

A BETTER MAN

HIGH SCHOOL LEARNING KIT

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OVERVIEW

LEARNING GOALS

The **A Better Man** documentary and high school learning kit can be catalysts for students to explore the following paths of inquiry:

- Signs of an unhealthy relationship, and how friends and family can respond
- Emotional literacy and its role in healthy relationships
- Different approaches to justice and taking responsibility for harm
- Representations of violence against women in media

A Better Man is rated 14A. The film and kit will be most suitable for grade 11 and 12 students in health or social studies courses such as physical education, psychology, sociology, anthropology, gender studies, women's studies or family studies. Connections to specific courses in the Ontario secondary school curriculum can be found on p. 22.

FILM SYNOPSIS

On a hot summer night 22 years ago, 18-year-old Attiya Khan ran through the streets, frightened for her life. She was fleeing her ex-boyfriend Steve, who'd been abusing her on a daily basis.

Now, all these years later, Attiya has asked Steve to meet. She wants to know how he remembers their relationship and if he is willing to take responsibility for his violent actions.

This emotionally raw first meeting, filmed by Attiya with Steve's consent, is the starting point for **A Better Man**. The rough footage also marks a new beginning in Attiya's own recovery process—as well as an important starting point for Steve. For the first time ever, he speaks of the abuse and cracks open the door to dealing with the past.

Illuminating a new paradigm for domestic-violence prevention, **A Better Man** offers a fresh and nuanced look at the healing and revelation that can happen for everyone involved when men take responsibility for their abuse. It also empowers audience members to play new roles in challenging domestic violence, whether in their own relationships or as part of a broader movement for social change.

PREPARATION

Have students complete the Healthy Relationship Diagnostic (p. 26) prior to introducing the film or other aspects of the learning kit (ideally one week prior). Notifying parents of the material covered in the film and learning kit is also prudent; the enclosed template (p. 25) can be used for that purpose. Setting the Stage (p. 6) also contains important information to share with students prior to showing or discussing the film. Finally, students may feel more confident discussing the film if they have reviewed the Vocabulary List (p. 6-7).

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Given the subject matter of this unit, there is a possibility that students may disclose experiences of violence to facilitators. See Appendix 2 (p. 22) for an outline of legal considerations for facilitators in Ontario regarding the delivery of this unit. Facilitators outside Ontario should check with their relevant government and professional regulatory bodies on legal considerations.



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TIMELINES

The film length is 1:17:40, which will necessitate two periods for viewing in most schools. To accommodate both the length of your class and your students' attention span, you may choose to view the film over *two* days or even *three* days. See Preparation (p. 3) for activities that should be completed prior to the Viewing/Unit Days below.

Two-Day Viewing

- Day 1: Beginning–41:10
(end of conversation with Seth)
- Day 2: 41:11–end

Three-Day Viewing

- Day 1: Beginning–26:35 (end of White Ribbon scene)
- Day 2: 26:36–57:38 (end of school scene)
- Day 3: 57:39–end

This learning kit contains options for viewing and unpacking the film with students over the course of either *three* or *five* days, with extension activity ideas for those who wish to turn it into a longer unit.

Three-Day Unit

- Day 1: Pre-learning (p. 4); view first half of film
- Day 2: View second half of film; short debrief discussion (kick off by asking students "What surprised you about the film?")
- Day 3: Post-learning (Red Flags, p. 10); resources (p. 19)

Five-Day Unit

- Day 1: Pre-learning (p. 4); view first half of film
- Day 2: View second half of film; "What surprised you?" discussion
- Day 3: Segmented viewing with discussion prompts (p. 7)
- Day 4: Complete segmented viewing and begin post-learning (starting on p. 10, your choice of two activities)
- Day 5: Continue post-learning; resources (p. 19)

Extended Unit

- Complete the five-day unit
- Choose one or more of the extension options (p. 15) for individual or group work in class or at home

PRE-LEARNING

DIAGNOSTIC – FACILITATOR NOTES

The purpose of this pre-learning activity is to determine what students already know or think they know about healthy relationships, and to find out what they are interested in learning.

Distribute the diagnostic handout (p. 23) and ask students to check whether the statements are true or false for *them*. Depending on students' needs, facilitators can also deliver the diagnostic questions orally. It is important to stress that students do not have to share their answers with anyone. For most questions (with the exception of 8 and 9, which are exclusively applicable to intimate relationships), students can consider any kind of close relationship, including family and friends. **Debrief:** In some classes, students will volunteer to share their answers. In others, the facilitator may have to go through each question individually and provide a rationale for answers that indicate a healthy relationship.

The following suggested responses can help guide the discussion after students have completed the true/false activity.

Source: [Assault Program/Health & Wellness. University of Toronto. 2015.](#)

1. **TRUE:** Partners in a healthy relationship spend time separately with their own friends as well as their partner's friends. You should be able to continue with other parts of your life when you are in a relationship. Love allows you to continue to grow as an independent and creative person, enjoying relationships and other important parts of your life, including your family, school, work and other friends.
2. **FALSE:** Jealousy is *not* a sign of caring in an intimate relationship. Feelings of jealousy often result from insecurity and low self-esteem, and may lead to possessiveness in a relationship. A need to always know what a partner is doing demonstrates a lack of respect and trust, and is also an indicator of controlling behaviour.

