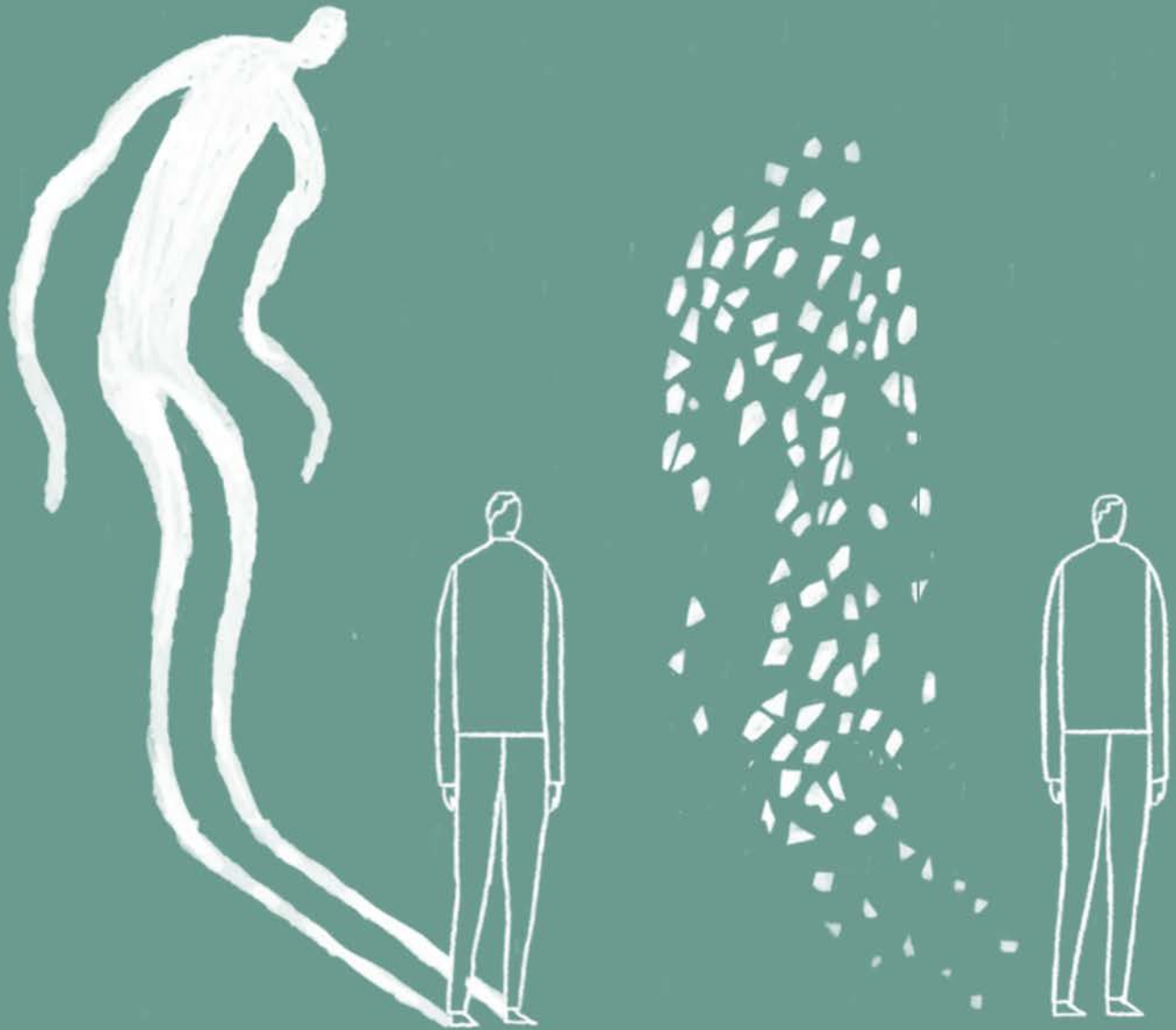


A BETTER MAN

It Was Me

INTERACTIVE COMPANION DISCUSSION GUIDE



@abettermanfilm
abettermanfilm.com

 **BRIDGES**

tvo
Never stop learning

 **Canada
Media Fund**

Intervention
PRODUCTIONS

INTRODUCTION

It Was Me is an award-winning interactive project featuring the voices of six men who have used violence against a partner. All have participated in group therapy and are working to change their behaviour and take responsibility for the harm they caused. The questions they respond to were crowdsourced from women who have experienced domestic violence. *It Was Me* is the companion piece for documentary feature *A Better Man*, which depicts co-director Attiya Khan pursuing her personal vision of justice and closure with the man who abused her 25 years ago.

