



PHOTO CREDIT:
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MELISSA M. WEIKSNAR

KEYNOTE SPEAKER | PANELIST
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A graduate of MIT, the University of Houston, and Harvard Business School, Melissa spent over 20 years in the high technology industry before changing careers to high school teaching. From 2013-15 she worked at the Center for Adolescent Substance Abuse Research at Boston Children's Hospital.

Melissa participated in the 2015 filming of the Jim Wahlberg movie "If Only" <http://dropthemoff.com/ifonly/> about youth substance use disorders, and has been a panelist following numerous showings of the film.

Melissa is married, the mother of two older children, and lives in Buffalo, NY.

Informative. Powerful. Life-changing.

Amy Caruso was a junior in the nursing program at Boston College and seemed to have everything going for her: she was bright, athletic, had many wonderful friends, career goals, good health insurance, and a loving family. But in November 2009, she admitted that she was addicted to heroin, and voluntarily entered treatment. Five weeks later, she died from an overdose at the treatment facility on the day after Christmas, weeks shy of her 21st birthday.



Since Amy's death, her mother, Melissa Weiksnar, has shared her daughter's story with over 24,000 listeners in school, college, community, healthcare, and religious groups to show how addiction can strike any family. Melissa tailors each presentation to the specific audience, including ways to take action. She typically includes a brief slideshow of Amy's life, followed by reflections on her six-year path to addiction in the context of the nation's opiate epidemic.

Melissa also quotes extensively from Amy's journals. Those from treatment are included in the 2012 book: *Heroin's Puppet —Amy (and her disease)* Amy's complete journals are in the 2014 book: *It's Not Gunna Be an Addiction: The Adolescent Journals of Amelia F. W. Caruso (1989 - 2009)*. The children's book *Loving Aunt Amy* was published in 2020. <https://www.amelibro.com/books/>

Melissa also produced a public service announcement for the city of Lowell, MA <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOK1Khe7d0k>.

"I had no idea about the extent of the problem of opiates in our community."

Parent

"The students really connected with Melissa as a mother."

Guidance Counselor

"I wish I had heard this presentation four years ago."

High School Student

"Melissa's raw pain, anger, and outrage poured forth and we all felt it. It was uncomfortable, frightening, justifiable, and necessary. It made an indelible mark on the audience."

Grandparent

"Melissa came to my classes as the culmination of our addiction and drug awareness unit. It was very informative and moving. I really think that was the first time in my 8 years of teaching the unit that students not only listened, but actually absorbed the sobering message."

Sophomore health teacher