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DIRECTORS OF *RBG*

# GABBY GIFFORDS WON'T BACK DOWN



Discussion Guide

JOURNEYS IN FILM™  
educating for global understanding



BRIARCLIFF ENTERTAINMENT AND CNN FILMS PRESENT IN ASSOCIATION WITH TIME STUDIOS A STORYVILLE FILMS AND LISA ERSPAMER ENTERTAINMENT PRODUCTION "GABBY GIFFORDS WON'T BACK DOWN"

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# Facilitation Guidelines

Filmmakers use immersive storytelling to produce intense thoughts and emotions in the viewer. **Journeys in Film** uses this powerful medium as a springboard for meaningful dialogue around humanity's most pressing issues. In this guide, you will find suggestions for leading productive conversations that broaden perspectives, encourage empathy, and build new paradigms for education.

- When watching a film or having a powerful discussion, normalize taking breaks and exercising bodily autonomy. Acknowledge that conversations around complex topics can be vulnerable, complicated, and challenging. Encourage members to voice and do what is right for them without needing to explain or apologize.
- People do their best when they know what to expect. Start and end meetings on time.
- Share or co-create your intentions for the meeting.
- Create your space. If possible, share snacks or find other ways to create an inviting, comfortable atmosphere.
- Create a trustworthy space. Maintain confidentiality; only speak to your own experience.
- Minimize distractions while you are together. Silence cell phones and devices so you can give your full attention to the conversation.
- Practice whole-body listening. Listen to words, tone, body language, and the feeling in the atmosphere.
- Acknowledge voices that may be absent. Is there a lived experience that isn't represented in your group? Who are the bridge people who might be able to connect you with other people in your community who might bring new perspectives to the table?
- Adopt an attitude of positive intent. If someone says something that rubs you the wrong way, assume positive intent and ask for more information.
- Ignite your curiosity around other people's views and opinions. Listen to understand, not to respond. You don't need to agree with others in your group or make it known that you are "right" to have a worthwhile conversation.
- Words matter. Be open to learning and practicing new ways to communicate with others.
- Be clear, direct, and kind in your communication. Nobody benefits when you bottle your opinions.
- Everyone has blindspots and biases; cultivate a space of grace as you enter into new territory together.
- If a conversation gets heated, practice acknowledging the tension and pausing as a group. Take a collective breath together before diving back in or take a longer break to reset.
- Privilege your relationships with others over the content or agenda of the meeting. Show each other kindness.
- Create a closing ritual that celebrates the time you've spent together and either gives closure or gives members something to think about before your next meeting.

# A Letter from Gabby Giffords

I hope you enjoy watching *Gabby Giffords Won't Back Down*. This film walks you through my life and my story, and I'm thrilled to be able to share it with all of you. My hope is that this discussion guide will spark important conversations about aphasia, gun violence, and continuing to fight for what you believe in—even when it seems like progress isn't possible.

In 2011, I was the target of an assassination attempt while I was meeting constituents, doing my job as a congresswoman. Six lives were lost that day, and my life was forever altered.

My story is a unique one, although not as unique as we might hope. Every day, more than 100 Americans die from gun violence. Many more are shot and survive and have to live with a lifetime of trauma and physical injuries.

After I was shot, I was partially paralyzed and diagnosed with the communication disorder aphasia. I wasn't able to continue to represent Arizonans in Congress, and I had to relearn some basics, including how to walk and talk.

Despite the fact that an estimated two million Americans are living with aphasia, around 85% of people have never heard the word. Aphasia can make it hard to connect and converse with those around you, leaving many individuals feeling isolated and lonely. I hope my story sheds some light on what aphasia is and what it isn't, and helps those living full, vibrant lives with aphasia feel a little less alone.

Shortly after the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in December 2012, I founded an organization dedicated to ending gun violence. I've channeled my pain into purpose through this organization, Giffords. We have made tremendous progress over the past 10 years, yet we still have so far to go.

I hope all who watch this film come away with a greater sense of empathy and understanding for those who have suffered from aphasia or gun violence.

