

ACROSS THE LINE



ACCESSING ABORTION IN AMERICA

A VIRTUAL REALITY EXPERIENCE



Discussion Guide

***Across the Line* Discussion Guide**

Throughout the entire guide, you'll find **facilitator notes in the margins**. The *italic blue texts* are phrases you can say out loud if you need.

We want you to have the best experience possible discussing the key takeaways from this film, so we sprinkled in a few extra special notes for you.

Thank you for hosting a conversation about *Across the Line*!

Across the Line is an immersive virtual reality experience that combines 360° video and computer-generated imaging (CGI) to put viewers in the shoes of a patient entering a health center for a safe, legal abortion. Using real audio gathered at protests, scripted scenes, and documentary footage, the film is a powerful depiction of the toxic environment that many patients, abortion providers, and health center staff must navigate on a typical day across America. We hope this film expands support for safe, legal abortion as well as support for the people who provide and receive this care, and that these conversations build powerful communities that act to protect our patients, providers, and health center staff.

We recommend a group of 10 or fewer to maximize sharing and discussion, and build trust. Expect your event to last two hours following this guide.

For any questions, please email AcrosstheLine@ppfa.org.

If you didn't select a full screening kit, here are supplies you'll need for your event:

Supplies Checklist *included in screening kit

- Pens
- Headphones for yourself
- Loaner headphones for guests, at least two
- Snack food
- Tissues
- Name tags
- Small sign that reads: "On your name tag, write a word that describes the type of community you want to be a part of"
- Flipchart paper or white board
- Question written on sign that reads: "Think of your most comfortable and best sexual health/wellness visit. What made it comfortable?"
- Post-it notes
- 3-4 post-it notes with pre-written phrases, such as: "Clear info from doctor," "comfy chair in waiting room," and "brief wait time"
- GoogleCardboards* or another viewer such as Oculus Go or GearVR
- Antibacterial wipes, if sharing cardboards
- Digital version of postcards* at acrossthelinevr.com/resources

Before the Event

- Read through this entire guide.
- Select a location and time.
- Hand-select people to invite; participation is limited due to time constraints. A sample invitation is located at the end of the guide.
- Just prior to the event, review this guide once more, focusing on the facilitator notes. Is there anything you're confused about? Do you feel prepared to answer all the questions that may come up?
- Prepare a list of potential actions your friends might want to join you in.
- Write the text for the icebreakers on flipchart paper or a whiteboard.
- Write some sample post-it notes for the icebreaker.
- Display "Text ACROSS to 22422"
- Have name tags and pens available.
- Fold the Google Cardboards.
- Ensure wifi, or set up a hotspot. If password protected, display password.
- Have extra headphones available upon request
- Set out snacks.

Icebreaker (Informal mingling; 10 min.)

Post-it Note Reflection: As group participants arrive – before starting the guided conversation – direct their attention to a large whiteboard or flipchart paper with the following question visible:

“Think of your most comfortable and best sexual health and wellness visit. What made it comfortable?”

Encourage guests to write their answers on Post-it notes.

Name Tag: Encourage everyone to write their name (optional if everyone knows each other) and a word that describes the type of community they want to be a part of on their name tag.

“Please take a few minutes to reflect; then transition into the discussion we’ll have shortly, by answering this question about your healthcare experience.”

Formally Opening the Space (5 min. or less)

It’s important to strike a positive tone for the discussion before you dive in. It helps set boundaries and expectations for a respectful and inclusive space. Below are some suggestions of what to do and say before you view and discuss the film:

- Welcome people and thank them for coming. Review what is going to happen at this gathering. You can use the first paragraph of this guide to introduce *Across the Line*.
- Encourage everyone to chime in, and make space for those who don’t speak up as easily.
- Make people aware that they can take a break or use the bathroom whenever they need, without worrying about interrupting the discussion.
- If appropriate, ask people to self-identify their pronouns (ex: they/them, he/him, she/her).

Set a respectful tone during the introduction of the formal discussion.

“We can differ in opinions and feelings, and still have a respectful and meaningful conversation.”

If a conversation veers into whether abortion access is morally right or wrong, lean back into message:

“Abortion in America today is safe and legal, so let’s remember, this conversation is about the experience of harassment for patients and staff.”

Watch the Film (10 min.)

Watch *Across the Line* on individual smartphones using folded Google Cardboards or “magic window” mode. If you have a weak wifi signal, have a hotspot set up with the info available at check-in. Have additional headphones available for anyone who didn’t bring any. For those with GearVR or Oculus Go, you only need to search for *Across the Line* in the Oculus store.

- Be sure all participants have installed the YouTube app.
- Plug headphones into personal phone.
- Have participants text “ACROSS” to 22422 for the viewing link. If guests do not want to receive future action alerts, they can text “STOP” once receiving the film link.
- If the film does not autoplay, click the play button on screen.
- In the bottom right hand corner of the video, select the mask icon.
- Insert phone into a Google Cardboard.
- If sharing Google Cardboards, please wipe down with antibacterial wipe.