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3. **FALSE:** Intimate partners do not have to be completely open with each other about everything. There is no need for partners to share everything. Each partner is entitled to some privacy, which should be respected by others.
4. **FALSE:** It is not important for partners in a relationship to enjoy all the same interests. It can be good for conversation, but partners do not need to share all the same interests. It's normal to have certain interests or be involved in activities that the other partner may not be interested in. A healthy relationship is one where each person has a balanced life, with activities in and outside the relationship.
5. **FALSE:** Giving in to your partner during arguments is not a good way to resolve conflicts. It is very important to openly discuss problems so that fair solutions agreeable to both partners can be created. This involves active listening and being able to express negative thoughts in a constructive way using assertive communication.
6. **FALSE:** No one can read another person's mind. Assuming you know what your partner is thinking can be dangerous and lead to misinterpretations. Communication includes active listening and being able to recognize and express feelings. Effective communication helps to set the stage for a healthy relationship.
7. **TRUE:** Trust is an important part of relationships. In a healthy relationship, both partners trust and respect each other. When partners distrust one another, a successful relationship is hard to maintain.
8. **FALSE:** Physical attraction is only a small part of a good relationship. Other positive qualities, including honesty, trust, respect, communication, a sense of humour, freedom and patience, must be present for a healthy relationship.
9. The Campus Wellness Web page from the University of Waterloo differentiates between infatuation and love this way: **Love** is when there is honesty, trust and respect. Partners have a balanced interest in other areas of life besides the relationship. Both people are allowed to be themselves and feel at ease with each other. There is mutual giving and receiving. **Infatuation** is when the relationship is the most important thing in your life and you depend on it to make you feel important. One person hangs onto another. There is jealousy and mistrust. One person is always giving more than receiving. There may be broken promises.

uwaterloo.ca/campus-wellness/health-promotion/health-topics/healthy-relationships#warning
10. **TRUE:** We all have to accept ourselves and others as we are.

Additional Resources

- Canadian Red Cross, *Healthy Youth Dating Relationships*: redcross.ca/how-we-help/violence--bullying-and-abuse-prevention/educators/healthy-youth-dating-relationships
- Canadian Women's Foundation, *Healthy Relationships 101*: canadianwomen.org/sites/canadianwomen.org/files/PDF-HealthyRelationships101.pdf
- Love is Respect: loveisrespect.org
- Ontario Ministry of the Status of Women, *Healthy, Equal Relationships*: women.gov.on.ca/owd/english/ending-violence/relationships/index

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SETTING THE STAGE

It is crucial to set the stage for this unit in order to create a safe space that protects both educational workers and students. It is recommended that at least three professionals be in the room during the viewing of the film (the classroom facilitator and two others).

It is also recommended that there be a support worker from the school or the broader community in attendance, e.g. child and youth worker, mental health professional. As facilitator, make sure you have phone and e-mail contacts for local agencies that can assist students. Let the students know you have these contacts.

Some people may have strong reactions to this film. If there are students in your class about whom you are specifically concerned, you might want to have pre-discussions with support professionals.

The following statements will help set the stage with students:

1. We are going to get into some very intense discussions over the course of the next few days.
2. As your facilitator, I have to tell you that I have a duty to report if I feel you are in danger. I do have a list of other contacts that I can share with you.
3. As a class, if we are going to be able to have these difficult conversations, we need to be able to trust each other and trust that they will not be repeated as gossip, that they will not appear on social media or be repeated out of context.
4. Like all of you, I am still learning about these topics and may not have all the answers. I will always give you the best information available to me, and I will work with you to find answers to any questions I'm not sure about.
5. We are going to have _____ and _____ with us while we view the film. This is because viewing this film might make some people remember things that are painful and difficult. They are here to support us. If you feel you need some support away from the film, please step out of the room. Know that one of them will join you until you can return.
6. We need to be kind to each other through this, as our opinions about these issues are often based on personal experiences (that we might or might not have shared).
7. [optional] Are there other ground rules that might be important to us in this class?

VOCABULARY LIST

Students may feel more confident discussing the film if they receive support in learning key words and terms used in the film. Feel free to review these vocabulary terms together as a class, or by sharing this list as a handout. Some groups of learners may benefit from ample time for vocabulary review prior to viewing the film.

- **Abuse:** to treat in a harmful way, harsh treatment, to malign
- **Anniversary:** a celebration of an event, usually a milestone that is honoured at yearly intervals
- **Barometer:** something that may indicate change
- **Bystander:** witness, observer, or a person who is in the proximity of an event and is aware of its occurrence
- **Compassion:** a deep sorrow for another person coupled with the desire to alleviate suffering
- **Counselling:** intervention by a professionally trained person to assist with support, clarification and healing
- **Credibility:** to have solid knowledge and/or experience of a subject
- **Defer:** to allow or accept another's opinion to take greater importance
- **Documentary:** a documentary film expresses a point of view, using cinematic techniques, about a set of facts, events, people or ideas
- **Empathy:** the ability to place oneself in the emotional experience of another
- **Escalate:** an increase in frequency or intensity or both
- **Femininity:** set of social norms, behaviours, pressures and personality characteristics often associated with girls and women
- **Intervention:** to interrupt or interfere with an occurrence or state of affairs

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- **Masculinity:** set of social norms, behaviours, pressures and personality characteristics often associated with boys and men
- **Memory Block:** the hindering or obstruction of remembrance or feeling state
- **Palatable:** acceptable, agreeable to how a person feels or thinks
- **Resilience:** one's ability to recover from injury and thrive
- **Responsibility:** to be accountable for one's behaviour, to be obligated
- **Shame:** feeling bad about one's actions, to be embarrassed by one's actions
- **Stalking:** to keep careful track of another's movements, usually obsessed by that person's activities
- **Sympathy:** pity, to feel pained for someone's suffering
- **Trauma:** refers to a wound (physical injury); also used to describe a psychological wound caused by an event in one's life
- **Trigger:** to activate a response
- **Vigil:** an event to remember and mourn individuals who have died
- **Violence Against Women:** behaviours including physical, verbal, emotional and sexual aggression toward women and girls; domestic violence or intimate-partner violence is a behaviour or pattern of behaviours used by one partner to control another
- **Vulnerability:** to be susceptible
- **White Supremacy:** the belief that white people are superior to those of all other races, resulting in discriminatory treatment of non-white people



SEGMENTED VIEWING GUIDE

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTION

After the class has watched the film, show students your own selection of the following segments a second time for deeper reflection. Hand out these words and prompts one section at a time prior to viewing that film segment. Each set of discussion prompts includes quotations from the film as well as specific questions, giving students options for responding to the film in a way that speaks to them.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

00:00–07:22 Coffee Shop

"That's the stuff that never leaves your mind."

