

# NFB EDUCATORS' GUIDE

## after wards

*a film by  
Romane Garant Chartrand*



This guide accompanies Romane Garant Chartrand’s documentary ***Afterwards***, which can be viewed [here](#).

The film and the themes it covers, as well as the study questions in this guide, are best suited to high school students aged 15–17 and post-secondary students.

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN CANADA

Domestic violence, or intimate-partner violence, is a serious problem that touches us all in one way or another. It can manifest in any relationship, regardless of age, income, country of origin, culture, sexual orientation or gender identity. However, the overwhelming majority of acts of intimate-partner violence occur against women in heterosexual relationships. The most extreme forms of violence against women also occur in these relationships. A 2019 Statistics Canada study revealed

that among victims of intimate-partner violence, it was more common for women to be choked by their spouse (14%), than for men (3.4%).

Why, we may ask, is intimate-partner violence primarily perpetrated by men? First of all, it’s important to make clear that violence is a social phenomenon. Men are not “by nature” more violent. We live by social norms we start learning as babies, through the process of

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**socialization.** Whether consciously or unconsciously, adults, then later peers and other authority figures (in media, films, the world of education and so on), place value on certain behaviours for girls and others for boys. Although there has been some progress, girls are still more likely to be encouraged to assume personality traits that are more passive, gentle and domestic. Boys, on the other hand, are often pushed to compete and find that sensitivity is less acceptable than aggressive, or even violent, behaviours. Similarly, men can sometimes develop a self-image informed by standards of masculinity that urge them to resolve conflict through violence, or to express power and control through the use of force. This distinction involves a power relationship, with men having power over women. We call this the **patriarchy**.

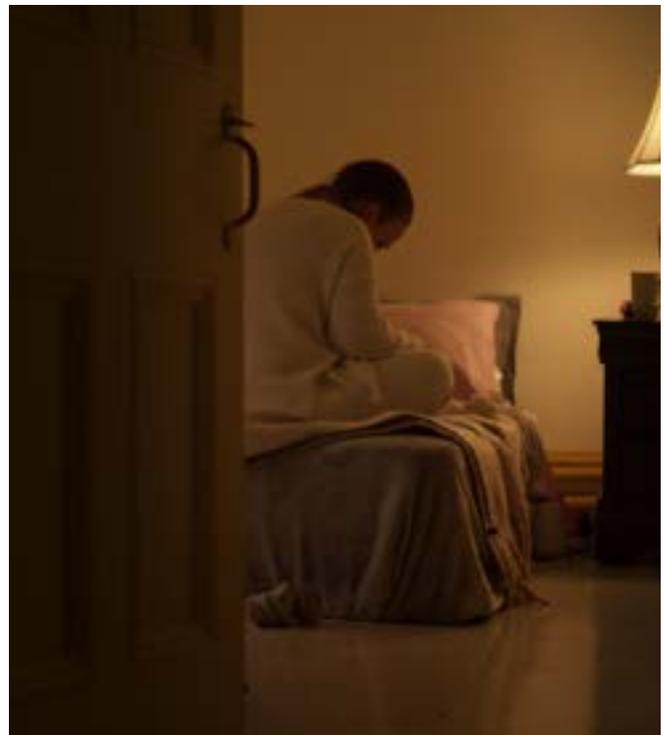
## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Given the dangers to women and the brutality of domestic violence perpetrated against women, this document will focus primarily on violence in heterosexual couples.<sup>1</sup>

It's important to understand that a person subjected to violence in an intimate relationship is in no way responsible for that violence. They are **victims**, through no fault of their own. Even though some women may be uncomfortable with the term, the word "victim" does not have an intrinsically negative connotation and does not imply passivity. Rather, it serves to illustrate the dynamic operating in relationships where violence is present.

This guide will allow you to better understand the different manifestations of violence between intimate partners, and it will help you learn more about the resources available for victims.

Warning: This subject matter may be difficult for those under the age of 14. It is important to exercise care in broaching the difficult subject of domestic violence in class. Teachers are well-positioned to determine the best approach for their classes. For instance, group discussions could take place in mixed or same-sex groups. Whatever the approach, some may be affected by or have lived experience of the examples shared, so it's essential to ensure that a list of supportive resources can be easily and confidentially accessed. Having a social worker in the classroom is highly recommended. Inform the whole teaching team about the activities, to ensure proper support for young people who may wish to disclose.



<sup>1</sup>The Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability counted 184 women murdered in Canada in 2022; nearly 60% of these murders were perpetrated by the victim's partner or ex-partner.

## LEARNING TO RECOGNIZE INTIMATE-PARTNER VIOLENCE

An argument between partners in a relationship can result from a disagreement, with both people feeling they can express their point of view. Intimate-partner violence is different. It is much more complex and involves an imbalance of power: one of the partners dominates the other, with the ultimate aim of destroying the victim's self-esteem, their independence, their autonomy and their ability to act—all in order to control them.