Tech issues to troubleshoot? Visit [AcrosstheLineVR.org/experience/](https://www.acrosstheLineVR.org/experience/)

For unresolvable tech issues or if there aren’t enough Google Cardboards to share, have your guests use the “magic window” mode. When adjusting the film to full screen, do not select the mask icon; move and tilt the phone in all directions without the Google Cardboard. Make sure the viewers also have headphones. For a more information on “magic window” mode (boxless rotating viewing) look at the **second image at:**

<https://www.cnn.com/2017/03/04/vr/how-to-watch-vr/index.html>

Expect a wide variety of emotional responses after a screening – including sadness, anger, frustration, despair, and confusion. Recognize that emotional responses vary and not everyone communicates in the same way.

Group Discussion Questions (1 - 1.5 hours)

Facilitator Note:

“Welcome back everyone. It looks like we’re waiting for a few people to finish watching the film.” In most cases, let viewers sit in reflection until everyone has finished viewing to begin the discussion. Pass around tissues as needed.

1. How was that to watch? (20 min. if 10 participants)

Facilitator Note:

To encourage dialogue treat the first question as a round, with each participant allotted two minutes (timed). Give participants the option to “pass.” As the conversation progresses it will move to popcorn style – where participants chime in one-by-one when they have something to add.

2. Think of a time you experienced harassment, bullying, or coercion similar to that featured in the film. How does viewing the harassment in the film impact you today?

3. How can we show compassion to ourselves and others in the face of this kind of bullying and harassment?

Facilitator Note:

If, and only if, there is any comment about compassion for those who bully and harass, one response could be, “While we do strive to have compassion towards all people in our community regardless of what they are going through, in today’s discussion, we want to prioritize the experience of the patient, staff, and volunteer health center escort facing harassment so we can collectively make their experience better.”

4. What are some of the ways bullying and harassment tactics may be targeted towards certain racial, gender, sexual orientation, or ability groups?

Facilitator Note:

The conversation can go in many different directions from this question so here is some helpful framing information to keep in mind or share with the group. Tactics may be targeted at and received by patients and staff who may be reminded of the history of reproductive oppression. Specific examples of reproductive oppression include:

- **Forced childbirth:** Black procreation helped sustain slavery as an institution, which provided an economic incentive to govern the reproductive choices of enslaved women.
- **Forced sterilization:** In 1975 alone, 25,000 Indigenous women were permanently sterilized by the Indian Health Services (IHS), an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services - many after being coerced, misinformed or threatened. In the 1940s, over 110,000 Japanese Americans were rounded up under Executive Order 9066 (overturned in 1976) sterilized without their knowledge while interned at Tule Lake. One-third of Puerto Rican women of childbearing age were sterilized as part of a campaign carried out by private agencies and the U.S. government in the 1940s.
- **Medical experimentation without consent:** In the 1980s, Phoenix and Oklahoma City Indian Health Services used Depo-Provera on disabled Indigenous women without consent, despite the fact that it hadn't yet been approved by the Food and Drug Administration
- **Blocking ability to adopt:** Until 1973, state courts commonly prohibited adoption by gay and lesbian people.

This past reproductive oppression frames the importance of reproductive health care access and agency. Patients and staff are often identified (or misidentified) as members of one of these groups. Traumas that these groups have historically experienced then becomes harassing language, or part of a tactic to further stigmatize their current reproductive (perceived) decisions.

5. The bullying and harassment seen in *Across the Line* is a form of abortion stigma. For people who have had an abortion and abortion providers, stigma can create feelings of being judged and threatened. To protect themselves from negative reactions, abortion providers as well as people who have abortions may keep their experiences secret – confiding only in people they trust or when it's absolutely necessary. Secrecy results in broader social silence around abortion. Silence is harmful because it can make individuals feel shame and alienated in their experience. Silence also makes it easier to restrict access to abortion. How do we go beyond silence on this issue? How can we become more vocal about our support?

Facilitator Note:

Abortion stigma shows up in many different places. Here is one definition of Abortion Stigma "Abortion stigma is a shared understanding that abortion is morally wrong and/or socially unacceptable." One of the ways to shrink societal abortion stigma include storytelling to normalize the experience of abortion. Another way is conversations like the one we're having now. There are many abortion storytelling websites, such as www.1in3campaign.org and theabortiondiary.com, if you would like to share your personal story, read other stories, or learn about the power of storytelling. Sometimes we are silent because we fear saying the wrong thing and inadvertently furthering stigmas. Someone in the discussion may make a statement evaluating someone's decision or reasons to have an abortion or provide an "excuse or justification" for why only some abortions are acceptable. As a general rule, when that happens try to re-frame the statement as: All abortions are valid and morally acceptable. We trust people to make their own, fully informed sexual and reproductive health care decisions.

SPECIAL NOTE: If the discussion is going strong an hour into the event and you haven't reached question number six, ask your group if they want to extend it for an additional 30 minutes, or if they prefer to wrap things up. If they prefer to wrap things up, skip to question number seven.

