



# Abuse in *Same-Sex and LGBTQ\** Relationships



\* Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, trans-identified, two-spirited and queer identities

# What you need to know about *Abuse in Same-Sex and LGBTQ relationships*

Abuse can happen in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, trans-identified, two-spirited and queer relationships just as it can in any other intimate relationship. Research shows that about one-quarter to one-third of people in LGBTQ relationships have experienced abuse on dates or with live-in partners.<sup>1</sup>



## *What is in this booklet*

This booklet gives you information about abuse in LGBTQ intimate relationships. When you have read this booklet, you will learn:

### **What is abuse**

- Understand major kinds of abuse and how they may show up in LGBTQ relationships
- Know what to look for so you can recognize abuse in LGBTQ relationships

### **What you can do**

- Know what you can do if you realize you are in an abusive LGBTQ relationship or if you are concerned about someone else who is in an abusive LGBTQ relationship

### **Where to get help**

- Know where to get help for yourself or for people you are concerned about

### *Definition of family violence\**

Family violence is the abuse of power within relationships of family, trust or dependency that endangers the survival, security or well-being of another person. It can include many forms of abuse including spouse abuse, senior abuse and neglect, child abuse and neglect, child sexual abuse, parent abuse, and witnessing abuse of others in the family. Family violence may include some or all of the following behaviours: physical abuse, psychological abuse, criminal harassment/stalking, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse, and spiritual abuse.

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\* This is Alberta Children’s Services’ definition of family violence. The definition has helped to focus Alberta’s Strategy for the Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying.

*“I have known I was lesbian since I was in high school. Last year I met an amazing woman at a conference. We visited one another to check out our attraction and it was electric. I was on long-term disability from my job because of health problems. We decided that I would leave my home in the city and move in with her on an acreage near a lake.*

*I knew she was volatile – that was part of the excitement – but after the first few days, I realized this was something different than I’d experienced before. She would flip out over nothing, yell at me, and then go silent for hours. One day she came at me screaming, scratching and kicking. I fought her off, but I had scratches and bruises all over.*

*That was just the first time. Now I’m on “red alert” all the time, because I don’t know when she will flip out again. I am hundreds of miles from my friends, I’ve sold most of my possessions, and I know almost nobody in this new community. I love being by the lake, but I need to get away from her and re-build my life.”*

## So what is abuse?

### ABUSE IS A PATTERN OF CONTROLLING BEHAVIOUR

Abuse in LGBTQ relationships happens when partners use psychological or physical ways to get and keep control over the other partner. They may do it to express feelings, to get their own way or to prevent the abused partner from leaving the relationship. Abused partners often change their own behaviour to meet the abusive partner’s demands, hoping the abuse will stop.

The abuse can and does result in physical, sexual, emotional or financial harm. The harm can be to the abused partner’s public or private life.

Abuse and violence in intimate relationships do not happen “just once.” They are not “an isolated incident.” Abuse happens over months and years. If the abuse continues, it usually becomes more frequent and more severe.

Abusive behaviours are always a choice. It does not matter what the abuser’s background or experience is. Abusive partners must take responsibility for their behaviour. No one has the right to abuse someone else, and no one deserves to be abused.

### TACTICS OF ABUSE

Abuse can take many forms. Whatever the form, abuse tactics are intended to undermine the partner and lower the partner’s sense of personal strength and value. The most visible abuse tactics may be physical, but less visible forms of abuse can be just as destructive.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE TACTICS** cause emotional pain and injury. The abusive partner uses emotional or mental weapons rather than physical assaults on the abused person. Psychological abuse virtually always accompanies other forms of abuse and includes:

#### Emotional abuse tactics

- Puts down, insults or humiliates the other at home or in public
- Blames the other partner
- Lies to the other partner
- Has peaks and valleys of emotional extremes: happy one moment, outraged the next

#### Control tactics

- Isolates the other partner and restricts his or her freedom
- Controls contact the other partner has with friends and relatives

#### Spiritual abuse tactics

- Interferes with or makes fun of the other’s spiritual beliefs and practices
- Makes it difficult for the other partner to be in contact with his or her spiritual community

#### Financial abuse tactics

- Controls all the finances so the other partner has little access to financial information
- Steals money or uses the partner’s credit cards without permission
- Tries to make the other partner financially dependent
- Makes financial decisions that affect the partner without consulting him or her

