or might it use in the future?

What would you say to individuals who are unsure about calling the police to respond to mental health emergencies?

How can our community work with law enforcement to better support the community's mental health needs?



WAYS TO TAKE ACTION

- Find out if your local police department utilizes a crisis response team. If not, reach out to your local National Alliance on Mental Illness chapter and advocate for them to do a CIT training.
- Create a working group of community stakeholders to discuss issues raised by the film. Establish a working dialogue with your local police department or sheriff's office and other community decision-makers, such as government officials, heads of hospitals, behavioral health system managers, etc.
- Encourage all community members to take a **Mental Health First Aid class**.
- Volunteer with your local NAMI chapter or participate in a local NAMI Walk.
- **Learn more** about CIT Programs.

SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

During your event, be sure to share information for those struggling with mental illness to receive support. National hotline and organization information is below and you may also find local resources using this tool from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Help is available 24/7 nationwide. If you are in crisis or know someone who is, reach out immediately to the following for help:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline | CALL 1-800-273-8255

The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals.

Crisis Text Line

Crisis Text Line is here for any crisis. A live, trained Crisis Counselor receives the text and responds, all from our secure online platform.

US & CANADA: Text HOME to 74174

UK: Text HOME to 85258

IRELAND: Text HOME to 50808

Or send a MESSAGE via **Facebook** to chat confidentially with a trained Crisis Counselor 24/7.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: Find Support

This not-for-profit organization is dedicated to understanding and preventing suicide through research, education and advocacy, and to reaching out to people with mental disorders and those impacted by suicide.

Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective

A group aimed at removing the barriers that black people experience getting access to or staying connected with emotional health care and healing. They do this through education, training, advocacy, and the creative arts.

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)

DBSA is a peer-directed national organization focusing on the two most prevalent mental health conditions, depression and bipolar disorder, which affect more than 21 million Americans.

Inclusive Therapists

Seeking counseling or therapy can be a vulnerable process. To that, add the challenges that people with marginalized identities face such as micro-aggressions, prejudice, and language or financial barriers. Getting the right help can become an overwhelming task. Finding a therapist should not feel like a gamble. Inclusive Therapists aim to make this process simpler and safer.

Mental Health First Aid

From the National Council for Behavioral Health, Mental Health First Aid is a skills-based training course that teaches participants about mental health and substance-use issues.

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

NAMI is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental

illness. On this site, you can find information about your local NAMI affiliate and learn more about Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) programs that connect law enforcement, mental health providers, hospital emergency services and individuals with mental illness and their families. You can also find mental health resources for Law Enforcement officers.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: Find Help & Treatment

Use this search tool from the US Department of Health and Human Services to find mental health treatment facilities and programs around the country.

The Treatment Advocacy Center

The Treatment Advocacy Center is a national 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to eliminating legal and other barriers to the timely and effective treatment of severe mental illness. The organization promotes laws, policies and practices for the delivery of psychiatric care and supports the development of innovative treatments for and research into the causes of severe and persistent psychiatric illnesses, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

POLICE / MENTAL HEALTH COLLABORATIONS

Council of State Governments Law Enforcement - Mental Health Learning Sites

In an effort to expand the knowledge base for law enforcement agencies interested in starting or enhancing a Police Mental Health Collaboration, The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center, with assistance from a team of national experts and the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), selected 10 law enforcement agencies to serve as national Law Enforcement-Mental Health Learning Sites. Learn more about accessing these resources with the Council of State Governments Police - Mental Health Collaboration Toolkit.

International Association of Chiefs of Police One Mind Campaign

The One Mind Campaign seeks to ensure successful interactions between law enforcement and people in crisis and/or with mental health issues or disorders. The initiative focuses on uniting local communities, public safety organizations, and mental health organizations so that the three become “of one mind.”

JUSTICE REFORM ORGANIZATIONS

Vera Institute of Justice | Serving Safely

The Vera Institute of Justice works to secure equal justice, end mass incarceration, and strengthen families and communities across America. Vera is developing empirically driven responses to the substance use and mental health needs of people involved in justice systems. Serving Safely is a national initiative designed to improve interactions between police and persons affected by mental illnesses and developmental disabilities.

