



Supporting LGBTQ Folk
Experiencing Relationship Abuse

QMUNITY



Safety and Language

The discussion of relationship abuse in this booklet may cause distress. Consider planning self-care strategies like contacting a support person after reading. Please avoid being seen reading this resource by someone who is or may be abusing someone you know.

Language is always changing. We've tried to make this resource inclusive, but if you have feedback about language or content for future editions, please contact **education@qmunity.ca**

For more information on LGBTQ relationship safety or LGBTQ terminology, visit **www.qmunity.ca** for these publications:

Safety in Relationships for Trans Folk*
Safety in Same-Gender Relationships
Queer Terminology: From A to Q

Supporting LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*, Queer) Folk Experiencing Relationship Abuse

Friends, family, chosen family, LGBTQ communities, and service providers such as counsellors, social workers, doctors, and police are all able to play a role in responding to relationship abuse experienced by LGBTQ folk.

Personal Support

Survivors of relationship abuse often seek the support of friends or family before considering professional support. For some LGBTQ folk, family support is not available, and relationship norms are not widely discussed in communities or the media. Friends, family, chosen family, and LGBTQ community members can help survivors by:

- Being alert to signs that someone may be experiencing abuse, e.g. they become isolated, show signs of physical violence, or seem nervous around their partner
- Making sure that someone who is becoming isolated stays included in invitations, even if they don't always accept them
- Not tolerating jokes about relationship violence which make it seem normal or insignificant
- Letting friends and family know that they can talk to you about anything without judgment
- If applicable: When feeling safe to do so, and being mindful of the risk of triggering others, sharing your own lived survivor experiences to reduce stigma and feelings of isolation

Service Provider Support

Service providers also have unique opportunities to work with LGBTQ survivors by:

- Letting LGBTQ communities know that they can expect inclusion, respect, and LGBTQ competent services by:
 - Advertising in LGBTQ directories. Advertising LGBTQ-competency should only be done where LGBTQ-competency is the consistent reality throughout the organization. LGBTQ-competency must extend to all parts of the community, including trans*, intersex, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, 2-Spirit folk, poly, and kinky folk.
 - Reaching out to LGBTQ community organizations
 - Inclusion of LGBTQ matters in materials such as websites, pamphlets, and advertising
 - Including LGBTQ pride stickers and accessibility measures such as all genders washrooms in their physical spaces

- Committing to ongoing learning such as participating in QMUNITY's Queer Competency Trainings. Service providers who felt confident in serving LGBTQ folk before taking such trainings often report being surprised to learn that "I didn't know what I didn't know"
- Avoiding making assumptions about the gender identity of clients and their partners. Assuming clients to be heterosexual and cisgender may send a message that your service will not be helpful or welcoming to LGBTQ clients
- Having policies and processes that prevent the abuser and survivor accessing the resource at the same time when both parties claim to be the survivor; e.g. dividing times when each party can access the resource, with a buffer time in between, and giving referrals for LGBTQ-inclusive services that they can access at other times. Communicating these policies to staff must take the privacy of both clients into account

Tips for All Support People

All people in a position to potentially support LGBTQ folk can benefit by reviewing these tips:

- **DON'T:** Think of the survivor as a victim. Understand that they have had the personal strength to come this far, and respect their expertise on their own situation
- **DON'T:** Disengage or get frustrated if the survivor doesn't do what you think they should do, or at the time or speed that you think they should do it at. Keep listening; your non-judgmental support can mean more than you might realize
- **DON'T:** Intervene in a way that the survivor hasn't asked for. For example, a support person who decides to criticize the abuser may never know that the abuser then goes home and punishes the survivor
- **DON'T:** Make the survivor feel guilty for anything that they might have done to survive, such as shouting back or using drugs

- **DON'T:** Become a target, e.g. by allowing your address to be known to the abuser
- **DON'T:** Refer to a service provider that you aren't sure is LGBTQ-competent
- **DON'T:** Assume that the needs of all LGBTQ folk are the same. For example, a service provider who is experienced with LGB issues may not be trans* competent
- **DON'T:** Turn your back on the survivor. For example, they may become hostile to test your commitment after an abuser has suggested that you don't really care about them, but still want your help
- **DON'T:** Associate abuse with particular communities, such as kinky folk, people of color, or any specific gender expression. This harmfully and inaccurately stereotypes some communities, and limits our ability to see abuse happening in others

- **DO:** Remind the survivor of their strength
- **DO:** Remember that abuse is never the survivor's fault, and remind the survivor of this
- **DO:** Be aware that friends or family may be reaching out to you for help, but not know how to express their feelings, or that what they are experiencing is abuse
- **DO:** Create opportunities for a survivor to disclose to you, e.g. "I've noticed that you seem very anxious when your partner is around. I want you to know that you can talk to me confidentially about anything." Do this when and where your survivor is not worried about being overheard and is not busy thinking about other things
- **DO:** Discuss best outcomes to aim for, and worst outcomes to plan for safety and well-being around

- **DO:** Offer your support to the survivor within the limits of promises that you can keep and are comfortable with, e.g. “Please let me know if there is anything that I can do, whether it’s now or in the future. I’m always here to listen, and you can call me at any time. Unfortunately, I can’t offer a place for you to stay, but I can help research other accommodation options.”
- **DO:** Offer to connect the survivor to other resources. For example, if you cannot provide legal advice, you may be able to research an LGBTQ-competent lawyer for them at a time when they may be too exhausted or too concerned about being found doing so by their abuser to research it themselves
- **DO:** Seek permission, if possible, before calling the police. The survivor may have many reasons for not wanting to involve the police, such as past experiences of LGBTQ-phobic police treatment, fear of being arrested along with the abuser and/or held in gender-inappropriate facilities, or fear that a police call will result in the survivor’s undocumented immigration status being uncovered

- **DO:** Ask questions that empower the survivor instead of giving advice, e.g. “For you to feel safe in your new home, what do you think would need to happen?”
- **DO:** Know the limits of your expertise. Avoid giving advice that you are not qualified to give
- **DO:** Be aware of the survivor’s privacy. For example, leaving a voicemail relating to their situation may put them in danger or out them to others
- **DO:** Offer, if you are able, to go with the survivor as an advocate if they access non-LGBTQ*-competent service providers
- **DO:** Reflect on and invite the survivor to correct you on assumptions you might make or biases you might have about their experience or about LGBTQ issues
- **DO:** Consider ways you may be able to help the survivor address things the abuser may be exploiting, such as lack of access to employment, or difficulty coming out or transitioning at school

This resource was published in 2014 by QMUNITY with the valuable assistance of a diverse team of volunteers, on unceded Coast Salish land.

For more information and resources visit www.qmunity.ca

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