

Hollow Bones — Discussion Questions



“The risks we take to protect the ones we love—in a world where crisis is always just around the corner.”

1. Molly spends her life anticipating worst-case scenarios. Where is the line between preparedness and fear? Do you think Molly knows when she crosses it?
2. How does losing her biological mother on 9/11 when she was an infant shape Molly differently than losing someone she can remember?

3. The novel asks what risks we take to protect people we love. When does protection become control? Which characters struggle most with that distinction?
4. Can a lie be an act of love? Choose one lie or withheld truth from the novel and argue both sides.
5. Picoult moves between past and present and different understandings of family history. How did learning information at different points affect whom you trusted?
6. Discuss the mothers and daughters in the novel. What makes someone a mother here-biology, sacrifice, caregiving, choice, truth, or something else?
7. Jesse is a police polygraph expert, while Molly's world revolves around predicting danger. Why do you think Picoult paired someone professionally concerned with truth with someone professionally concerned with risk?
8. What does the novel suggest about our desire to assign blame after tragedy? Does knowing why something happened actually make grief easier?
9. How effectively did the historical backdrop of 9/11 work for you? Did it feel like history, personal memory, inherited trauma-or some combination?

10. Which character did you judge most harshly at first?
Did additional information change your judgment?
11. Picoult has said she wanted the novel to examine how people try to keep loved ones safe, including by lying to themselves. Which character is most dishonest with themselves?
12. What can impossible one, or both? parents reasonably promise their children? Is "I'll keep you safe" a loving promise, an
13. If you could ask Molly one question after the final page, what would it be?
14. Jesse Fitzgerald returns from *My Sister's Keeper*, something Picoult has described as a gift for longtime readers. Does knowing Jesse's earlier story change how you interpreted him here? Does *Hollow Bones* change how you see the Fitzgerald family now?
15. What did you learn about postpartum psychosis from this book? Were you familiar with the disorder before this? In what ways does the health care system fail women-and what can be done to change that?