**“I knew why it was happening, but I still felt guilty.”<sup>2</sup>**

In order to understand intimate-partner violence, we need to talk about **coercive control**: a violent partner's frequently repeated daily behaviours that affect all areas of their partner's life and are aimed at restricting their freedom and autonomy. The abuser's goal is to make his partner fully dependent on him, notably by isolating her from her family and friends. To maintain control, he is violent **in private** and frequently adopts a different personality in the presence of others, appearing as an attentive and affectionate partner. If family or friends suspect the relationship is toxic, the perpetrator will try to keep them at a distance so he can maintain control. As a result, victims often feel isolated and are constantly questioning and doubting themselves.

**“Your soul's been bruised, even if they can't see it on your body.”**

Intimate-partner violence isn't only physical violence. In order to establish their authority and dominate the victim, abusers will use a variety of methods and different types of violence. Here are some examples.

### Physical violence

The abuser may inflict injuries on his partner (direct physical violence) or her pets. He might also damage or break her personal effects or shared belongings (indirect violence, or abuse by proxy).

### Verbal violence

The perpetrator vocalizes his violence by yelling at or insulting his partner.

### Psychological violence

This form of violence can harm the victim's mental health, through behaviours including intimidation, threats and humiliation.

### Technological violence

The abuser may use technology to track the victim so he knows where she is at all times, harass her through texts and phone calls, or use social media to humiliate her, by, for instance, sharing intimate images of her.

### Sexual violence

This includes all forms of non-consensual sex, such as rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment.

Many other forms of violence can be added to this list (economic, social, religious, etc.). It can be very hard for victims to recognize the full extent of the violence they are dealing with in their lives, because in an abusive relationship, its many different forms coexist, overlap and are intertwined.

<sup>2</sup>All quotes are from the film *Afterwards* (NFB, 2023) by Romane Garant Chartrand.

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Intimate-partner violence is more than a series of isolated violent acts. It is part of a specific system of dominance that we call the **cycle of abuse**, which is made up of four distinct phases.

## 1. TENSION

“Just the sound of his keys, the way he’d set them down on the counter, I’d know what kind of night or time I’d be having... Even before he came into the room, I’d be stressed out.”

Tension mounts and the abuser’s frustration increases. Victims may experience anxiety and fear as tension rises, or they may feel like they are walking on eggshells.

## 2. INCIDENT

“The first time I called 911 was in 2019. There were punch holes in every wall.”

This is the moment when violence peaks. Threats, attacks and abuse become overt.

## 3. RECONCILIATION

“He continued to make me doubt myself, even after I arrived here.”

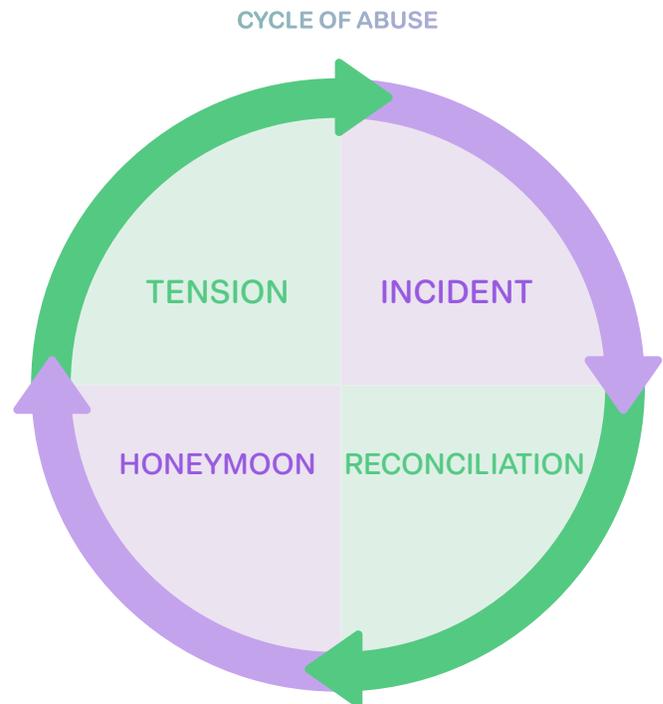
The abuser tries to justify his actions by minimizing the violence, projecting his responsibility onto the victim, or finding excuses for his behaviours. This phase is disorienting for the victim, who may find herself feeling guilty or responsible for the acts perpetrated against her, and may even make excuses that justify the violence.

## 4. Honeymoon

“We miss the good times. Because they can be great when things are going well.”