But most importantly, I hope viewers understand that even when it seems like the challenges you face are too great to overcome, you must move ahead and keep fighting.

With love and gratitude,  
Gabby Giffords



## Introduction to the Film



*Photograph of Gabby Giffords with film directors  
Betsy West and Julie Cohen*

*Gabby Giffords Won't Back Down* is a powerful film that allows viewers to examine the phenomenon of gun violence in the United States and address the challenging emotions this reality can raise. The gun violence prevention organization that Gabby founded, [Giffords](#), notes that the term “survivor” refers to anyone whose life has been irreparably changed by gun violence. This can include people who have witnessed an act of gun violence, had someone they know and care for injured or killed, or been threatened or wounded with a gun.

Gun violence can include homicides, suicides, domestic violence, and unintentional shootings. Some people may not recognize themselves as survivors until they see their experience represented. Others choose different words to represent their experience. If you have people who have experienced gun violence in your group, acknowledge that they are the experts of their own experience and offer the resources found in this guide to support them in their journey.

Thoughts and beliefs about gun ownership and legislation vary tremendously depending on political identity and geography. It's hard to find a person who doesn't have a strong opinion about guns in America. **Journeys in Film** hopes your community will come together to watch this powerful story regardless of each individual's current stance on the issue.

*Gabby Giffords Won't Back Down* is a film that encourages healing and thoughtful discussions. As you watch the film, consider how your community might be strengthened by engaging with the material and with each other. See the facilitation guide on page 3 for suggestions and guidance on how to engage in productive group discussions.

As gun violence is on the rise and more people are affected by its devastating consequences, it is essential to acknowledge the gravity of the subject matter and recognize that the material presented in the film may be triggering for some viewers.

# The Life of Gabrielle Dee Giffords: A Timeline

<b>June 8, 1970</b>	Born in Tucson, Arizona, to Spencer and Gloria Giffords.
<b>1993</b>	Graduated from Scripps College in Claremont, California, with a double major in Latin American studies and sociology.
<b>1996</b>	Earned an M.A. in urban planning from Cornell University.
<b>1997–2007</b>	Ran her family’s tire business in Tucson, then helped manage a commercial property firm.
<b>2002</b>	Won election to the Arizona State Senate.
<b>2006</b>	Won election to the U.S. Congress as the representative for Arizona’s Eighth Congressional District.
<b>2007</b>	Married Mark Kelly, a Navy pilot and astronaut.
<b>2007–2012</b>	Served in the U.S. Congress as Representative from Arizona and served on the Armed Forces, Foreign Affairs, and Science and Technology Committees. Chaired the Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics.
<b>2011</b>	Shot in the head by a gunman at a constituent event and seriously wounded. After a partial recovery, she returned to the House to vote.
<b>2012</b>	Resigned from the House to concentrate on further recovery.
<b>2013</b>	Founded Americans for Responsible Solutions, a non-profit organization supporting gun safety, after the Sandy Hook shooting.
<b>2016</b>	Americans for Responsible Solutions merged with the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. In 2017, the organization was re-named Giffords.
<b>2018</b>	Co-founded Friends of Aphasia with speech therapist Dr. Fabi Hirsch Kruse.
<b>2020</b>	Mark Kelly elected to the U.S. Senate in a special election.
<b>2022</b>	Awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian honor, by President Joe Biden.
<b>Currently</b>	Continuing to work on her own recovery and to advocate for responsible gun ownership and policies to prevent gun violence.

To learn more about the life and work of Gabby Giffords, see the resources below:

Dave Cullen, “How Gabby Giffords Survived a Shot to the Head, and Outsmarted the NRA”

<https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2020/09/how-gabby-giffords-survived-a-shot-to-the-head-and-outsmarted-the-nra>

Karen Tumulty, “How Gabby Giffords Found Her Voice Again”

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/07/15/gabby-giffords-documentary-shooting-recovery-profile/>

# Congresswoman Giffords: Policies and Politics

Gabby began her political career by running successfully for the Arizona House of Representatives and then for the Arizona Senate, where she became the youngest woman elected to the state senate in Arizona. A few years later, she was elected to the United States House of Representatives, where she served on three committees: Armed Services, Foreign Affairs, and Science and Technology. A member of the moderate “Blue Dog Coalition,” Gabby’s leadership abilities and dedication to bipartisan compromise quickly made her a rising star in the House.