"How would you have preferred the relationship to be?"

"I know it wasn't good, and I don't even know why."

1. Pay attention to non-verbal expression. Can you name the emotions that you think the individuals might be feeling?
2. How can Steve say, "I clearly haven't remembered this" and also "That's the stuff that never leaves your mind"?

08:02–15:50 Steve's first session with Tod

"Women are always asked why we stayed."

"Almost every incident was unbelievable."

"What were some of the justifications you used for acting against your values?"

"These things take place in places where you can get away with it."

"You don't want someone to be afraid of you, but when you slip into that control, you do."

"Who doesn't want to be in a supportive relationship?"

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1. What differences do you see in Steve's body language at the beginning and end of this segment?
2. What does Steve mean when he says, "starting from ground zero"?
3. Steve says he used violence in a way that made Attiya scared of him. This is a form of control. Give some other examples of control within a relationship.

16:44–22:47 Attiya running, and session with Tod

"I thought this was how life is."

"I pushed you off me, kicked off my heels and ran."

"You were terrified of me... you thought you were going to die."

1. What is stalking?
2. How was Attiya resilient?
3. Why do you think Tod asked Steve to tell Attiya what he heard her say?
4. What is the difference between apologizing and taking responsibility?

24:21–37:31 White Ribbon campaign, and session with Tod

"If you're sorry, stop."

"Who is responsible for Steve continuing to hit you?"

"This is what happens... this is what your boyfriend does."

"An incapacity to deal with your feelings in a productive way."

1. How and why do Attiya and Steve remember this incident differently?
2. Explain how Attiya demonstrates compassion and empathy in this scene.

3. Why do you think Attiya didn't raise the name-calling and racism with Tod and Steve?
4. Do you think Attiya will continue to have nightmares about this incident?

37:44–41:10 Seth

"He seemed totally normal and friendly and fun... he could be that!"

1. How and why do Attiya and Seth remember the discussions they had in their relationship differently?
2. In what ways did Seth and his friends help Attiya and Steve?

44:20–52:05 Old Apartments

"No one on this street ever helped."

"I'll probably never come back... I don't remember much from here."

"Do you mind me being here?"

"I put us in a situation where I couldn't act out."

1. Describe the physical reactions both Steve and Attiya have to these locations.
2. How did returning to this site with Steve change things for Attiya? How was this different for Steve?

52:32–58:20 School

"I got there on my own."

"How important it was... to get bus tickets... just to talk to someone who seemed to care."

"I saw the bruises."

"You can drink, get high, do a lot of things, but those things are always waiting for you... you procrastinate, you deal with it a little and then start running again."

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1. What assumptions were made in Attiya and Steve's school about people who experience and use violence in relationships?
2. What impact did the adults in the school have on Attiya and Steve? What could they have done differently?
3. List differences between Attiya's high school experience and that of Steve.

1:01:13–1:04:14 Steve with Tod

"I brought that with me... I didn't have the capacity to let it go."

"I don't want to talk about justice without Attiya here."

"That's when you pack things up... move on from 'I'm an abuser, I'm a victim.'"

1. Why did Steve "sign up" to be part of this film?
2. The best people to define justice are those involved in the incident(s). Discuss.



1:05:30–1:10:38 Party set-up, Attiya and Steve with Tod

"I was so desperate to keep you beside me, I'd do anything to keep you."

"I defer to your judgment about Steve."

"You're my barometer on that."

1. Why did Steve not do anything for 20 years?
2. List the different ways that participating in this process helped both Attiya and Steve.

1:14:04–1:17:40 Credits

1. Why do you think so many people and organizations with so many different priorities supported the production of this film?



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POST-LEARNING

ACTIVITY #1: RED FLAGS AND WAYS OF RESPONDING

Three-day unit

The goal of this activity is for students to list non-physical warning signs of unhealthy or abusive relationships, and to define possibilities for responding to these warning signs as a friend or family member outside the relationship.

Introduction

Facilitator-led brainstorming session with some of the following questions:

1. Name a few examples of non-physical abuse in Attiya and Steve's relationship.

(answers here are "red flags")

Possible answers: racial slurs, insults, name-calling, stalking, financial worry, controlling who she looks at/talks to, isolation, controlling how she spends her time

2. What are some of the ways that people outside the relationship did respond or could have responded?

(answers here are "ways of responding")

Possible answers:

Did: nothing (in school, in neighbourhood), teacher talking with Steve, bus tickets, friends occupying Steve to give Attiya a break, listening

Could have: told an adult, reported to authorities, taken either/both to a counsellor

* Some students may promote physical violence as a possible response. See Common Student Questions and Concerns (p. 20) for considerations in responding to these comments.

Activity

As a class or in small groups if time allows, have students create one of the following for their peers:

- Wallet-sized info card
- Poster
- Brochure

Their product must include:

- 4 possible warning signs
- 3 possible helpful responses
- 1 resource from the school community who could be contacted for support
- 1 resource from the local community who could be contacted for support

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ACTIVITY #2: WHAT DOES JUSTICE MEAN TO ME?

Option for five-day unit

Introduction

The purpose of this activity is for students to explore the concept of justice as both a legal and personal term.

Facilitator-led brainstorming session with the following questions (N.B.: It will be important for students to try to explain their responses using examples from the film):

1. Why do you think Attiya wanted to make this film?
2. Why do you think Steve participated?
3. Do you think justice was achieved?
 - a) From Attiya's perspective?
 - b) From your perspective?
4. Regardless of the answers to questions 1 to 3, what impacts does this film have?