**Intimidation tactics** are any words or actions one partner uses to scare the other. One partner could:

- Destroy the other partner’s property or possessions
- Threaten to harm or kill the partner
- Threaten to harm or kill the partner’s children or pets
- Stalk or harass the other partner after the relationship has ended
- “Out” or threaten to “out” a partner to family, friends, work or the community

**PHYSICAL ABUSE TACTICS** include any activity that can cause physical pain or injury

- Shoves, slaps, hits, kicks, bites or does anything else that physically hurts the partner
- Throws things
- Uses a weapon
- Interferes with basic daily requirements for food, shelter, medicine and sleep

**SEXUAL ABUSE TACTICS** cause both emotional and physical harm, and include:

- Uses force or pressure to get the other partner to have sex
- Uses force or pressure to get the other partner to have sex in a particular way
- Criticizes or ridicules the other partner's performance
- Refuses to be affectionate or to have sex in order to punish the other partner
- Uses unsafe sexual practices

Abused LGBTQ partners usually experience more than one type of abuse. For example, emotional abuse accompanies almost all other forms of abuse or intimidation tactics.

## ABUSE IN LGBTQ RELATIONSHIPS

### SOME FACTS

- Partner abuse can occur in all segments of the LGBTQ community
- Partner abuse has nothing to do with gender, masculine or feminine traits, physical appearance or stature
- Partner abuse is not "mutual abuse." One partner is controlling the other through abuse

### THE SOCIAL CONTEXT MAKES IT EVEN HARDER

- Homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism increase the isolation of people who are experiencing partner abuse in LGBTQ relationships
- Many LGBTQ individuals do not want to report abuse. They fear that the therapist, social worker, medical person or police will not believe them
- Specialized services are limited for abused and abusive partners in LGBTQ relationships
- Mainstream services may not be aware of dynamics in LGBTQ relationships
- Partners in abusive LGBTQ relationships may fear that they will lose their privacy if they speak out

### LGBTQ PARTNERS CAN USE HOMOPHOBIA, TRANSPHOBIA AND HETEROSEXISM AS WEAPONS OF CONTROL

- They can "out" or threaten to "out" their partners to friends, family, employers, police, church or others in the wider community
- They can tell their partners that help is not available to them because the police and the justice system are homophobic or transphobic
- They can tell their partners that no one will believe them because lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, trans-identified, two-spirited or queer people do not sexually assault or abuse their lovers
- They can say that their partners deserve abuse because they are LGBTQ. This form of abuse is often the result of the abusive partners' own homophobia or transphobia
- They can tell their partners that they are not 'real' LGBTQ people because they have opposite sex friends, have children, prefer certain sexual practices or used to have intimate relations with the opposite sex
- They can try to convince a partner that the abusive behaviour is normal and that the abused partner does not understand LGBTQ relationships
- Because of heterosexist stereotypes about LGBTQ relationships, abusive partners can give the idea that the violence is mutual or that the abused partner consents to the abuse. That increases the abusive partner's power and control
- Men can tell LGBTQ partners that abusive behaviour is not domestic violence but an expression of "masculinity"



*“Chase was fired from his job a couple of weeks ago. The boss lost his temper and called Chase all kinds of filthy names. I told Chase he should contact Human Rights but he just yelled at me to stop telling him what to do. Lately he’s acting weird, not like himself at all. The other day he actually slapped me. He apologized afterwards and promised it wouldn’t happen again. As a peace offering, he brought me a bottle of my favorite wine, as if that would make it okay. I can understand that he is frustrated because the boss treated him unfairly. Being without a job right now is stressful for him. But other people have job troubles and stress. They don’t hit people.”*

LGBTQ couples do not have as many role models as heterosexual couples do. They have to find their own way, and that can make it easier for abuse to occur. Families of LGBTQ couples may not know how best to support the couple, and so leave them on their own.

Some people may have more than one characteristic that leads to discrimination – for example, a lesbian who is a member of an ethnic minority or in a wheel chair. For them, the risk and isolation are even greater.

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## An abusive environment harms children now and in their future<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes people abused by their partners think their children do not know about the abuse or that the abuse does not harm the children. But children are harmed, even if they are not directly abused.

