



# Abuse In Same-Sex and LGBTQ\*

## Relationships Information Sheet

Abuse can happen in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, trans-identified, two-spirited and queer relationships (LGBTQ) 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. (National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) (1999). Anti-Lesbian, Gay, Transgender and Bisexual Violence in 1998)

### Get Help

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

For help in your community or for more information, please call the 24-hour Family Violence Info Line toll free at **310-1818** or visit [www.familyviolence.alberta.ca](http://www.familyviolence.alberta.ca)

## Abuse in Same-Sex and LGBTQ relationships

Some facts:

- Partner abuse can occur in all parts of the LGBTQ community
- Partner abuse has nothing to do with gender, feminine and masculine 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 LGBTQ partner abuse
- 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 LGBTQ people do not abuse or sexually assault 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

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



- 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”

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 potential for risk and isolation is even greater.

### *Nine things* you can do if your partner is abusing you.

1. First, make sure you and any children are physically safe.  
**If you are in immediate danger, call 911.**
2. Know that you are not responsible for the abuse. The abuse is the responsibility of the abuser.
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.
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.
5. Find out more about abuse in relationships.
6. Find out what help is available in or near your community. Call the 24 hour Family Violence Info Line toll-free at **310-1818** or visit **[www.familyviolence.alberta.ca](http://www.familyviolence.alberta.ca)**
7. Use your circle of friends to find professional help from a qualified counsellor. Make sure the person knows about partner abuse, is LGBTQ affirmative and accessible. A counsellor with these qualities may help you address the important issues of abuse with more comfort, sensitivity and focus. If the counsellor is not a good fit for you, try other alternatives until you find a good fit.
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 have kind and rewarding relationships. You can too.