The abuser shows signs of repentance and affection. He’s attentive and apologetic, promises to change and to never do it again, as a way of re-establishing a false sense of harmony in the relationship.

Sometimes, especially early in relationships, the cycle can play out over a longer period of time. But over time the stages get closer and closer together, sometimes going straight from incident to honeymoon and back again.



## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What are the differences between intimate-partner violence and a couple having a fight?

How do you picture a relationship among equal partners? What’s acceptable? What isn’t? What constitutes an act of violence? What doesn’t?

What are some of the ways consent can be expressed? What are the signs that consent is absent?

## THE JUSTICE SYSTEM AND INTIMATE-PARTNER VIOLENCE

The justice system has a critical role to play in protecting victims, but there are still many gaps and challenges when it comes to the ways it handles cases of intimate-partner violence.

**“What consequences does he face? A hundred hours of community service?”**

It's important to understand that domestic violence, or intimate-partner violence, is not a specific crime under the Criminal Code of Canada. This can make it difficult to find justice. That's why some countries, like Scotland and Australia, have incorporated the notion of coercive control into their criminal codes. Canada began studying the possibility of doing the same thing in 2023. But until these changes are incorporated, only **specific acts** can constitute a **criminal offence**. Here are some examples:

### Assault

Acts typically involving physical violence, like punching a partner or throwing an object at her.

### Mischief

A perpetrator may commit mischief by breaking or intentionally damaging items belonging to the victim. For instance, he might throw her phone and shatter it, or slash her tires.

### Uttering threats

The partner utters threats verbally, in writing, or through gestures: “You'll never get out of here alive!,” “Take your dog or else I'll... [throat-cutting gesture],” “I'll set your car on fire!”

Intimate-partner violence may be linked to many other criminal-code offences, including harassment, forcible confinement, attempted murder, and so on. What they all have in common is that they require sufficient **proof**. As intimate-partner violence tends to take place in private, victims cannot always supply proof, and there are rarely witnesses to these reprehensible acts. Victims also have to be willing to **file a complaint**. This is a significant obstacle, given the fear of retaliation, or the guilt they may feel. Even when it's possible to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the abuser did in fact commit the acts they're accused of, this often fails to take into account the scale of the emotional and psychological impact on the victim.

**“I never talked about it again, because I thought if the police didn't notice that I was in distress, and actually blamed me, no one's going to believe me.”**

As we saw earlier, ignorance and a failure to properly understand intimate-partner violence lead to prejudices against victims that continue to affect them. These prejudices touch all of us, including police officers. Like the rest of society, they are not always aware of the realities of intimate-partner violence, nor do they have the tools to take action and help victims. Given victims' frequent lack of confidence in the justice system, over the last few years experts from across Canada have been working to review the practices of all **socio-judicial positions**, including police, lawyers, judges and correctional officers, to provide them with appropriate training. The goal is to ensure they can effectively intervene in cases of intimate-partner violence. Some police stations now have specialized crisis-intervention teams. And in Quebec, specialized courts are being set up across the province to deal with domestic and sexual violence. Unfortunately, there's still a lot of work to be done to change attitudes.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What kinds of prejudices might people who haven't witnessed domestic violence have towards victims?

How can these prejudices affect victims of intimate-partner violence, and in particular whether or not they file a complaint?



## “WHY DOESN'T SHE JUST LEAVE?”: IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE

As we have seen, abusers use strategies of control to take away their victims' independence and autonomy, and to normalize violence. Over time, as the violence continues, the victim's self-esteem crumbles. Because of this, and because the abuser's strategies are complex and overlapping, it can be hard for the victim to notice the gradual creep of violent actions. Victims may not recognize that their situation is not normal or acceptable, and they may not be able to see a way out of the relationship.

**“I blame you for succeeding in still having control over me.”**

In contrast to what most people think, separation does not put an end to intimate-partner violence. Statistics Canada data shows that in 2019, 45% of victims experienced violence after having separated. And many studies show that the risk of murder related to domestic violence is highest when a relationship is about to end or if it ended in the previous 12 months. During separation, the abuser's domination strategies change, and violence can become more frequent as he tries to maintain the kind of control he had in the past. We call this **post-separation abuse**.

**For example, the ex-partner may:**

- continue to try to control the victim;
- track her or enter her residence without permission;
- increase attempts to communicate with her, and the channels used to do it;
- publish denigrating material about her on social media;
- threaten to hurt or kill her, or take it out on the children;
- refuse to pay support, or violate the custody agreement;
- turn those close to the victim, including her children, against her.

## THE ROLE OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS

When a victim is leaving a relationship, she faces a partner who's more dangerous than ever. The role played by family and friends at this time—whether positive or negative—is critical. Perpetrators will often have isolated their victim, keeping her away from loved ones

whom they use and manipulate. As a result, people in her network may not see a problem and may not believe the victim and acknowledge her emotions, or they may deny the violence and encourage her to stay with a violent partner. Facing a **lack of support** from her friends and family, the victim may find it too hard to leave the relationship.