### **Being exposed to anger and violence affects children’s brain development**

- Brain scans show that children in abusive environments use much of their brain to watch out for danger. Less of their brain is available for healthy growth and development
- This affects their physical, emotional and mental development
- It affects their ability to form healthy relationships
- It affects them even when the children are not consciously aware of the violence in the home<sup>3</sup>

When a child is in a threatening environment over time, such as in a home where the adults are abusive, systems in the child’s brain undergo changes. These changes result in emotional, behavioural, intellectual and physical symptoms.

### **All children in a threatening environment are affected by fear.** They might:

- Feel anxious or panicky
- Have an increased heart rate – babies in violent or angry homes have faster heart rates even in their sleep
- Be very watchful and attentive all the time, as though on “red alert”

Because their brains are distracted by fear, they may:

- Find it hard to concentrate or pay attention
- Have difficulty sleeping
- Have difficulty learning

### **Children in a threatening environment use different ways to cope**

Some children react by becoming more aggressive. They may:

- Be defiant
- Act impulsive
- Have angry outbursts
- Act bossy or pushy
- Bully or hurt others

Sometimes these loud children do not appear to be affected. They look like they feel confident and in charge. But their aggressive behaviours grow out of fear expressed outwardly as anger.

Some children react by becoming quiet and withdrawn. These children might:

- Try to stay safe by becoming “invisible”
- Go into their own fantasy world and tune out the world around them
- Be more obedient or passive than other children
- Be numb and disconnected from their own feelings
- Be detached from other people
- Have a hard time getting along with others
- Be depressed

Sometimes these quiet children do not look like they are affected by what is going on around them because they do not seem to react. However, this “unaffected” appearance is a danger sign. In the face of fear and feeling helpless, they have disconnected from their environment.

You may think that the abuse between adults in the home does not affect children, or that you can shield them from what is going on. That is not true. As long as children live in an abusive environment, the trauma will continue to affect their brains. They will not be able to heal.

There is hope. Even if the trauma of living in an abusive home changes a child’s brain in unhealthy ways, the brain can heal over time if the child has a safe, predictable and loving place to live.

If there are children in your household, take responsibility for their safety and well-being. Do this even if you are not their biological parent. The children did not choose the adults in their home. They deserve a healthy and safe environment, so they can grow to become healthy and flourishing adults.

If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected by a parent or guardian, report your suspicions immediately. Call the police, your local Child and Family Services Authority or the 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-387-KIDS (5437).

If you suspect someone other than a parent or guardian is abusing a child, report your suspicions immediately to the police. Look in the red emergency pages of your local telephone directory to find the telephone number of police in your area.

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# How can I tell if my relationship with my partner is healthy, unhealthy or abusive?

Look at the chart that follows. For each relationship factor, think about your relationship. Then ask yourself this question: Is my relationship most like the healthy, unhealthy or abusive relationship?

	<b>HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP</b>	<b>UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP</b>	<b>ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP</b>
<b>Sharing Feelings</b>	You feel safe and strong enough to tell your partner how you really feel.	You feel awkward telling your partner how you really feel.	You are afraid to tell your partner how you really feel because you fear getting put down or threatened.
<b>Communicating</b>	You respect and listen to each other even when you have differing opinions on a topic.	Your partner ignores you and does not respect your opinions when there is a difference of opinion.	Your partner treats you with disrespect and ignores your ideas and feelings or makes fun of them.
<b>Disagreements</b>	You can have disagreements and still talk respectfully to each other. You resolve your disagreements.	Your disagreements often turn into fights.	You are afraid to disagree because you do not want to unleash your partner's anger and violence. The disagreement is an excuse for abuse.
<b>Intimacy and Sex</b>	Both of you can be honest about your feelings about physical affection and sex. Neither of you feels pressured to do anything you do not want to do.	You are embarrassed to say how you feel because you think your partner may not listen or care. You "go along" with some things.	Your partner ignores your needs and wants. Your partner pushes you into situations that make you uncomfortable, frighten or degrade you.
<b>Trust</b>	You trust each other. You are comfortable with your partner spending time with another man or woman.	Your partner feels jealous every time you talk to another man or woman. You feel jealous every time your partner talks to another man or woman.	Your partner accuses you of flirting or having an affair, and orders you not to talk to another man or woman.
<b>Time Alone</b>	You can each spend time alone and consider this a healthy part of your relationship.	You think there may be something wrong if you want to do things without your partner. Your partner tries to keep you to himself or herself.	Your partner does not allow you to spend time doing things on your own. Your partner sees this as a challenge or threat to your relationship.
<b>Violence</b>	You and your partner take care not to speak harsh words or make mean comments. There is no physical violence in your relationship.	There have been a few incidents of emotional abuse or controlling behaviour in your relationship. There is no pattern of abuse or violence.	There is a pattern of increasing, ongoing abuse in your relationship: emotional, physical, sexual and/or intimidation.