Gabby eventually chaired the Science and Technology Committee, where she pushed for a federal role supporting research and development of alternative energy sources, particularly solar. She believed that our country’s health-care system needed to be drastically improved and supported Barack Obama’s Affordable Care Act. She believed that gay service members should be allowed to serve openly in the military, and argued for the repeal of the “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy. She was pro-choice and in favor of spending for education.

1. Given the policies that Gabby championed in the House of Representatives, would you have voted to re-elect her? Why, or why not?
2. What aspects of Gabby’s background helped to prepare her for some of her congressional responsibilities?
3. Gabby once said, “Always I fought for what I thought was right. But never did I question the character of those with whom I disagreed. Never did I let pass an opportunity to join hands with someone just because he or she held different beliefs.” Do you think this reflects the behavior of today’s political leaders? Can you identify politicians who seem to feel the same way?



# Tragedy in Tucson



Meeting with constituents was one of Gabby's favorite parts of being a congresswoman. On January 8, 2011, Gabby and some of her staff hosted a "Congress on Your Corner" event in front of a Safeway supermarket in Tucson, Arizona. On that cold January morning, a man drew a Glock semi-automatic pistol and shot Gabby in the head. He then shot randomly into the crowd, killing six people, including a nine-year-old girl, and injuring others.

The bullet that went through the left side of Gabby's brain caused extensive damage. Gabby was placed in a medically induced coma, and part of her skull was removed in emergency surgery. She was moved from the University Medical Center of Tucson to Houston's Memorial Hermann Medical Center for rehabilitation, a long and slow process of recovery.

1. What were the impacts of the shooting on Gabby?
  - On her physical body?
  - On her mental abilities?
  - On her emotional wellbeing?
  - On her ability to speak?
  - On her family relationships?
  - On her career?
2. Do you think it is important for political figures to meet openly with their constituents in spite of the risks? Why, or why not?
3. The man who shot Gabby had been suspended from his college for disruptive behavior. He had two previous offenses, including one for drug possession. He posted bizarre statements about terrorism and the federal government online. He had been rejected by the military as unqualified for service. In your opinion, should he have been able to purchase the weapon that he used? Why, or why not?



# What is Aphasia?



Gabby was partially paralyzed by the gunshot to the left side of her brain, an injury that left her with a communication disorder known as aphasia. Aphasia affects more than two million Americans, yet 85% of people aren't familiar with the term.

Aphasia impacts a person's ability to effectively use language to communicate. Aphasia is typically caused by a stroke, but it can result from any type of brain injury that damages the parts of the brain responsible for language. Word-finding difficulties are the hallmark of aphasia, but it can also impact the ability to understand speech, to read, and to write. However, aphasia does not impact cognition, or a person's intelligence.

In the early days of Gabby's recovery, she was only able to say two words: "what" and "chicken." Through fierce determination and endless hours of hard work, she has now returned to giving speeches. Language and communication remain challenging, but she continues to make progress.

And her ongoing improvements are not unique to her alone; people living with aphasia often improve and make progress over the course of their lifetimes.

1. Describe the therapy that Gabby received while she was in rehabilitation. What methods did her speech therapists use? What seemed to be their attitude toward their patient?
2. How did Gabby feel about her speech therapy and rehabilitation? What does this tell you about her character?
3. How important was music in her recovery? Did that surprise you? Why, or why not?
4. What role did family members play in helping her to recover?
5. Have you ever worked to help someone who was recovering from a serious accident or illness? How do you think this work affects such caregivers?