This discussion kit is designed to help people unpack *It Was Me* together, and envision new roles they can play in challenging domestic violence, whether it's in their own relationships or as part of a broader movement for social change. This kit can be used to spark discussion in formal or informal settings, from a community workshop to your living room.

SETTING THE TONE

***It Was Me* is available for free online.**

Visit the Interactive page on our website:

abettermanfilm.com

Experiencing It Was Me requires a stable internet connection.

Ideally, people should experience and discuss *It Was Me* in a calm and quiet space to facilitate reflection and dispel concerns that others might overhear the discussion. Those leading more formal groups may consider having a counselor available for private discussion with participants, and/or preparing a list of local support services and resources for participants (get started on our website: abettermanfilm.com/resources).

To base the conversation on trust, the group may want to brainstorm a list of ground rules for the discussion. Ground rules could include:

- Things shared in the discussion will not be relayed to others as gossip.
- Nobody will be pressured to share things they don't want to.
- Responses from women and transgender people will be prioritized.

Discussions about *It Was Me* can be painful or triggering. We encourage those engaging in a discussion about the project to treat one another with care and compassion, recognizing that our opinions about intimate partner violence may be rooted in our own experiences.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

We want to hear about your discussion!

Please post photos and insights your group is comfortable sharing on social media and tag @abettermanfilm

Consent is important! Make sure your group is okay with it before posting, and avoid posting personal details.

Icebreakers

- How do you feel right now?
- If you could say anything to the interviewees, what would it be?
- Which moments stood out the most for you?

General Questions

- Did you hear aspects of yourself in the men interviewed for this project? What about the women? If so, which comments or moments triggered it?
- Did you feel any of the interviewees are still justifying, minimizing or avoiding the realities of their abuse? If so, what made you feel this way? What steps could these men take to continue their growth?
- Have you ever known someone who you were concerned might be using violence? How did you respond? Is there anything you'd do differently now?
- Can you think of a time that "justice was done" after somebody hurt you? What, and who, contributed to that sense of justice? Now think of a time you hurt someone else. What did you do (or wish you had done) to take responsibility?

Segmented Questions

Depending on the time available and the group's goals, some groups may prefer to focus on segments of the interactive, rather than the full piece.

Segment One: Admit what you did.

Interviewees describe the violent tactics they used against their partners.

- This question is worded differently than the others: as a demand, rather than a question. Name some possible reasons for this creative choice. How do you feel about it?
- What were some examples of violence in the interviewees' relationships? Can you think of any other examples?
- Multiple interviewees talk about the importance of "winning" or gaining control of an argument with their partner. Can you relate to this feeling? Where have you seen this dynamic in your own relationships or those of others? Describe some healthier ways to approach arguments in a relationship.

Violence can look like:

- Damaging property
- Swearing, insulting and name-calling
- Screaming in partner's face
- Blaming self-harm on partner
- Controlling who partner can speak to
- Pushing
- Strangulation
- Hitting/punching

Groups may get ideas from the “Evidence Brief: Intimate Partner Violence in LGBTQ Communities” fact sheet from Rainbow Health Ontario. Find it on the Resources page of our website under “Learning Tools”.

abettermanfilm.com

Segment Two: What made you think it was okay?

Interviewees examine the roots of their violence, reflecting on how, where, and from whom they learned that violence was acceptable.

- In “Macho image”, the interviewee mentions a pressure to perform a macho type of masculinity to protect himself from homophobia. Name other ways that homophobia and transphobia can fuel abuse in LGBTQ communities, or serve as a barrier to getting help.
- Masculinity is a set of social norms that men and boys of all sexual orientations often feel pressure to “live up to”. What aspects of masculinity do you think can contribute to abuse? What can we do to encourage healthier masculinities for men and boys?
- Many interviewees spoke about abuse in their childhood homes. What connections exist between your childhood and how you approach relationships today? How can we do a better job of stopping intergenerational cycles of violence?
- The survivor mentions that the answers to this question are often unsatisfying. How can we hold space for the trauma of childhood abuse without letting it excuse the use of violence in adulthood?

Segment Three: Why did you hide it?

Interviewees explore how they concealed their violence, their reasons for doing so, and how this dissuaded them from seeking help.