# If you are in an abusive relationship

## NINE THINGS YOU CAN DO IF YOUR PARTNER IS ABUSING YOU

- 1. First, make sure you and your children are physically safe. Recognize the danger.**  
If there has been any act of violence, there is likely to be more violence.
  - If you are in immediate danger, call 911
  - Make a safety plan. See “Safety Plan” suggestions in the box on page 8
- 2. Know that you are not responsible** for the abuse. The abuse is the responsibility of the abuser. You did not make it happen and you cannot stop it from happening, even if your partner would like you to think so.
- 3. Understand that abuse and violence almost never stop on their own.** In fact, the abuse and violence usually become more frequent and more severe over time. When you are thinking about your choices, be realistic in deciding what the risks are in your situation.
- 4. Tell someone you trust** about the abuse. Choose someone who will believe you. Secrecy only gives the abuse and the abuser more power. When you tell another person, you are already gaining some power to make the situation better. If the person you tell does not take you seriously, talk to someone else. Do not give up.
- 5. Find out more about abuse in relationships.** You are not alone. Research shows that about one-quarter to one-third of people in LGBTQ relationships have experienced abuse on dates or with live-in partners. Once you start looking for sources of help, you will meet people who understand your situation.
- 6. Visit [www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca](http://www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca)** or call the 24 hour Family Violence Info Line toll free at **310-1818** for more information about LGBTQ resources in your community.
- 7. Use your circle of friends to find professional help** from a qualified counsellor. Make sure the person knows about LGBTQ partner abuse, is positive about LGBTQ relationships and is accessible. A counsellor with these qualities may help you address the important issues of abuse with more comfort, sensitivity and focus.
- 8. Look after yourself.** You are in a difficult situation. Dealing with it takes energy. Make time to do some things that feel good. Doing something you enjoy for half an hour will give you energy and strength. That will help you get through another day and do what is necessary to create a happier life for yourself.
- 9. Spend time with healthy people.** Even if they cannot help you directly, being with healthy people will remind you that most people are kind to one another and many people have healthy and rewarding relationships. You can too.

## SIX THINGS TO DO IF THERE ARE CHILDREN IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD

- 1. Think of the safety and best interests of the children first.**
- 2. Get legal advice** about custody, access and maintenance issues.
- 3. Tell the children** that even though the adults in their home do not get along, the children are not to blame and the abuse is not their fault.
- 4. Do everything in your power to expose the children to healthy relationships,** and to environments that are safe, predictable and loving. Children need to know that most adults are kind to one another and that most homes are safe places.
- 5. Help the children connect with healthy and gay-positive adults** outside the immediate household. Find adults who care about the children’s well-being and whom the children can count on to be stable and reliable.
- 6. Help the children find ways to succeed.** Children who know they are good at something are stronger in themselves, even when they are in abusive environments.

*“Sarah is the first person I have lived with since I left my husband. I always knew I was different but I didn’t know I was a lesbian until I was married and had two kids. My life changed when I met Sarah. We were hardly out of each other’s sight once we found each other. It was great. For the first time in my life, I felt complete. I moved in with Sarah a couple of weeks later and it felt like heaven. As we’ve continued our relationship, though, she gets jealous when I have to spend time with any of my old friends, my family or my kids. At first I liked feeling I was so desirable that she didn’t want me to be away from her. Now I’m not so sure. I adore Sarah but I’m beginning to feel cut off from the other people who are important to me.”*



Only you can decide what to do about your relationship. Whether you stay or leave is your decision. However, you do not have to do this alone. Whatever you decide to do, you have the right to get the help you need. The resources listed at the back of this booklet are a good place to start.

