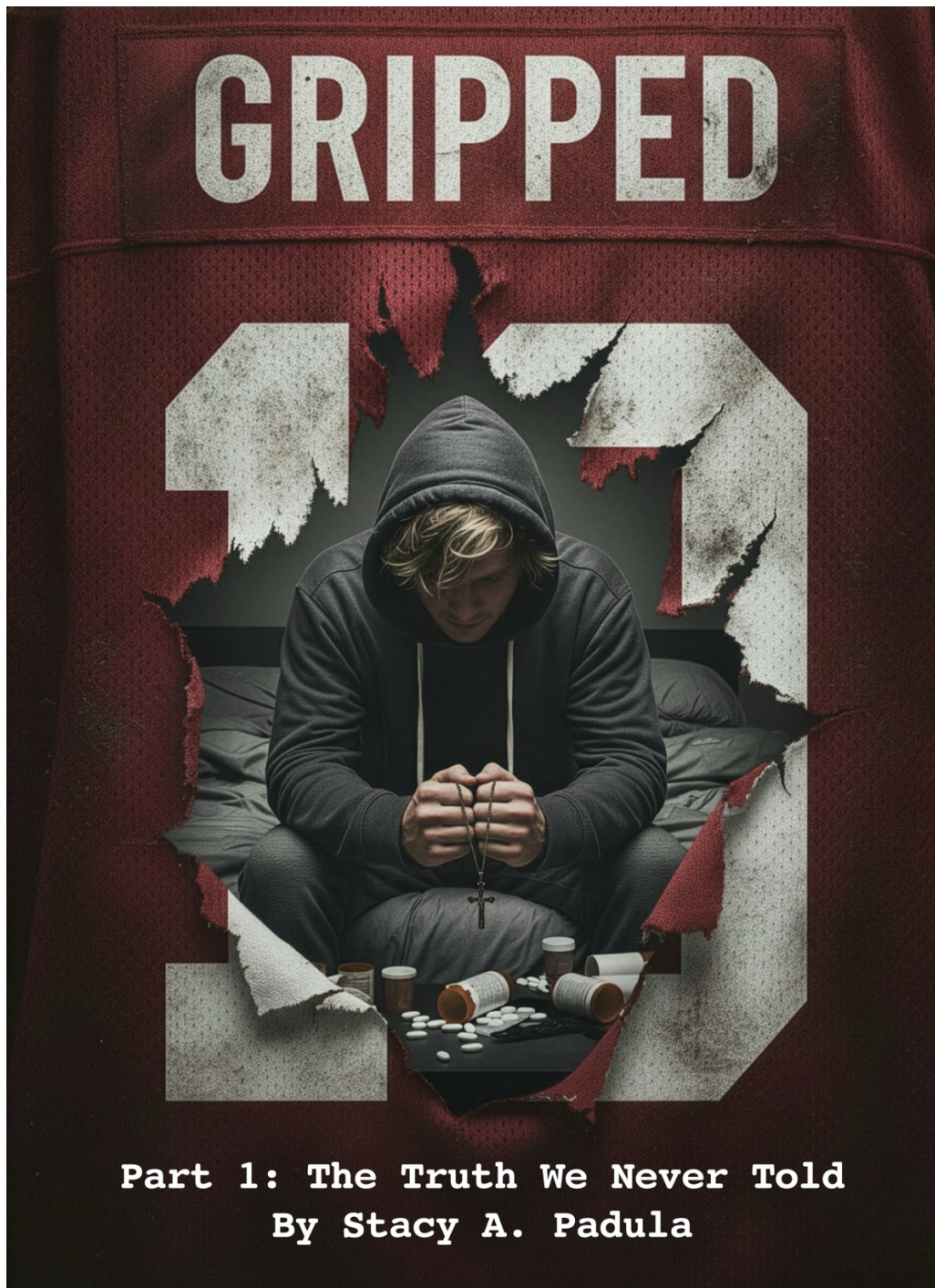


A Parent's Guide to Reading
Gripped Part 1: The Truth We Never Told
With Your Teenager



For parents of teens ages 13–18

Prepared to support open, meaningful conversations about the realities of substance use, peer pressure, family, mental health, and hope.