- Several interviewees talk about other people perceiving them as nice, caring or even “wonderful” guys. Why do you think these “nice guy” perceptions created silence around their abuse? What needs to change in order to break these silences?
- Multiple men discuss efforts to push away or avoid closeness with people outside the relationship. What are the unhealthy impacts of this behaviour, whether or not the relationship involves abuse?
- A common theme is the fear of appearing weak or less masculine if they admitted they had a problem and sought support. What are some of the steps we can take to address or remove these barriers?

Segment Four: Are you ready to change?

Interviewees highlight their turning points. Their stories can elicit useful reflection on bystander intervention.

- How did different people in the interviewees’ communities motivate or help them to change their behaviour?

“There is change. There is hope.”

— Interviewee #6,
It Was Me

- In “They posted online”, the interviewee sought help after a person he hurt spoke out on social media. Why might a survivor seek justice this way? Why might it be the catalyst for the person who used violence to change? How do you think you would respond if this took place in your community?
- In “Why do you talk to her like that?”, what can we learn from how the husband and wife in a healthy, respectful relationship engaged with their neighbour who was using violence?

Segment Five: How are you taking responsibility?

Interviewees explain the steps they are taking to change and/or be accountable for their behaviour.

- The survivor highlights a dilemma: survivors deserve a voice in deciding how the person who hurt them should take responsibility, but this can place an unfair burden on them. What steps can people who have used violence, and/or community members, take toward justice when the survivor does not want to be involved?
- Two men share how culturally relevant supports helped them (e.g. sweat lodges, advice from elders). What approaches does your culture use to help people take responsibility for harm? Why are culturally relevant supports important?
- Several interviewees talk about learning to see their behaviour through the eyes of others. Do you agree that this is an important part of taking responsibility? Why or why not?
- What are the challenges of supporting people who use violence in changing their behaviour? What are the dangers if our society does not do this work?

Find services to support change and justice on our website. Visit the Resources page under "Support Services".

abettermanfilm.com

ACTIVITY: REMEMBERING HARM

It Was Me features men reflecting on harm they caused. As one survivor says in the piece’s introduction, “Articulating [harm we’ve caused] is terrifying, because that makes it real. But I do think it’s the only way you can move past it.” We have all hurt other people to varying degrees, for varying reasons and with varying impacts.

Think of a time that you hurt someone (emotionally, physically, financially, sexually, psychologically). It could be a partner, co-worker, friend, family member, or any other person in your life. While it doesn’t need to be an abusive type of harm, if you feel supported in this space, try to challenge yourself to think of a moment that makes you feel ashamed.

EMOTIONAL VOCAB

- Frustration
- Sadness
- Hope
- Pride
- Shame
- Fear
- Anger
- Trust
- Embarrassment
- Grief
- Surprise
- Disgust
- Awe
- Remorse
- Anticipation

Shame can contain important information about our values. Ask yourself: “What does my shame over my harmful choices say about what is important to me? What would it say about my values if I did *not* feel ashamed?” Facing feelings of shame can be productive and freeing.

- What do you remember about this incident?
- How did you justify your actions at the time?
- Name any responses you feel in your body as you remember the incident (e.g. flushed cheeks, tense shoulders, racing heart). What emotions can you connect these physical responses to?
- How has the incident shaped you and your choices since?

FURTHER LEARNING

Some participants may wish to dive further into the topics of intimate partner violence, justice and healing. The following links may be helpful.

[9 ways to be accountable when you've been abusive](#)

By: Everyday Feminism (Author: Kai Cheng-Thom)

Great for: People who have used violence and wish to learn how they might be able to take responsibility for the harm they have caused.

[Neighbours, Friends and Families](#)

By: Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children, Western University

Great for: People whose friends or family are experiencing or using violence. Includes tips on safety planning, supporting those who may be experiencing violence, and speaking with those who are using violence.

If you care about a person using violence...

Some people who have used violence feel shame about their choices and may cope with it in a variety of ways, some by addressing it and some by turning away from it. Support from friends and family, or from a therapist, elder, or support group, can help channel shame into long-term change.

People who use violence are human beings. It's okay for friends and family to provide compassionate support for their journeys toward non-violence and accountability. If this is the role that feels right for you, it is also crucial to check in with yourself regularly about your loved one's commitment to that journey. You can be supportive, while remaining cautious of attempts at manipulation and being honest about your biases.

START THE CONVERSATION

Visit our Resources page:

abettermanfilm.com

Tips for people who have:

- Used violence
- Experienced violence
- A friend or family member in a violent relationship