## For Better or for Worse...



Gabby and Mark met in 2003 and were married in 2007. They had a long-distance relationship in the first years of their marriage because she worked in Arizona and Washington, D.C., while he was stationed at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas.

Mark Kelly graduated from the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy with a degree in marine engineering and nautical science; eight years later, he received an M.S. in aeronautical engineering from the Naval Academy Postgraduate School. As a naval aviator, he had two deployments to the Persian Gulf and flew 39 combat missions. His first trip into space was in 2001 when he piloted the STS Endeavor to the space station. Two more space missions followed. Mark was preparing for his third mission when Gabby was shot. Gabby recovered enough to make the trip to Florida to attend the launch of the last one.

He then retired from the Navy to help with his wife's continuing recovery. After the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December 2012, Gabby and Mark founded Americans for Responsible Solutions in 2013, an organization working to reduce gun violence, and authored a book about their life together. He was elected to the U.S. Senate in 2020.

1. How did Mark first learn about the Tucson shooting? What was his reaction?
2. Many people played a role in Gabby's recovery. How important was Mark's involvement in her therapy? How did he support her in other ways?
3. How has Gabby helped Mark in the years since the shooting? Has this been beneficial for her in any way?

# Gun Violence in the United States

An average of nearly 41,000 Americans die from gun violence every year, or more than 110 per day.<sup>1</sup> Of these, 59% are suicides, 38% homicides, 1.3% police shootings, and 1.2% unintentional shootings. Americans are 35 times more likely to be killed in a gun homicide than people in other high-income countries.

Just how prevalent are guns in the United States today? In 2018, the Washington Post published an article with some startling statistics.<sup>2</sup> The reporters found that there are “more than 393 million civilian-owned firearms in the United States, or enough for every man, woman and child to own one and still have 67 million guns left over.” That’s more than twice as many per capita as the next highest country, Yemen. Since then, the number of civilian-owned guns has continued to grow.

Gabby herself is a gun owner, and Giffords organizes responsible gun owners who understand that gun safety and gun ownership go hand in hand. Her work to reduce gun violence reflects a movement of responsible gun owners who are seeking smart legislation to improve public safety.

1 <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-violence-statistics/>

2 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/06/19/there-are-more-guns-than-people-in-the-united-states-according-to-a-new-study-of-global-firearm-ownership/>

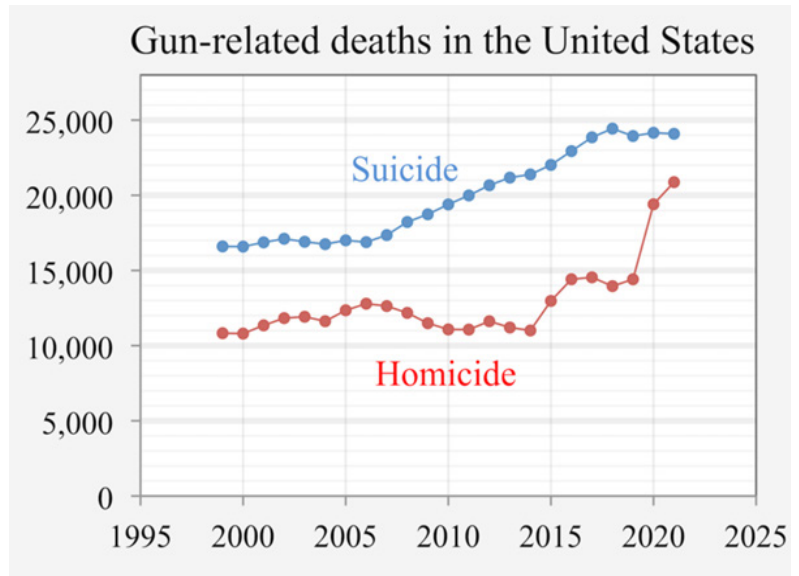


Chart reference <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org>

1. Go to the Giffords organization website at <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-violence-statistics/> to read additional information about gun violence today. Look up the gun violence statistics for your own state. What information did you learn that surprised you?
2. Gun violence is now the leading cause of death of children in the United States, and more than 4.6 million children live in a home with at least one unlocked and loaded gun. What happens to children who are exposed to gun violence, even if they are themselves uninjured?
3. What is your own attitude toward gun ownership? Why do you think some individuals choose to own one or more guns while others believe gun ownership is either unnecessary or undesirable?