The Marshall Project

The Marshall Project is a nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization that seeks to create and sustain a sense of national urgency about the U.S. criminal justice system. Their section on Policing includes their own articles and investigations alongside curated links from other publications.

Institute for Innovative Prosecution - John Jay College of Criminal Justice

The Institute for Innovation in Prosecution at John Jay College of Criminal Justice (IIP) provides a collaborative national platform that brings together prosecutors, policy experts, and the communities they serve to promote data-driven strategies, cutting-edge scholarship, and innovative thinking. The IIP is dedicated to criminal justice that promotes community-centered standards of safety, fairness, and dignity.

Pew’s Public Safety Performance Project (PSPP)

PSPP works with states to advance data-driven, fiscally sound policies and

practices in the criminal and juvenile justice systems that protect public safety, hold offenders accountable, and control corrections costs.

From Punishment to Public Health - John Jay College of Criminal Justice

From Punishment to Public Health (P2PH) is a unique collaboration led by John Jay College of Criminal Justice and the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), in partnership with over a dozen key stakeholders focused on addressing the overuse of incarceration and its many public health impacts.

The Stepping Up Initiative: A National Initiative to Reduce the Number of People with Mental Illnesses in Jails

A collaboration of the National Association of Counties (NACo), the American Psychiatric Association Foundation and The Council of State Governments Justice Center, Stepping Up is a national movement to provide counties with the tools they need to develop cross-systems, data-driven strategies that can lead to measurable reductions in the number of people with mental illnesses and co-occurring disorders in jails.

OFFICER WELLNESS

Code 9 Heroes and Families United

Code 9's mission is to work towards positive change in the first responder culture as they continue to raise awareness, advocate and educate on the devastating effects of PTSD for first responders and families that could lead to suicide.

Critical Concepts Consulting

Critical Concepts Consulting is a training and consulting organization that offers in-person and online training to individuals, companies and communities seeking healing and knowledge.

First Responder Support Network

The mission of the First Responder Support Network (FRSN) is to provide

educational treatment programs to promote recovery from stress and critical incidents experienced by first responders and their families.

In Harm's Way: Law Enforcement Suicide Prevention

IN HARM'S WAY is a federally funded program that offers training seminars and workshops nationally on suicide prevention. This webpage offers a plethora of resources, reproducible materials, articles with varying viewpoints, statistics and opinions from which readers can form their own conclusions on the magnitude of the law enforcement suicide problem, its causes and the best approaches to finding a solution.

Police Psychology: : A Journal for Law Enforcement and Public Safety

A clearinghouse of information related to the new and growing field of police and public safety psychology. The Q&A section of the site answers questions frequently asked by police, first responders or other individuals engaged in public safety.

Post Incident Stress & Trauma in Law Enforcement

PISTLE-PS is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing resources for law enforcement and public safety professionals who are battling the effects of stress from critical incidents incurred in the line of duty. The staff at PISTLE-PS are current or retired law enforcement officers and firefighters who have experienced and understand the stress involved from enduring critical incidents. Learn more about their weekly support groups by visiting their website.

Yoga for First Responders

YogaShield® Yoga For First Responders® (YFFR) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization providing yoga training that is job specific and culturally informed. Their mission is to provide first responders and military personnel with traditional yoga training that is culturally informed and job specific for the purposes of effectively processing stress, building resilience, and enhancing performance.

CONNECT ONLINE

Film Website

ernieandjoethefilm.com

Twitter

twitter.com/ernieandjoe

Facebook

facebook.com/ernieandjoethefilm

Instagram

[@ernieandjoethefilm](https://www.instagram.com/ernieandjoethefilm)

To purchase the film for institutional or educational use
(for example, ongoing in-class or training use,
and/or to add the film to your library collection), please visit
our educational distributor **Roco Films/Film Platform.**

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