Vocabulary Terms

- **Restorative Justice:** "a response to crime that focuses on restoring the losses suffered by victims, holding offenders accountable for the harm they have caused, and building peace within communities" (Restorative Justice Canada)
- **Healing Circles:** "aim at developing consensus on how to repair harmful results of the offence; intensive and more difficult than passive jail sentence, as offenders are made to face, accept and attempt to correct harms they have caused" (Justice Education Society)

Activity

1. Think of a time when you harmed someone.
2. Answer the following questions regarding that time:
 - a. What did you think when you realized the harm you had caused?
 - b. What impact has this incident had on you and others?
 - c. What has been the hardest thing for you?
 - d. What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

AND/OR

Create a two-part skit that re-enacts the moment and demonstrates what you would do to make things right.

Optional: Students hand in, anonymously, their reflections (template on p. 27). Facilitator reads aloud those where "yes" has been checked for sharing for discussion.

Logical Extensions

- Restorative justice
- Different ways of healing
- The concept of voice (What helps us feel like we have a voice? How can a voice be silenced or drowned out? How do power and privilege impact our voices? What are some possible ways of using our voices?)
- Abuser/victim dichotomy

Resources

- Restorative Justice.org, restorativejustice.org
- Correctional Service Canada, csc-scc.gc.ca/restorative-justice/index-eng
- Article in *The Guardian*: "How restorative justice is steering young offenders away from crime," theguardian.com/society/2014/sep/17/restorative-justice-young-offenders-crime
- Justice Education Society: Aboriginal Restorative Justice Remedies, justiceeducation.ca/about-us/research/aboriginal-sentencing/restorative-justice
- Moose Hide Campaign – Men Taking a Stand Against Violence Toward Aboriginal Women and Children, moosehidecampaign.ca/index

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ACTIVITY #3: EMOTIONAL LITERACY

Option for five-day unit

The goal of this activity is for students to recognize their own emotions, to identify those of others and to name some possible healthy ways of dealing with difficult emotions.

FACILITATOR INTRODUCTION

- **A Better Man** shows people processing difficult emotions and expressing them through body language, facial cues and other non-verbal ways of communicating. Both Attiya and Steve also talk about feeling limited in terms of what they are comfortable expressing, and how.
- Our capacity to understand and express emotions (our own and those of others) is a very important skill in developing healthy relationships. This skill is called emotional literacy.
- Unhealthy relationships are often marked by a lack of empathy—the ability to think about things and even feel things from another person’s point of view. Building our emotional literacy by paying attention to our own feelings and expressions and those of others can help us get better at practising empathy.

Option 1

Work in small groups or with the class to fill in the following chart. Encourage students to think of examples from the film and from their own lives.

Emotion	Can look like this	Can look like this Can feel like this	Can be managed by
e.g. happy, sad, angry, afraid, joyful, excited, depressed, worried, ashamed, insecure			

Possible answers for more nuanced emotions:

Emotion	Can look like this	Can look like this Can feel like this	Can be managed by
Shame	No eye contact; face flushed; sweaty	Pit of stomach pain/ nausea; hot	Removal from situation and then talking to another
Insecurity	Control; insulting language; jealousy	Suffocation; small; over-attention; never enough	Maintaining multiple supports in your life instead of relying on one person; list things you like about yourself; write down negative self-talk in order to throw it away and replace it

Boys and girls often face very different pressures when it comes to expressing emotions and paying attention to those of others. Ask the class for examples of these pressures and how they can differently impact boys’ and girls’ emotional literacy, based on their own experiences.

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Option 2

Have students complete three or four worksheets covering a variety of topics from the following list:

- Emotional Literacy
- Emotional Intelligence
- Stress Management
- Anger Management
- Resilience and Overcoming Problems

While many activities are readily available on the Internet, it is advised that you consult with colleagues (teachers, child and youth workers) in your workplace to find activities, as many courses have emotional literacy as part of the curriculum (e.g., physical education, guidance, senior social sciences).

Logical Extensions

- Exploration of power and privilege in emotional expression as it relates to gender, race, religion, sexuality, etc.
- Self-care

ACTIVITY #4: VISUAL ANALYSIS OF A BETTER MAN

Option for five-day unit

This activity helps students build media-literacy skills by considering the impacts of the filmmakers' visual choices in **A Better Man**, and how these choices support or challenge stereotypical depictions of women onscreen.

Using the following list, discuss as a class which visual elements of documentary film were used (and how/to what effect) in **A Better Man**.

- **Original live footage:** Footage of real events, places and people, e.g. Attiya and Steve visiting their old high school.
- **Archival footage:** Footage that has been shot prior to the making of the documentary, or footage from an archive or library that shows an event, place and people.
Not used in A **Better Man**

- **Interviews:** Footage of a person speaking about the subject of the documentary, sometimes a subject-matter expert, a witness, etc., e.g. opening scene of Attiya interviewing Steve in the coffee shop.
- **Re-enactments:** Reconstructed scenes, which are staged and acted out, based on information of an actual event pertaining to the subject of the documentary.
Not used in A **Better Man**
- **Still photos:** Photos that have been taken prior to the making of the documentary, or photos from an archive, library or a personal collection that show an event, place and people, e.g. photos of Attiya and Steve when they were a couple shown in the beginning of the film.
- **Documents:** Documents can include legal documents, newspapers, notes, e-mails, letters, etc. to support an argument being made in the documentary.
Not used in A **Better Man**
- **Animation/graphics:** Still or moving graphics that reconstruct a scene based on information of an actual event pertaining to the subject of the documentary. Animation is commonly used if the scene cannot be reconstructed in live-action or as a creative treatment chosen by the director. Graphics are commonly used to display information that is difficult to understand through verbal description.
Not used in A **Better Man**
- **Black screen:** A plain black screen. It is commonly used when a sound element such as a voice recording exists but there is no supporting visual element. An example of this is a recorded phone conversation.
Not used in A **Better Man**

Example: The film uses archival photos at the beginning to show viewers how young Attiya and Steve were when they met, and to illustrate that they had fun together.