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## **SAFETY PLANNING**

If your partner has ever been violent, the violence could happen again at any time. You will need a safety plan so you can get to a safe place quickly if necessary.

If you decide to leave the relationship, you need to know that separating is one of the most dangerous times in an abusive relationship. Your abusive partner is losing control over you and will do everything possible to get it back. In this situation, there is an increased risk of violence, harassment, threats and increased emotional abuse. That does not mean you should stay in the abusive situation. It means you need to assess the risk and plan how to stay safe.

### **MAKING A SAFETY PLAN**

- 1. Tell people you trust** that you are in an abusive relationship.
  - Talk to them about how they can help you be safe
  - Let them know about any custody or no-contact orders
  - You may want to keep the abuse private, but when people outside your home know about the abuse, they can watch for danger signs and help keep you safe
- 2. Plan where you can go** if you need to leave in a hurry.
  - Look for places that are open 24 hours where you can be safe while you call for help
  - If you plan to go to someone's home, arrange this ahead of time. That way if you arrive with no notice, they will know to let you in, lock the doors and ask questions later. Do NOT plan to go to the home of a friend or relative where the abuser will think to look. That might endanger all of you
  - Make sure you have the car keys and gas in the car, or bus tickets or another means of transportation
  - Be sure to check out exactly how to get to where you plan to go
  - Have a back-up plan in case you are not able to get to the place you intended to go
- 3. Memorize emergency numbers** like the numbers for the police or taxi. Also learn the phone numbers of trusted friends or relatives, so you can tell them where you are going. You may not have time to look up these numbers if you need to leave fast.
- 4. Find out about emergency protection orders**, restraining orders, peace bonds or other legal ways to stop your partner from contacting you. Visit [www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca](http://www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca) or call **310-1818** for more information.
- 5. Learn to erase phone numbers from call display**, so your partner will not know who called you or whom you called.
- 6. Pack a small emergency bag** and put it in a place where your partner will not find it. You could leave it with a trusted friend or in a place that only you know about. Include some things you will need, such as:
  - Cash
  - Debit or credit cards
  - Health care cards
  - Car keys
  - Important documents like your driver's license and passport
  - Any prescription drugs
  - Copies of any no contact orders
  - If you have children, whatever they will need for a few hours

### **7. If your former partner is stalking or harassing you:**

- Report this to police. Stalking is a crime called criminal harassment
- Keep a record. Write down what happens, including times and dates. The record of more than one incident will help to prove the harassment. “Criminal harassment” is a crime if it happens more than once
- Tell key people (for example, co-workers, friends, your children’s teachers) that your ex-partner is stalking or harassing you. Show them a picture of your ex-partner so they can watch out for her/him
- You may need to arrange for a no-contact order of some kind (see point 4 above)

### **8. If you have children:**

- Tell them exactly what they should do in an emergency
- Tell them how they will know it is an emergency
- Tell them exactly where they should go and what they should do when they get there

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## **If you are concerned about someone you know**

### **CLUES THAT SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS INVOLVED IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP**

1. First, look at the chart about healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships (page 6). What do you see, hear or feel when you are with the couple? In which category does their relationship fit?
2. Next, look at the list of behaviours describing emotional, spiritual, physical, financial and sexual abuse, and intimidation tactics (page 2). Have you observed these behaviours over time? If so, there may be abuse in the relationship.
3. Then, consider if there have been changes. For example, has the person stopped coming to events they used to attend regularly? Is the person withdrawing from friends and family? Do you notice changes in the person’s personality (for example, is he or she quieter, grouchier, more distracted or less energetic than usual)? Is the person on medication? Are there bruises or other physical injuries that do not match up with the story they tell you about how they got the injuries?

Any of these conditions might indicate that the person is dealing with abuse.

### **IF YOU SUSPECT THAT SOMEONE IS BEING ABUSED**

#### **1. Understand the person may not realize this is abuse or may not want to talk about it.**

Many abused people do not realize that the behaviour they are living with is abuse. It may take time before they begin to understand that their partner is abusing them. This is a painful thing to acknowledge. It means realizing that someone you love, that you thought loved you, is willing to harm you.

As well, many people in abusive situations are ashamed or afraid to talk about the abuse. Society’s homophobia, or the person’s own, may further isolate them and make them reluctant to take steps to end the abuse.