**“Give me a break with your ‘I told you so.’”**

Sometimes, loved ones can **have a negative effect, despite their good intentions**. For instance, they might encourage the victim to immediately leave a violent relationship, without considering the danger or logistical and financial obstacles. Remember that the victim of domestic violence is the person best suited to assessing how dangerous the situation is. Friends and family might also take action without consulting the victim, or they may seek to confront the perpetrator. Keeping the victim out of the loop **takes away her power to act** and inadvertently reproduces a dynamic she experiences daily in her violent relationship. As a result, she may feel she’s misunderstood and judged, and can find herself living with guilt, withdrawing into herself and feeling a deep sense of isolation, even in the presence of her network.

**“I’m sending her lots of documents, like the 13 types of violence. And out of the 13, she checked 10... She’d reply, ‘It wasn’t that bad.’”**

The support of family and friends is extremely important when it takes into account **the needs of the victim**. This network can play a positive role in sharing resources and helpful information, without judgment. Loved ones can also remind the victim of her qualities outside of the abusive relationship, so she can envision possibilities for the future. Members of a helpful network remain available without seeking to impose their own timeline on the victim, respecting her choices even when they are not in line with their expectations.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Ask students to respond to the following questions, with reference to the cycle of abuse.

How does the perpetrator act to ensure the victim does not leave him?

For victims, what feelings does this cycle unleash?

Is it possible for a person to be a victim of violence without realizing it?

What emotions might be a sign that something is wrong in your relationship, or in someone else’s?

What role do friends and family play in the context of a violent relationship?

How can you help the victim without imposing your own opinions or solutions on them?

## RESOURCES

### “I left you too soon, I left after five weeks or so.”

There are resources and services dedicated to responding to the needs of victims of intimate-partner violence across Canada. They take diversified approaches in order to respond to the needs and experiences of victims at all stages of their journey. We call this the **continuum of domestic-violence services**. **Crisis lines** can be accessed at any time. **Emergency shelters** offer a place for short-term stays, based on victims' needs; they are a place where they can come, alone or with children, to take refuge and get psychological and social support. Help and support are also offered to victims who do not need a shelter or don't want to go to one. These are called **external services**. Finally, because violent ex-partners can represent a danger to victims after they've left an emergency shelter, **second-stage transitional housing** provides a secure place to live for a longer period of time.

### “Having you nearby, with your human warmth... The world outside is so cold.”

What these services all have in common is that they take a **feminist approach**. This approach is based on two fundamental principles: believing the victim, and centring her in the process of recovery. Key values of this approach also include respect, commitment, equality and not blaming the victim, with the goal of creating an environment that's both physically and psychologically safe. It recognizes the victim's right to autonomy, respect and liberty. She's the expert when it comes to her own situation and has the tools needed to take control of her life again. In short, feminist intervention aims to further the process of de-victimization and regaining autonomy, which in turn gives the person the power to act and reorganize her life on her own terms.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

If you are concerned about your safety or the safety of someone close to you, call 911 as soon as possible.

### [SOS Violence conjugale](#)

Available in many languages, including several Indigenous languages. Has a questionnaire to help you assess your situation and offers a help line: 1-800-363-9010.

### In French:

### [hebergementfemmes.ca](#)

An online resource to help women seeking to leave a violent situation.

### [Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes](#)

The FMHF brings together, supports and represents shelters, with the aim of promoting and defending the rights of women who have been assaulted, as well as their children.

### [Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale](#)

Works to change laws and policies to improve protection for women and children who are victims of domestic violence.

### [Regroupement québécois des centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel \(CALACS\)](#)

Offers a list of resources, by type of sexual-assault help centre, along with a list of services by region, so you can find a centre near you.

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## [Tel-jeunes](#)

Supports Quebec youth in their daily lives, their explorations, their first experiences, their questions and their problems. Tel-jeunes teams are there for everything from more minor concerns to major anxiety.

1-800-263-2266

## [Trousse média sur la violence conjugale, Institut national de santé publique du Québec](#)

Quebec media kit on domestic violence from the Institut national de santé publique du Québec.

## **In English:**

### [Kids Help Phone](#)

1-800-668-6868

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

### [Assaulted Women's Helpline](#)

1-866-863-0511

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

### [Talk 4 Healing](#)

1-855-554-4325

Service languages: Ojibway, Oji-Cree, Cree, English, French

Provides 24/7 culturally sensitive counselling, advice and support to Indigenous women.

### [Shelter Safe](#)

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

## **WRITING TEAM**

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