In **A Better Man**, directors Attiya Khan and Lawrence Jackman chose not to use re-enactments to represent the memories of Attiya or Steve, from positive memories of meeting for the first time to the painful memories of abuse. Why do you think they made this choice? Were the directors' choices pivotal to the film's effectiveness? Brainstorm as a class a few scenes that could

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have been re-enacted in the film, and write short descriptions of these scenes on the blackboard, whiteboard or chart paper.

We all play many roles in our lives (e.g. student, friend, sibling, artist), and many of the actions we take in life are connected with one or more of these roles (e.g. writing an essay → student, giving someone a ride to school → friend, driver and student).

Draw a basic version of the chart below on the board/chart paper. For each scene that students could envision being re-enacted, ask the class to consider what the re-enactment would show Attiya doing, the role(s) in Attiya's life that this action is related to, what Attiya might have been feeling in that moment, and assess the degree to which their re-enactments are positive or negative representations of women onscreen.

Example:

Attiya's Action	Role	Attiya's Feelings	Positive/Negative
Running away from Steve	Person being abused, victim	Afraid, angry, tired	?

After students have reflected on how their re-enactments represent Attiya, turn their attention back to the actual scenes as they appeared in the film, and fill out a new chart. Using the handout on p. 34, have students reflect on the following questions:

1. What did they observe Attiya doing in the film?
2. Which of Attiya's roles in life are these actions related to?
3. How do they think she's feeling as she does these things?
4. Is this a positive or negative representation of women onscreen?

Have students use the charts in their handouts to organize their thinking, provide evidence from the film and make a final assessment.

Example:

Attiya's Action	Role	Attiya's Feelings	Positive/Negative
Helping a woman in need of support	Counsellor	Compassionate, concerned	Positive
Running on the street	Narrator, athlete, navigator	Strong (physically and mentally), introspective	Positive
Meditating in a studio, taking care of her mind	Meditator	At peace, calm, confident, self-love	Positive
Confronting Steve in therapy	Counsellor, listener, friend	Poised, attentive, compassionate, angry	Positive
Speaking on the phone to her partner	Partner, mother, friend	Loving, caring, thoughtful	Positive
Celebrating with friends and family	Friend, co-worker, mother, partner, woman, advocate	Smart, courageous, empowering	Positive

To close the discussion, ask students how visual representations of violence against women can reinforce negative stereotypes and tropes of women onscreen. Attiya directed the film—how did that role enable her to shape her own story?

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EXTENSION OPTIONS

For longer units, supplement the five-day unit with one or more of these activities:

1. Student investigation using Statistics Canada resources on family violence. Example: Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2015, statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/14698-eng.pdf. Students could use the data from Section 3 ("Police-reported Intimate Partner Violence") and extend to fill in the gaps. Why don't more people report? What happens to those who experience violence after they report? What happens to those who use violence after a police report? What more could be done?
2. Healthy Relationships project: Students could use virtually any medium (visual art, mixed media, poetry, dance, song, dramatic piece, collage, video) to create a representation of healthy relationships. What does a healthy relationship look like? What does an unhealthy relationship look like? The final product could also take the form of an online resource.
3. School-wide project: In the right environment and with a supportive staff advisor, students might start up a student-led group that focuses on healthy/unhealthy relationships and modes of bystander intervention to address unhealthy relationships. Gay-Straight Alliance groups provide a useful model for this type of group.
4. Create a student-focused community resource that lists agencies and groups that can provide support to those using or experiencing violence. Post it on the school website and/or make posters to put up around school.
5. Choose possible themes to explore from the list below:
 - Self-care
 - Co-op options
 - Different ways of healing
 - Restorative justice
 - In-depth body-language study of the film
 - Community-based support connections
 - History of our societal understanding of healthy/unhealthy relationships
 - Exploration of power and privilege in areas including gender, race, religion, sexuality, etc., and how they impact emotional expression in intimate relationships
 - Power imbalances/forms of abuse: Abuse can look like... Create a chart, pamphlet, or brochure
 - Gender stereotyping
 - The concept of voice (What helps us feel like we have a voice? How can a voice be silenced or drowned out? How do power and privilege impact our voices? What are some possible ways of using our voices?)
 - Abuser/victim dichotomy
 - Music options
 - Reflections on quotes from the film

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COMMON STUDENT QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

Students may not receive many opportunities to discuss intimate-partner violence openly. Conversations about **A Better Man** may spark strong interest and open up a number of avenues for deeper reflection. Some of these topics may require further investigation from the facilitator. They may also pose an opportunity for a research project or other assignment to engage students in the process of inquiry.

Even experts on intimate-partner violence are always learning. If a student raises a question the facilitator cannot answer on the spot, facilitators can model this spirit of curiosity and continuous learning. Example: "I don't have an answer at the moment, but I'm glad you asked that question. I'll find more information to share with you soon."

The following topics, comments or questions arose regularly in the pilot of this learning guide, and may arise during your discussion. Feel free to draw upon these notes and resources to help students deepen their reflection.

USING VIOLENCE AGAINST ABUSIVE PEOPLE AS PUNISHMENT

Some students may say "an eye for an eye" is the best form of justice for those who have used violence. This can manifest in macho comments, like saying "I'd beat him up" or joking about prison rape. While students of all genders express these ideas, facilitators may find it particularly common among boys. For some students, it may stem from personal anger about violence they or their loved ones have experienced. Facilitators may find some of the following discussion prompts useful:

- Is it true that "violence is never okay"? Are there situations where you think violence could be warranted? Why or why not?
- What does our society teach us about violence when we're children? Do these messages change as we grow up? If so, how? How are the messages different for boys and girls?
- What are the possible goals for using violence to punish someone who has used violence? What might some of the consequences be?

- What do you think abusing people as a punishment for their own violence teaches them? How are these lessons similar to those of jail and the criminal justice system? How are they different?