Recognizing abuse, and then deciding what to do about it, is a process not an event. You will need to be patient and supportive of the person you care about.

*“With my last partner, life was high drama and high adrenaline all the time. We’d have screaming matches in public. Sometimes at the clubs, we were the entertainment. So when I settled in with Jason I was looking forward to a more peaceful home life.*

*Jason is quite a bit younger. I enjoyed the fact that he was cheerful and easy-going and content to stay at home a lot. He designs and makes fabulous costumes, but he only works once in a while. Even then, he doesn’t always get paid for the work he does. I am carrying the financial load. That was okay with me until I found out he was using my credit cards. All of a sudden, I’m in danger of going bankrupt. My credit cards are maxed out for things I didn’t buy and never saw. I can’t keep up to the payments. Besides that, even though he isn’t always working, Jason does nothing around the house.*

*Lately he’s started telling me I’m old and ugly and lucky to have him. I used to like going out with him but now I can’t stand watching him come on to others. He knows all the ways to be cruel to me.”*

## 2. Find the right words to open the door for conversation.

Here are some examples of statements that may be helpful.

- “Are you okay?”
- “I’ve noticed lately that you are more withdrawn. We don’t see much of you any more, and when we do, you seem quieter and look troubled. I don’t mean to pry, but sometimes that means a person is not being treated very well by their partner”
- “I’ve been in an abusive situation and I can see the signs. (Only say this if it’s true.) Here are some things I see and hear that tell me you’re dealing with power and control tactics from your partner. (List the things you’ve noticed.) From my experience, and the experience of lots of other people, I can tell you that it doesn’t get better, and I can tell you that you don’t deserve to be abused”
- “Look, I want you to know that I am on your side. Whatever you decide to do, I’ll back you. How can I help?”

**3. Once the abused partner understands this is an abusive relationship,** encourage the person to get help. There are community agencies that can help the person figure out how dangerous the relationship is. They can help with safety planning and can tell the person what other resources are available. The list at the back of this booklet may give you a place to start looking for help.

## IF SOMEONE TELLS YOU ABOUT BEING ABUSED

If someone tells you about being abused, here are six things you can do and three things not to do.

### Six things you can do

1. Listen fully. Listen quietly. Tell them that you believe them.
2. Tell them the abuse is not their fault and they don’t deserve to be abused.
3. Privately express your concern and ask, “How can I help?”
4. Respect their confidentiality.
5. Encourage them to make a safety plan.
6. Help them to find resources – if they want you to. The information listed at the back of this booklet can help you start.

If the person doesn’t want to leave their abusive partner, be patient. Understand that changing or leaving an abusive situation is not an easy process. Let them know that you will be there regardless of their decisions.

### Three things not to do

1. Do not over-react. If you act too horrified or shocked, the person may stop talking to you.
2. Do not criticize or blame the abusive partner. If you do, the person who has told you about the abuse may feel forced to defend the abusive partner. The person may believe you think he or she is stupid for being in a relationship with the abusive partner.
3. Do not give advice or suggest what they should do. They may stop talking to you, especially if they do not want to take your suggestions.

## IF YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO IS ABUSIVE

If you have any concern at all about talking to an abusive person, then don’t do it. Trust your instincts. Confronting an abusive or violent person is dangerous. Be aware of the risks, and do not leave yourself open to harm.

However, if you know someone who acknowledges being abusive to a partner, and if the person expresses the desire to change, here are some things you could say.

## **ABUSIVE BEHAVIOUR IS LEARNED**

You could let the person know that abusive behaviour is learned. It is not “automatic.” No matter what the circumstances, abusive behaviour is a choice. If the abusive person wants to find other choices that are not harmful, the person will have to be committed to changing the behaviour.

## **HELP IS AVAILABLE**

Encourage and support the person in getting help to stop the abusive behaviour. The resources listed at the back of this booklet are a place to start.

## **HOLD THE ABUSER ACCOUNTABLE**

Abusive behaviour is not caused by the person’s partner, by work stress, by addictions, by financial pressure, by health issues or by any other life issues. The abusive person makes a choice to belittle, control or dominate. The abusive person is solely responsible for these choices. The abuser needs to understand and accept this in order to make the mental shift to end abusive behaviour.