## Gun Violence: The Argument Continues...



The question that divides American society, perhaps more than any other, is what to do about gun violence. When a high-profile mass shooting captures public attention, the debate swells. Recent tragedies include the shooting at a theater in Aurora, Colorado, that killed 12 and wounded 70; the murder of nine people, including the pastor, at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church; and the massacre of 49 people and wounding of 53 more at the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida. Since the film was made, more mass shootings have occurred, from a supermarket in Buffalo, New York, to an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas.

Every time such shootings occur, many Americans call for our nation's gun laws to be strengthened. Groups representing gun manufacturers and their interests, like the National Rifle Association, push back against such attempts. Play the film again from 56:28 to 1:02:57, a segment which features a speech by President Barack Obama and testimony in Congress from Wayne LaPierre, CEO of the National Rifle Association.

1. What do you know about the National Rifle Association? What policies does it lobby for? What was its position after the Sandy Hook shooting?

2. Who is Wayne LaPierre? Why do you think he opposed the bill to require background checks for all gun buyers? What happened to the bill in Congress?

3. LaPierre's recommendation with regard to stopping gun violence in the United States was to put armed police officers in every school. Do you agree with this recommendation? Why, or why not?

4. What do you think about each of these suggestions for lowering the level of gun violence? Which one(s) would you like to see implemented in your state?

- a. Eliminating the sale of all semi-automatic weapons to civilians
- b. Banning the sale of high-capacity magazines
- c. Requiring background checks for all guns sale
- d. Raising the age for purchasing a gun
- e. Passing extreme risk protection orders ("red flag" laws) in every state
- f. Removing guns from domestic abusers
- g. Community programs to intervene in and prevent violent situations
- h. Other suggestions?

## Giffords and Citizen Action



In December 2012, 20 children and six adult staff members were murdered at Sandy Hook Elementary School. In response, Gabby and Mark formed an organization called Americans for Responsible Solutions. This group, an intended counterpart to the NRA, would be an organization that changed hearts and minds, supported political candidates who believed in gun safety, and helped educate the public on gun violence.

In 2016, Americans for Responsible Solutions joined forces with a San Francisco-based organization, the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, to form a new organization that

was later rebranded as Giffords. This merger meant that individuals with political savvy about advocacy and lobbying were now combining talents with legal experts. According to their website, they “track and evaluate gun safety bills, rank each state on the strength of their gun laws, file amicus briefs in critical cases, and conduct original research that then gets disseminated to advocates, legislators, and the media.”

Spend some time on the Giffords website at <https://giffords.org/> to learn more about what the organization does and what resources they offer.



1. What is a lobbyist? How do lobbyists work to influence legislation? Is it proper for lobbyists to make donations to political campaigns? What does it take to become an effective lobbyist?
  
2. If you were to lobby on the issue of gun safety, how would you go about it in your community? In your state? On a national level?
  
3. What new information have you learned from looking at the Giffords website? For example:
  - a. What gun laws are in effect in your state? How does your state rank in terms of gun safety?
  - b. What is the Giffords position on police shootings?
  - c. Are there racial disparities in the numbers of gun deaths?
  - d. Who are the political leaders who have been endorsed by Giffords?
  
4. Who are your representatives in Congress, state government, and local government? What are some of the ways that you can influence them? How can you be most effective?