INTIMATE-PARTNER VIOLENCE AS A CULTURAL PROBLEM

Students may associate intimate-partner violence with a particular culture or cultures. This can include comments about one's own culture, such as "That's just how it is in my culture/community." While not endorsing these comments, white facilitators should also be careful not to undermine a racialized or Indigenous student's interpretation of their own culture. Rather, responses to these comments may focus on the fact that while each culture is unique, intimate-partner violence is a serious problem in every culture.

People who use violence sometimes use cultural beliefs to try to justify their violence. This can include racist beliefs that the person they are abusing is inferior due to their culture or race, as in the case of Steve's slurs and insults toward Attiya. It can also include manipulation of the messages in their own popular cultural or religious texts to explain why the abuse is justified. However, a vast majority of cultural beliefs and attitudes that the [World Health Organization](#) identifies as contributing to intimate-partner violence are gender-related and can be found in many cultures, including mainstream North American culture.

Students may also make assumptions about other cultures, such as suggesting that Attiya was more likely to "put up with" abuse because of "her culture"—a belief rooted in stereotypes about Brown women and Arabic cultures. It may be helpful to offer statistics to expand these students' understanding of how common abuse is among Western cultures and the developed world.

- The [World Health Organization](#) found that 23% of women from high-income countries have experienced physical or sexual violence from a partner.
- The [European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights](#) found that 43% of women in the European Union have experienced psychological violence from a partner.

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STEVE'S GROWTH PROCESS

Some audience members have valid curiosity about whether Steve changed his abusive behaviour in later relationships. Students should be invited to explore this question and the reasons why the answer is important for them. This can deepen their reflection on what it means to take responsibility. Facilitators may use any of the following prompts:

- Why is it important to know whether Steve has continued to use violence? What would it mean to you if he has? How would this impact your feelings about Steve and the things he expressed in the film?
- What role do you think the person who was hurt (in this case, Attiya) should play in deciding what it would mean for the person who hurt them to take responsibility? What about if multiple people were hurt? What demands would this role place on the people who were hurt? Is it possible to take responsibility with one person and not others?
- How long do you think it might take someone to complete the process of taking responsibility for abuse? What would some of the steps be in that process?
- **Share this note from filmmaker Attiya Khan:**

"Before we filmed our first conversation, Steve and I agreed that we would only discuss our own relationship on camera. Ethically, I didn't feel right talking about other partners, whether or not violence was used. I felt strongly from the beginning that this question is not for me to put out there on camera."

Why do you think Attiya made this choice? What are some possible ethical complications with discussing other relationships?

The film's interactive companion, [It Was Me](#), provides extension material on the topic of taking responsibility for violence, and what growth processes can look like. The piece features the voices of several men who have used violence against a partner, have participated in group therapy and are working to change their behaviour and take responsibility. This piece requires Internet access and contains coarse language and descriptions of violent incidents.

TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR PEOPLE WHO USE VIOLENCE

Some students may want to learn more about Tod Augusta-Scott's therapy approach with Steve and Attiya. Tod expands on his approach, which is called **narrative therapy**, in an interview he completed with the Dulwich Centre (facilitators may want to choose excerpts rather than use the entire interview). His comments are available via [video](#) or [downloadable PDF](#).

There is also a wide range of other therapeutic approaches for people who have used violence. Each of these approaches may be practised with a variety of clients, so it is important to seek therapists and organizations that specialize in working with those who have a history of intimate-partner violence. Common approaches include the following, which students may wish to research further:

- Solution-focused therapy
- Cognitive-behavioural therapy
- Attachment and trauma therapy
- Couples therapy
- Group therapy

Other intervention approaches are not therapeutic in nature, although some participants may find them therapeutic. For example, Partner Assault Response programs in Ontario, operated by the Ministry of the Attorney General, are group education programs primarily for men who have been charged with a criminal domestic violence offence. The influential [Duluth Model](#) informs the structure of these programs. Other interventions, such as [restorative justice](#), are designed to address and repair the harm, rather than to heal the issues that influenced the person's choice to use violence.

The [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) offers a comprehensive list of programs across Canada for men who have used violence against a partner (please note this list was created in 2008 and may contain out-of-date information). Tod Augusta-Scott's [Bridges Institute](#) has a Canada-wide list of recommended intervention programs. The [Moosehide Campaign](#), an Indigenous-run initiative to engage men and boys in ending violence against women, also has a list of recommended community programs for men.

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HELPING PEOPLE WHO ARE EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE

Students may show curiosity about how to support friends or other loved ones who are experiencing violence. In this [Q&A video](#) with Attiya Khan, she discusses what people could have done to help her when she was with Steve (6:00–8:30). Attiya points out that supporting a loved one experiencing violence can be frustrating because that person may not want to leave the relationship, and this can persist for a long time.

Facilitators may notice a sentiment of well-meaning frustration or impatience among some students, such as comments about “making” a person leave or “getting” them to leave. While it is not possible to force someone to leave an abusive relationship, this sentiment is evidence of the students’ compassion and shows a desire to end the harm. To encourage reflection, facilitators could respond by asking students:

- What steps might you take to try to achieve that?
- What are some of the possible reactions from the people involved (your friend and the person hurting them)? *Depending on the steps the students suggest, facilitators can probe further by asking students how they tend to feel when someone questions their judgment or tells them what to do.*
- What could some of the safety concerns be if you took that step?
- Name possible reasons why a person might not leave an abusive relationship.

For further teen-friendly reading about why some people stay in abusive relationships, and tips on how to help a friend, students can visit [LovelsRespect.org](#).

COMMON AREAS OF INTEREST FOR RESEARCH EXTENSIONS

The pilot of this learning guide yielded powerful classroom discussions, with many students and facilitators expressing an interest in further learning. Many surveyed students identified the following areas they would like to learn more about. See the links below for starting points for independent or small-group extensions.