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## **Get help**

**If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 911.**

- Visit [www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca](http://www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca) or call the 24 hour Family Violence Info Line toll free at **310-1818**
- Emergency protection orders, restraining orders and peace bonds are some of the legal ways to stop an abuser from contacting someone
- Use your circle of friends, the Internet or local community centre to find LGBTQ affirmative services, resources or counsellors. If the service, resource or counsellor is not a good fit for you, try other alternatives until you find a good fit

## **USEFUL WEBSITES**

- The Pride Centre of Edmonton website has information about LGBTQ resources and events in the Edmonton area. [www.pridecentreofedmonton.org](http://www.pridecentreofedmonton.org)
- The following websites relate to LGBTQ resources and services in Calgary and area  
[www.vigorcalgary.ca](http://www.vigorcalgary.ca) (Violence in gay male relationships)  
[www.safetyundertherainbow.ca](http://www.safetyundertherainbow.ca) (Resources primarily for service providers)  
[www.youthsafe.net](http://www.youthsafe.net) (Resources for LGBTQ youth)

*“My partner likes to keep things private, so his family and business partners don’t suspect he’s gay. We try to act like we’re buddies, not lovers. He never takes me to company events or family functions, so we can keep up the pretense. Lately my partner has been drinking and staying out late while I’m home by myself. I’m worried about him. I’d like to ask some of his friends from work what’s going on, but I don’t dare talk to them because he’d be mad.*

*Some nights when he comes in late he’s been drinking and he gets nasty. I try to tell myself he doesn’t mean it – it’s the booze talking – but he’s mean. He swings at me and swears and calls me names. I hate it when he gets like that. I’m starting to think I deserve better.”*



*“My partner has a senior position with her company. Some days when she gets home, she is still angry because of what’s been going on during the day. I try to keep things smooth and make our home a peaceful place, but it’s hard. Last week she threw her briefcase and broke a vase. Twice this month I have cried because she said such hurtful things. I know she’s overwhelmed, but I think we need to work on how we communicate. Being under stress doesn’t give her the right to take it out on me. I want her to go to a counsellor with me but she won’t. We would use her medical coverage from work to pay for the counsellor, and she’s afraid her boss will find out that she is a lesbian. She says it’s not worth the risk. I’m wondering, what about the risk to me of not dealing with this situation.”*

## DEFINITIONS

### **LGBTQ**

A commonly used acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, trans-identified, two-spirited and queer identities. Sexual minority is a synonymous term.

### **LESBIAN**

A female who is attracted physically and emotionally to other females.

### **GAY**

A person who is physically and emotionally attracted to someone of the same sex. The word “gay” is used to refer to both males and females, or to males only.

### **BISEXUAL**

A person who is attracted physically and emotionally to both males and females.

### **TRANSGENDERED/TRANS-IDENTIFIED**

A person whose gender identity, outward appearance, expression and/or anatomy do not fit into conventional expectations of male or female. Often used as an umbrella term to represent a wide range of non-conforming gender identities and behaviours.

### **TWO-SPIRITED**

Some Aboriginal people identify themselves as two-spirited rather than as lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans-identified. Historically, in many Aboriginal cultures, two-spirited persons were respected leaders and medicine people. Two-spirited persons were often accorded special status based on their unique abilities to understand both male and female perspectives.

### **QUEER**

Historically, a negative term for homosexuality. More recently, LGBTQ communities have reclaimed the word and use it as a positive way to refer to themselves.

(Definition source: Alberta Teachers’ Association)

<sup>1</sup> National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) (1999). Anti-Lesbian, Gay, Transgender and Bisexual Violence in 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Information adapted from Perry, B. (2005). The Destructive Impact of Domestic Violence on Children, and Facts about Exposure to Violence. In Family Violence: It’s Your Business, Community Resource Guide. Edmonton, AB: Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying, Alberta Children’s Services. Online at: [www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca](http://www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca)

<sup>3</sup> Bender, E. (2004). Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Other Disorders Evident in Kids Who Witness Domestic Violence. Psychiatric News, 39(11).



**Alberta Children's Services**  
**Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying**  
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Edmonton, AB T5K 2N2  
Family Violence Info Line: 310-1818  
[www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca](http://www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca)

## Abuse in *Same-Sex and LGBTQ* Relationships

