

thistle

A Post-Film Discussion Guide

A Note to the Discussion Facilitator

Thanks so much for your willingness to host a discussion!

The following notes are recommendations to help you lead a post-film discussion. In this document you will find:

- Tips on **preparation** and **facilitating** a discussion
- The **Discussion Guide Outline** for the leader

Tips on preparation:

- **Watch the film beforehand** – The content of the film is weighty and might connect to your own history and trauma. Watch the film beforehand to allow time to process the contents of the film.
- **Refer to specialists** – Be mindful of your own limitations and be prepared to connect people with a local counselor who specializes in sexual trauma. If presenting to a larger group, consider inviting a counselor or trauma specialist to be available for anyone following the film.
- **List local resources** – We recommend compiling a list of local resources and support that people can take home with them. Research organizations that provide:
 - Support for people who have experienced sexual violence
 - Volunteer opportunities for those looking to get involved
- **Prepare logistically** – Think through:
 - Where will the group meet?
 - How will we arrange the room and chairs?
 - Will we need a microphone and speaker to be heard?

notes
for
you!



Tips for facilitating a discussion:

- **Allow silence** – When posing questions to the group, allow plenty of space for people to pause and think.
- **Participation looks different** – Try to foster an environment where people have the space to share, if they so choose, but do not feel pressured to share. People participate in different ways.
- **Non-judgmental presence** – Seek to engage people with empathy, patience, and respect. Hold space for complex emotions and the expression of anger, hurt, grief, etc. Be gracious towards yourself, and be gracious towards others.
- **Focus on the film** - In the discussion, participants might disclose their own history of trauma. While you want to honor their story, do not linger so long that the discussion slides into a group therapy session. You might gently redirect the conversation by saying “Thank you for entrusting us with your story—we honor it and will hold it in confidentiality. In the interest of people’s time, I’d like for us to discuss...”
- **Navigating tension** – If conversation becomes contentious, unproductive, or harmful, be prepared to gently but firmly redirect the conversation. You might say, “My sense is that it would be best to table this conversation for now. I am happy to speak further on this subject following our group discussion, but for now I’d like to redirect the conversation to...” If you feel it is appropriate to follow up with certain group members, you can check in with them after the discussion.
- **Monopolizing conversation** – If one person is dominating conversation, you might kindly redirect them by saying “Thank you so much for sharing. I’d love to check in with some others and hear what arose in them?”
- **Eye on the clock** – Out of respect for people’s time, we recommend limiting the discussion to 1 hour. Make sure you have access to a clock to keep track of time.

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A word before the film:

- **Trigger warning** – Before the film begins, we recommend noting that the film includes sexual abuse, domestic violence, drug use, addiction, and references to cutting. Encourage folks to take a moment and step out if needed.

Discussion Guide Outline

Following the Film:

[suggestions for beginning the discussion]

- **Tuning in to our bodies** – Acknowledge that the content of the film is weighty, noting that we often carry that heaviness in our bodies. You might take a moment for silent reflection or prayer, inviting people to tune into their body and breath.
- **Candle lighting** - To transition into the discussion time, you might begin with a candle lighting like they do in the film: “We light this candle for the woman on the street and for the woman trying to find her way home.”
- **Freedom to move** – Throughout this conversation let people know that they are welcome to get up, step out, grab some water, or take a moment if needed.
- **Overview** – Provide the group with a brief overview on how the discussion will go and let them know what time the discussion will wrap up.

(Direct participants to their handout)

Review Discussion Reminders:

[Included in participant handout]

Engaging in Respectful Conversations

- **Time** – Be lean with your words and allow space for others to share.
- **Curiosity** – Each person here has their own unique history. Practice curiosity and compassion as we engage different perspectives.
- **Confidentiality** – If personal information is disclosed, honor their story and perspective by keeping it confidential.
- **Content** - While we know that the content of this film might connect to your own history of trauma, for the purpose of our conversation tonight we are hoping to keep the discussion grounded in the stories presented in the film and action steps we can take to get involved.

some things
you might
mention to
open the
conversation

this is
included in
the
participants
copy

Discussion Questions:

[Included in participant handout]

*recommend 30-45 minutes

1. What will stay with you from this film? Are there any lines or scenes that particularly spoke to you?
2. What questions emerged within you as you watched the film?
3. Becca Stevens (Founder of Thistle Farms) highlights how early childhood trauma and systemic injustices are often the catalyst for the issues women face at Thistle Farms. Looking back on the women's stories, what were some of the factors that made them vulnerable to sexual violence?
4. A traumatic experience in childhood can lead to other traumatic experiences later in life. For example, in Ty's story:

...she experienced child abuse
...and used drugs to cope
...which led to an addiction
...and resulted in incarceration
...which made it hard to get a job
...and impacted her ability to secure housing
...and so on

Looking at the stories told by women in the film, in what ways did you see traumatic events build on one another? What resources or support was missing in their earlier years?

5. The film emphasizes rehabilitation over incarceration, highlighting how many of these women have been victims of violence long before their actions were criminalized. Dorinda Carter (TN Department of Correction) poses the question: "What led you to come to prison in the first place, and what can help you—not only stay out of prison—but never return?"
 1. How did the film impact your perspective on why people go to prison?

2. What can we as individuals (and as a community) do to help people stay out of prison?

6. Acknowledging the role that childhood trauma plays in our lives, Dr. Arthur Lee (Residential Program Educator) invites us to shift away from asking the question “What’s wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?” What would shift if we approached ourselves this way? What would shift if we approached other people this way?

7. Part of the success of Thistle Farms is due to the fact that women survivors collaborated in creating it. Instead of outsiders imposing their notion of what they thought the women needed to heal, the women in the program articulated their wants/needs, and that shaped the program. As we seek to engage complex social issues like sexual violence, what might it look like for us to elevate the voices of those most impacted? How can we push communities we are a part of to center the voices of survivors?

8. Did the film shed any light on what we can do (as individuals, as communities, or on a policy level) to address issues related to human trafficking or sexual violence?

9. Becca closed the 2020 Thistle Farms Graduation with the following words: “Love heals. And all of us can heal from trauma... My charge to you is to go back out and love the world—again and again and again—until we get it right.” You are invited to take a moment of silent reflection to explore the questions:
 1. Where do I need to experience healing?
 2. What might it look like for me to go out and love the world—again and again and again?

Closing Reflections:

[suggestions for concluding the discussion]

- **Closing ritual** – To close, you might invite people to take a moment of silence, noticing how they feel and taking a moment to be present to it. Following the moment of silence, you might read a short poem or prayer before blowing out the candle.
- **Resources** – Before people leave, highlight the resources section on their handout. Note that there are resources for those who have experienced sexual violence and need support, and there are resources for those who would like to get involved.

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Additional Resources

[Included in participant handout]

For more information, visit:
www.ThistleDocumentary.com

this is
included in
the
participants
copy

Hotlines : Speak with trained specialists that can offer support, information, advice, or connect you with local resources

- National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-4673
- National Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-888-373-7888

Organizations

- **RAINN** (Rape Abuse Incest National Network)
 - An organization that provides resources to survivors and education to the public
- **NSVRC** (National Sexual Violence Resource Center)
 - Provide information and tools to prevent and respond to sexual violence
- **Darkness to Light**
 - Offers online training that specializes in the education and prevention of child sexual abuse