- Teen dating violence, including statistics and quizzes ([LovelsRespect.org](#))
- Financial abuse ([Bustle.com](#))
- Violence in LGBTQ relationships ([Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children](#))
- Digital/online abuse ([One Love Foundation](#))
- Trauma, memory, healing and the brain (a chapter from Dr. Bessel Van der Kolk’s book *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, or an audio interview with the author via the [On Being Project](#))
- Men, violence, shame and memory (a chapter from Terrence Real’s book *I Don’t Want to Talk About It: Overcoming the Secret Legacy of Male Depression*)

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SUPPORTING STUDENTS

RESOURCES

Further Learning / Extension

- Restorative Justice.org: restorativejustice.org
- Correctional Service Canada: csc-scc.gc.ca/restorative-justice/index-eng
- "How restorative justice is steering young offenders away from crime," *The Guardian*: theguardian.com/society/2014/sep/17/restorative-justice-young-offenders-crime
- Justice Education Society: Aboriginal Restorative Justice Remedies: justiceeducation.ca/about-us/research/aboriginal-sentencing/restorative-justice
- Thom, Kai Cheng (2015). "6 Ways to Confront Your Friend Who's Abusing Their Partner," *Everyday Feminism*: everydayfeminism.com/2015/09/confront-friend-abusing-partner
- Brown, Brene (2012). "Listening to Shame" TED Talk: ted.com/talks/brene_brown_listening_to_shame
- Egale Canada Human Rights Trust: egale.ca
- Toronto District School Board Gender-Based Violence Prevention Program: tdsb.on.ca/AboutUs/Innovation/GenderBasedViolencePrevention
- Canadian Red Cross, Healthy Youth Dating Relationships: redcross.ca/how-we-help/violence--bullying-and-abuse-prevention/educators/healthy-youth-dating-relationships
- Canadian Women's Foundation, Healthy Relationships 101: canadianwomen.org/sites/canadianwomen.org/files/PDF-HealthyRelationships101.pdf
- Love is Respect: loveisrespect.org
- Ontario Ministry of the Status of Women, "Healthy, Equal Relationships": women.gov.on.ca/owd/english/ending-violence/relationships/index

Support Services

For a printable list of Canada-wide hotlines and support service directories, see Appendix 7 on p. 39. Facilitators are advised to use these directories to search for local programs to add to the list in Appendix 7.

Shelter Safe

Directory of emergency and transitional shelter and housing services across Canada for women experiencing gender-based violence.

Justice Canada – Victim Services Directory

Directory of support services across Canada for survivors of gender-based violence and other forms of violent crime.

Public Health Agency of Canada – Men's Program Directory

Canada-wide directory of treatment programs for men who have used violence against an intimate partner.

Bridges Institute

List of selected intervention and counselling programs across Canada to help men create just outcomes for the partners or ex-partners they have abused.

Moosehide Campaign

List of community programs to support men in making non-violent choices in relationships, with a focus on services for Indigenous men.

Assaulted Women's Helpline

1-866-863-0511

Toll-free support hotline for women who have experienced gender-based violence.

Fem'aide Hotline

1-877-336-2433

Toll-free support hotline for Francophone women who have experienced gender-based violence.

Kids Help Phone

1-800-668-6868

General distress hotline for children and youth, including those who may be experiencing or using violence.

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[Ontario Women's Justice Network](#)

Extensive and diverse list of counselling, legal and support services for women across Ontario, including those experiencing gender-based violence.

[Aboriginal Justice Strategy Programs – Canada](#)

Directory of a range of alternative justice programs for Indigenous communities across Canada, including peacemaking circles, restorative justice programs and courts with Indigenous judges, Crown attorneys and other key personnel.

[Canadian Restorative Justice Consortium](#)

Directory of restorative justice programs and organizations across Canada.

[Rainbow Health Ontario](#)

Rainbow Health Ontario works to improve the health and well-being of LGBTQ people in Ontario, and to increase access to competent and LGBTQ-friendly health-care services across the province.

EXERCISES FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING TRAUMA TRIGGERS

INTERNAL COPING STRATEGIES

Internal coping strategies help the person take their mind off the problem without their contacting another person (e.g. relaxation techniques, physical activity).

Call on the person's body's capacity to calm itself by guiding them through progressive muscle relaxation.

Example:

Sit in a comfortable position; feel the ground beneath your feet. (Moving bottom to top, top to bottom.) Starting at your feet, tense your muscles as much as possible and then relax them completely. Tense and relax your feet, legs and torso. Then tense and relax your shoulders, neck, arms and hands. Repeat this with your head and face.

If the person is too close to the story of trauma, the listener may try leading them through an externalizing conversation.

Example:

- If you could give a name to the problem you are experiencing, what would you call it?
- When did _____ find its way into your life?
- How did _____ gain such a strong hold in your life?
- What is _____ like?
- When does _____ gain the upper hand?
- What are _____'s tricks and tactics for influencing you in these ways?
- Has _____ ever been helpful in any way?
- How has _____ affected your relationship/school/work/sense of self?
- What has _____ gotten in the way of?
- Are you okay/not okay with _____'s development? Or is it somewhere in between?
- Is it fair/not fair/somewhere in between?



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- What does your stance say about what's important to you?
- What does it say about what your hopes/dreams are for yourself?

Suggest present-focused exercises, such as a mindfulness exercise.

Example:

Find an object near you that you are attracted to, one that brings you comfort. Find a comfortable position. Feel where the soles of your feet make contact with the floor. Notice how your chair is supporting you in this moment. Feel where your body is making contact with your chair. Take a moment to notice the sounds in the room. Begin to notice your breathing. Allow yourself to become aware of the present moment, gently bringing awareness to the experience and awareness of your breath and bodily sensations. You do not need to change your breath in any way. Let it be what it is and simply notice. And if you find that your attention wanders away from your breath, simply notice what drew your attention away and gently bring your attention back to your breath without judgment. Welcome as best you can, experiencing your breath, with awareness, just as it is. Now gently open your eyes. Turn your focus on the [object] you have chosen, place it in your hand. Notice and explore the qualities of the [object]—how the light catches it, its textures, edges, colours, etc. What is it like to hold this [object] in your hands? Notice any thoughts, emotions or body sensations that arise. As you hold your [object] in your hands, think about how you take care of yourself, and be thoughtful of what it means to take care of yourself. Notice what you are present with in this moment. When you're ready, bring your attention back to the room.