# Resources for Further Study

## Gabby's biography

Gabrielle Giffords and Mark Kelly, *Gabby: A Story of Courage and Love*

Gabby Giffords' personal website  
<https://gabbygiffords.com/>

Biography and additional information from the History, Art & Archives webpage of the U.S. House of Representatives.  
<https://history.house.gov/People/Detail/14267>

White House ceremony awarding Gabby Giffords the Presidential Medal of Freedom  
<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/lfDcump8sJM>

## On aphasia:

The Friends of Aphasia website: Let's Get People Talking (co-founded by Gabby)  
<https://friendsofaphasia.com/>

The Mayo Clinic explanation of aphasia  
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/aphasia/symptoms-causes/syc-20369518>

Dealing with aphasia, from Johns Hopkins Medicine  
<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/aphasia>

## On gun ownership and gun violence:

An article from the Washington Post on the prevalence of guns in the U.S.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/06/19/there-are-more-guns-than-people-in-the-united-states-according-to-a-new-study-of-global-firearm-ownership/>

Statistics on gun violence in the U.S., including state-by-state statistics and rankings  
<https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-violence-statistics/>

A recent press release from Giffords showing a jump in gun violence deaths in 2021.  
<https://giffords.org/press-release/2022/07/2021-cdc-data-shows-record-number-of-gun-deaths/>

What the data says about gun deaths in the U.S. from the Pew Research Center  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/02/03/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-u-s/>

## On gun policy

Wide differences on most gun policies between gun owners and non-owners, but also some agreement  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/08/04/wide-differences-on-most-gun-policies-between-gun-owners-and-non-owners-but-also-some-agreement/>

The Giffords organization website  
<https://giffords.org/>

Common Cause makes it easy to identify and contact your representatives in Congress  
<https://www.commoncause.org/find-your-representative/addr/#>

ProPublica article on how to get your representatives in Congress to listen  
<https://www.propublica.org/article/users-guide-to-democracy-how-to-get-your-lawmakers-to-listen>

Advice on how to make a phone call, send an email, or visit your representatives in Congress  
<https://www.apa.org/advocacy/guide/who-to-contact>

## Film Credits

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Featuring (in order of appearance)

**Gabby Giffords**  
**Senator Mark Kelly**  
**Dr. Dong Kim**  
**Angie Glynn**  
**Ron Barber**  
**Representative James E. Clyburn**  
**President Barack Obama**  
**Gloria Giffords**  
**Daniel Hernandez**  
**Suzi Hileman**  
**Sergeant Charles Garcia**  
**Claudia Kelly**  
**Claire Kelly**  
**Senator Kirsten Gillibrand**  
**Howard Fischer**  
**Stephanie Innes**  
**Fabi Hirsch**  
**Peter Ambler**  
**Senator Chris Murphy**  
**Representative Val Demings**  
**Sage Sundman**  
**Mark Sundman**  
**Rabbi Stephanie Aaron**





## Image Credits

Page 1: Poster

<https://briarcliffentertainment.app.box.com/s/a6djzbgz6i-w5juv7a4m67gfe0i70vsfd>

Page 4: Headshot photo of Gabby Giffords, provided by Jack Thompson

Page 5: Photo of Gabby with Betsy West and Julie Cohen, directors of *Gabby Giffords Won't Back Down*, provided by Giffords.

Page 8: By Jens Schott Knudsen - Candlelight Vigil in Union Square Uploaded by Mono

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=12684206>

Page 9: Photo of Gabby and Mark in the hospital, provided by Briarcliff Entertainment (film still)

<https://briarcliffentertainment.app.box.com/s/oh3p5rbc-jw97jpeunyif6kcydyrdcif3/file/966628093994>

Page 10: Photo of Gabby and Mark at home, provided by Briarcliff Entertainment (film still)

<https://briarcliffentertainment.app.box.com/s/oh3p5rbc-jw97jpeunyif6kcydyrdcif3/file/966627715037>

Page 11: Compilation of gun violence statistics

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1999-\\_Gun-related\\_deaths\\_USA.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1999-_Gun-related_deaths_USA.png)

Page 12: Gabby stands by Washington Monument memorial, provided by Briarcliff Entertainment

Page 16: Giffords sign at protest.

<https://giffords.org/about/history/>

This discussion guide for the film *Gabby Giffords Won't Back Down* and additional free materials for your classroom can be found at <http://journeysinfilm.org>.



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