1. Purpose of This Guide

Gripped Part 1 is a raw, realistic young-adult novel that shows how “good kids” can slide into substance use, addiction, and the ripple effects on family and friends. The author wrote it specifically so teens (and the adults who love them) can see the process clearly—without sugarcoating.

This guide helps you:

- Decide whether the book is a good fit for your teen right now
- Prepare for the content ahead of time
- Read or discuss it together in a productive way
- Turn difficult scenes into opportunities for real conversation
- Point your teen toward healthy coping, honesty, and hope

You do not need to have all the answers. Your willingness to read and talk is already powerful.

2. Brief Book Overview

The story centers on the Dunkin family in Montgomery, Massachusetts, and the interconnected group of teens around them.

- **Taylor Dunkin** – Former high-school & college football star and college prospect whose career is derailed by a severe knee injury. Painkillers lead to addiction and then to dealing drugs.
- **Marc Dunkin** – Taylor’s youngest brother, a focused, principled teen who discovers the truth and fights to save his brother.
- **Cathy Kagelli** – A girl raised in a Christian home who struggles with anxiety, depression, identity, and past substance use while navigating relationships.
- Supporting characters (Chris, Jason, Luke, and others) show how peer influence, parties, family stress, and mental-health struggles intersect with drug use.

The book moves between present-day events and flashbacks that reveal how the characters reached their current situations. It ends with several open threads that continue in later books in the series.

3. Content Overview & Potential Triggers

The novel is intentionally unflinching. Parents should be aware of the following:

Substance use (detailed and realistic)

- Prescription opioid abuse (Percocet, OxyContin) including crushing and snorting pills
- Benzodiazepines (Xanax, Klonopin)
- Cocaine, ecstasy/molly, marijuana, alcohol
- Mixing substances

- Withdrawal symptoms described in detail
- Drug dealing and organized-crime connections

Mental health

- Anxiety and panic
- Depression
- Self-medication
- Shame, guilt, and identity struggles

Other content

- Underage parties and peer pressure
- Family conflict and broken trust
- Romantic relationships and breakups (no explicit sex scenes, but references to physical relationships and pressure)
- Police investigation and danger tied to drug trafficking
- Occasional strong language

The author states in the preface that the book may be considered too controversial for some school settings precisely because it refuses to soften these realities. Many teens will recognize elements of the story from their own schools or social circles.

4. Why This Book Can Be Valuable for Teens (and Parents)

- It shows the *process* of how addiction often begins—not with a dramatic first hit, but with legitimate pain, pressure, boredom, loneliness, or the desire to fit in.
- It illustrates how one person's choices affect an entire community of friends and family.
- It portrays both the damage and the possibility of change, honesty, and recovery.
- Characters come from different backgrounds (strong Christian home, affluent family, high-achieving athletes, etc.), helping a wide range of teens see themselves or people they know.
- Faith appears naturally in some characters' lives without the story becoming a sermon.

Reading it together gives you a shared reference point for conversations that might otherwise feel abstract or accusatory.

5. How to Approach Reading Together

Option A – Read side-by-side

Each of you reads the same chapters, then talks.

Option B – Parent reads first

You read the full book, then decide which sections to discuss or read aloud together.

Option C – Guided discussion only

Your teen reads independently; you use the questions below for conversation.