6. For those who wrote a description the type of community you want to be a part of on your name tag, let's shout those out to the group now.

7. These visions for our community – all these words – if realized, what are potential effects on reproductive access, including health care and education, across our community?

Facilitator Note:

Are there any proven road maps to stop harassment and bullying completely? There are case studies in specific communities and theories of how change is possible, but there is no single strategy. We do know some actions that are not effective, such as counter-protesting and doing nothing.

8. What resources or skills do you need to help achieve this vision, both personally and as a community? What are you ready to do now to make that aspirational vision (of the words you wrote on your name tag) a reality?

Facilitator Note:

If participants suggest counter-protesting, ask the open ended question, "How do you think counter-protests might impact clients and staff?" or "Why do some abortion clinics have a non-engagement policy?" You can share that "Counter-protesting may increase tension and make it more difficult for patients and staff to navigate." We recommend formal Planned Parenthood volunteer opportunities, such as becoming a patient escort, getting involved in lobby days or other events, and self-work to deepen your understanding of reducing abortion stigma and existing activist projects in your community.

Facilitator Note:

In advance of your event, check with your local Planned Parenthood health center for volunteer opportunities, upcoming events, and specific needs they may have. The [Planned Parenthood Get Involved website](#) includes current actions of varying levels of commitment. You will want to prepare a list in advance of potential ways to get involved in your community.

Wrap-up Exercise/Closing the Space

“I would love for us to continue this conversation, but we do have to be out of this space at 9 p.m. so let’s continue talking with each other, and our friends who are not with us tonight. At the door we have postcards for each of you to take home for a reflection activity on your own, and I will be sending you an email in the next few days. Before we step away from this discussion circle, I’d like to do a quick breathing exercise as a practice of self-care, which is needed to give of oneself and promote justice effectively. Let’s all stand up. We’re going to inhale through our nose on a count of 4, and hold for 2 and exhale through the mouth on 4. We’ll do this 3 times. I’ll wait for everyone to stand now, if you have the ability to do so comfortably. Let’s breathe in inclusion (deep breath), breathe out exclusion (breath), breathe in health equity (breath) breathe out health disparities (breath), breathe in, breathe out. Thanks again for joining us tonight.”

We recommend emailing attendees after the event to thank them for participating and share further resources. A sample email is included on the next page.

Hopefully, you had a great discussion that built stronger personal relationships. If you would like recommendations of storytelling websites, other similar discussion guides, or board games, please contact our team.

For any questions, please email AcrossTheLine@ppfa.org.

Don’t forget to personalize the action you’re willing to take. You can also include any other future events you are planning to participate in or volunteer with.

Sample Follow-up Email to Your Guests

Thank you for joining in the vibrant discussion tonight. I am thrilled that we were able to connect and grapple with such important topics.

We refuse to normalize or accept this harassment, and continue to fight together against this and all other manifestations of abortion stigma. We do know change is possible, and we can minimize the impact of bullying and harassment. But it won’t happen overnight. There are many different actions we can each take toward the goal of creating the equitable world we want to live in. I’m thinking of some of the words we all wrote on our name tags, like “loving” and “kind” and “heartfelt.” I’m excited for the change we can work toward in the future.

In this next week, I commit to sending an email to my elected official about birth control and then updating my social media profile photo using the filter at: www.istandwithpp.org/take-action

Thanks again for being part of the conversation tonight, and any conversations you want to be part of in the future.

Best,

Host Name

Printable Postcard Take-away

These postcards can be mailed to either friends or kept as a reminder of action to take.

What are the characteristics of a community that does not tolerate harassment and bullying?

The unfortunate reality is that too many people in the U.S. face barriers to sexual and reproductive health care as well as safe, legal abortion – which are hindered by TRAP (Targeted Regulation of Abortion Providers) legislation, waiting periods, the availability of providers, and cost. Everyone – no matter where they live, or how much money they make, or who provides their health insurance – deserves access to health care without barriers or political roadblocks.

FRONT

Please join me. Commit to make a difference by creating a more compassionate community. I have committed to _____

Yours in solidarity,

BACK

[Download here.](#)

Sample Invitation

Dear friends -

I recently watched a virtual reality film that has really stayed with me. It uses documentary footage to show the bullying and harassment that sometimes happens outside health centers. I know Planned Parenthood and many other reproductive health care providers value the health and safety of patients and staff, and I'm just appalled at things like this are still happening in any community.

I am hosting a small gathering of five people at _____ (location) at _____ (date/time) for a screening and conversation about the virtual reality film, *Across the Line*. I even picked up portable virtual reality players (Google Cardboards) for each of us! In the current climate, I keep thinking about how we can amplify our supportive voices to drown out the negative ones – I'd love to have that conversation with you.

Bring your phone with the YouTube app installed and a pair of headphones. RSVP by _____ (date).

I'm looking forward to our time together!

