

Working With LGBT Victims of Violence

What you should know

LGBT is an all encompassing acronym for people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and/or gender non-conforming. Using the most agreed upon estimation of LGB population size – 10% of the general population, on average each year 10% of the victims you work with may identify themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual. (We don't have good statistics on the transgender population.)

- Homophobia and fear of further victimization by first responders and other service providers can make it difficult for many LGBT victims to call for or otherwise seek help.
- Many LGBT victims (especially hate crime survivors) fear they will not be believed.
- Many LGBT victims fear being “outed” in the process of seeking help.
- Many LGBT victims will not “come out” to service providers when they do seek help, making it hard to provide truly comprehensive services.
- Make it easy to disclose sexual orientation or gender identity

Here are several things you can do to make it easier for an LGBT victim to disclose their identity to you.

Ask. It seems simple but it is likely the most overlooked solution to this challenge. Amend intake forms to routinely ask for sexual orientation and gender identity. Amending forms insures that everyone is asked and takes staff out of the hot seat. Asking also sends a signal to clients that this part of their identity is important and respected.

Redecorate. Take an environmental survey of your office, especially the waiting rooms and other rooms where clients are seen. What posters, wall hangings, magazines, etc. are present? Are they reflective of all people? Get a subscription to the Advocate Magazine to add some LGBT diversity to the magazine offerings. Images of male or female couples will send a strong message of acceptance and safety to LGBT clients. Post resource materials and hotline numbers for LGBT specific issues and services.

Offer gender neutral bathrooms. This is especially easy to do with “one-seaters.” If bathrooms are multi-stall types there is often a staff rest room or a handicapped rest room in the building that can be designated a gender neutral space. Be sure to post the availability of the gender neutral rest room prominently near the Women's and Men's rooms.

How you can help

Following the victim-centered approach to service provision is key:

- Treat LGBT victims of violence like any other victims – with empathy, kindness, and respect.
- Believe what victims tell you.
- Ask if the victim believes the crime was committed or escalated because of his/her sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.
- Use LGBT specific materials like the LGBT Power and Control Wheel.
- Refer LGBT victims to culturally competent service providers or to the Gay Alliance Anti-Violence Project for additional support.
- Apologize if you find yourself using the wrong language, terminology or gender pronouns. People can be forgiving when they know you are aware you are making mistakes and not acting out of malice.

LGBT Victim Resources

Gay Alliance Anti-Violence Project, 875 E. Main St. Rochester, NY 14605.
585-244-8640, safe@gayalliance.org, www.gayalliance.org/avp, www.gayalliance.org/dv.

National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 240 West 35th Street, Suite 200, New York, NY 10001. NYC AVP 24 Hour Bilingual Hotline 212.714.1184, TTY: 212.714.1134, info@ncavp.org, www.avp.org/ncavp

The New York State LGBTQ Domestic Violence Network, 240 West 35th Street, Suite 200, New York, NY 10001. NYC AVP 24 Hour Bilingual Hotline 212.714.1184, TTY: 212.714.1134, ylee@avp.org, www.avp.org/dvnetwork/main.htm,

The Trevor Project, 9056 Santa Monica Blvd., Ste. 208, West Hollywood, CA 90069. 24 Hour Hotline 1-866-4-U-TREVOR (866-488-7386), info@thetrevorproject.org, www.thetrevorproject.org.

Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network, 90 Broad Street, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10004. P. 212.727.0135, glsen@glsen.org, www.glsen.org.