EXTERNAL COPING STRATEGIES

External coping strategies are things the person can do with other people to regroup or distract themselves, or to seek longer-term support.

- Are there any people and/or social settings that can provide distraction?
- Who can you ask for help (e.g. friend, co-worker, family member)?
- Are there support services that might be helpful to you right now (e.g. urgent care services, crisis centres, telephone counselling, shelters)?



APPENDIX 1: Canadian Curriculum Connections

(SEE ATTACHED DOCUMENT)

APPENDIX 2: Legal Considerations (Ontario)

Your duty to report is immediate.
Your duty to report is direct.
Your duty to report is ongoing.
Your duty to report overrides concerns about confidentiality.
Your duty is to report, not investigate.

Ontario's *Child and Family Services Act* (CFSA) requires those who perform professional or official duties with respect to children to report suspected child abuse where there are reasonable grounds. A child is anyone under 16 (or appears to be) or who is 16 or 17 and subject to a child protection order. You don't have to be certain that a child may need protection. Suspicion on reasonable grounds—information that an average person, using normal and honest judgment, would need to decide—is reason enough to report. You have to report to a children's aid society so that they can assess and determine what the child needs.

Notice from the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers:
ocswssw.org/2015/08/11/knowning-your-duty-reporting-under-the-child-and-family-services-act

Professional Advisory from the Ontario College of Teachers:
oct.ca/Home/Resources/Advisories/DutytoReport

Professional Advisory from the College of Early Childhood Educators:
college-ece.ca/en/Documents/ProfessionalAdvisoryDutytoReport2015.pdf

Ontario Ministry of Education Resources

Making Ontario's Schools Safe and Accepting
edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/pdfs/saferSchools.pdf

Safe and Accepting Schools: Promoting a Positive School Climate
edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/climate.html

Policy/Program Memoranda (PPM)

PPM 128: Provincial Code of Conduct and School Board Codes of Conduct
edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/128.pdf

PPM 144: Bullying Prevention and Intervention
edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/144.pdf

PPM 145: Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour
edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/145.pdf

If delivering this unit outside of Ontario, please check with your relevant legislative and professional regulatory bodies.

True/False – Decide whether each of the following statements is true or false for you.

All questions, with the exception of 8 and 9, can also apply to close relationships that are not romantic (e.g. family, friends).

- _____ 1. Partners in a healthy relationship spend time separately with their own friends as well as their partner's friends.
- _____ 2. Jealousy is a sign of caring in an intimate relationship.
- _____ 3. Intimate partners should be completely open with each other about everything.
- _____ 4. It is important for partners in a relationship to enjoy all the same interests.
- _____ 5. Giving in to your partner is a good way to resolve conflicts.
- _____ 6. If your girlfriend/boyfriend or partner loves you, they should know how you feel.
- _____ 7. Trust is an important part of relationships.
- _____ 8. A healthy relationship is based on strong physical attraction.
- _____ 9. I can tell the difference between love and infatuation.
- _____ 10. Nobody is perfect.

Use this space to take notes from the class discussion that followed this activity.

Record as many ways as you can to describe both a healthy and an unhealthy relationship.

Characteristics of a Healthy Relationship	Characteristics of an Unhealthy Relationship
<p>Source: depts.washington.edu/sexmedia/printouts/handout-healthyunhealthyrelationships2.pdf</p>	

[Date]

Dear Parent/Guardian:

On [date], students in my [subject] class will begin a mini-unit on healthy relationships, which is one component of the curriculum in this course. The unit is built around the viewing of a new documentary entitled **A Better Man**, which follows a series of intimate conversations between a woman and the man who had abused her 20 years prior, when they were teenagers.

A Better Man is a thought-provoking and at times disturbing film that does not shy away from sometimes graphic descriptions (but not depictions) of the violence used by one partner against the other during the course of their two-year relationship. There are many elements that set this story apart from others. The two partners were teenagers attending high school throughout their turbulent relationship. The person who experienced the violence is the co-director of the film, who seeks not to blame but to acknowledge the violence that did occur, to examine its consequences for each partner, and to find a path to healing for both parties. The person who had used violence throughout the relationship was a willing collaborator in the project. The film is a co-production with the National Film Board of Canada.

The unit plan provides several days of viewing **A Better Man**, which contains sensitive material and the use of some profanity. Please be advised that in addition to myself, we will have two other professionals with us to support students during the viewing.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [phone number] or by e-mail at [e-mail address]. This is an important activity, and I do appreciate your support. You can find more information about **A Better Man** at abettermanfilm.com.

Sincerely,

[Facilitator Name]

[School]

Yes, share mine _____

Task

1. Write a description of a time when you harmed someone.
2. Write answers to the following questions regarding that time:
 - a. What did you think when you realized the harm you had caused?
 - b. What impact has this incident had on you and others?
 - c. What has been the hardest thing for you?
 - d. What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

List as many things as you can remember Attiya doing in the film. For each action, name which of Attiya's roles in life the action is related to (e.g. friend, counsellor, mother), how you think she was feeling as she did those things, and whether you feel this is a positive or negative representation of women onscreen.

Attiya's Action	Role	Attiya's Feelings	Positive/Negative?
e.g. Helping a woman in need of support	Counsellor	Compassionate, concerned	Positive

Use the space below to take notes on the class discussion.

[Shelter Safe](#)

Directory of emergency and transitional shelter and housing services across Canada for women experiencing gender-based violence.

[Justice Canada – Victim Services Directory](#)

Directory of support services across Canada for survivors of gender-based violence and other forms of violent crime.

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Canada-wide directory of treatment programs for men who have used violence against an intimate partner.

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