Practical tips

- Set a calm, private time (car rides, evening walks, or a set “book night” often work better than formal sit-downs).
 - Start with curiosity, not lectures: “What did you think of that part?” is more effective than “See what happens when...”
 - Acknowledge the intensity: “Some of these scenes are heavy. How are you feeling after reading that?”
 - Share your own relevant experiences or observations when appropriate (without turning the conversation solely toward your teen’s behavior).
 - Pause if emotions run high. You can always return later.
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6. Key Themes & Discussion Framework

Use these overarching themes as anchors for conversation:

1. **How addiction often starts** – Injury, legitimate pain medication, emotional pain, boredom, peer influence.
 2. **The difference between “using” and “addiction.”**
 3. **Family roles** – The sibling who tries to rescue, the parent who misses warning signs, the recovering parent who extends grace.
 4. **Peer pressure and loyalty** – When friendship becomes enabling.
 5. **Mental health and self-medication** – Anxiety, depression, and the temporary relief substances seem to offer.
 6. **Identity and shame** – Who am I when the thing I was good at is taken away? How do I face people after I’ve messed up?
 7. **Honesty vs. secrecy** – What happens when truth is hidden or revealed.
 8. **Hope and second chances** – Characters who begin to choose differently.
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7. Suggested Discussion Questions

(Grouped for flexibility. You do not need to use every question.)

Opening the conversation

- What was your overall reaction to the book?
- Which character did you understand or relate to most? Least? Why?

- Were there any scenes that felt especially realistic or surprising?

Taylor's story

- How did Taylor's injury and the loss of his football future affect his choices?
- At what points could someone have intervened earlier? What made intervention hard?
- What do you think about Marc's decision to confront Taylor and involve their parents?

Cathy's story

- How does Cathy's anxiety and family background influence her decisions?
- What role does her friendship group play in both her struggles and her support?
- How do you see the difference between wanting to fit in and losing yourself?

Family and friendship

- How does addiction affect the whole Dunkin family, even those who are not using?
- Where do you see enabling versus healthy support in the story?
- What does real loyalty look like when a friend or sibling is making destructive choices?

Choices and consequences

- Which small decisions in the book led to bigger problems later?
- How do the characters justify their actions to themselves?
- What moments show characters beginning to take responsibility?

Faith and values (if relevant to your family)

- How do different characters relate to faith or church?
- Where do you see grace, judgment, or hypocrisy in the story?
- What does the book suggest about forgiveness—of others and of oneself?

Looking forward

- What do you hope happens for these characters in later books?
- If you could talk to one character, what would you say or ask?
- What is one takeaway you want to remember from this story?

8. Practical Conversation Starters for Everyday Life

- “The book talks a lot about pressure—sports, grades, fitting in. What kinds of pressure feel heaviest for kids your age?”
- “Marc keeps trying to help Taylor even when it's hard. Have you ever been in a situation where a friend needed help but didn't want it?”
- “Cathy struggles with anxiety and tries different ways to cope. What healthy ways do you or your friends use when stress gets high?”

- “The story shows how secrets grow. Is there anything you wish adults understood better about what teens deal with?”
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9. Warning Signs & Resources

The book depicts many classic warning signs of substance problems:

- Changes in sleep, mood, or energy
- Withdrawal from family
- Secretive behavior
- Decline in school or sports performance
- New friend groups centered on partying
- Defensiveness when substances are mentioned

If reading this book raises concerns about your own teen or someone they know, trusted starting points include:

- Your pediatrician or family doctor
 - School counselor
 - Local adolescent substance-use programs
 - National helplines (SAMHSA National Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP)
 - Al-Anon / Alateen for family members affected by someone else’s use
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10. Closing Encouragement for Parents

You do not have to turn every discussion into a perfect teaching moment. Simply reading the same story and staying open creates a bridge. Many teens are more willing to talk about difficult topics when the conversation is framed around characters rather than themselves.

Gripped does not offer easy answers, but it does offer honesty—and honesty is often the first step toward protection and healing. Your presence as a calm, non-reactive listener may be one of the most protective factors your teenager has.

If you continue into later books in the series, the same approach of shared reading and open questions will remain useful as the characters’ stories deepen.

Thank you for investing the time to engage with your teen through this story.