

LGBTQ Partner Abuse

Partner abuse is a systematic pattern of behaviors where one person tries to control the thoughts, beliefs, and/or actions of their partner, someone they are dating or had an intimate relationship with.

Partner abuse is also called domestic violence, battering, and/or intimate partner abuse.

Abuse crosses all social, ethnic, racial, and economic lines.

You can't tell if someone is abused or abusive by their size, strength, politics, gender expression, race, economic level or personality.

Abuse is not about violence, it's about control.

Physical violence is often unnecessary to maintain control.

Verbal, emotional, and economic abuses are powerful weapons.

Abuse is never mutual.

Although both partners may use violence, abusers do so to control their partners; a survivor may use violence in self-defense or to try to stop the abuse.

Abuse can happen regardless of the length of relationship or living situation.

Abuse does not lessen; it tends to get worse over time. Couples counseling, anger management, and communication workshops do not help abusers stop abusing and can be dangerous for the partner who is being abused.

In Massachusetts you may be eligible for a restraining order (209A), a civil court order intended to provide protection from abuse from a partner, family member, or household member, regardless of marital status, gender, or sexuality. (Outside of Massachusetts eligibility varies from state to state.)

Abuse is NOT about size, strength, or who is "butch" or more masculine

Abuse is about using control to gain power and control regardless of a person's gender or sexual identity.

Abuse is NOT about both partners just "fighting it out" all the time.

Partner abuse is not mutual. *Although the abused partner may fight back, there is a difference between self-defense and abuse*

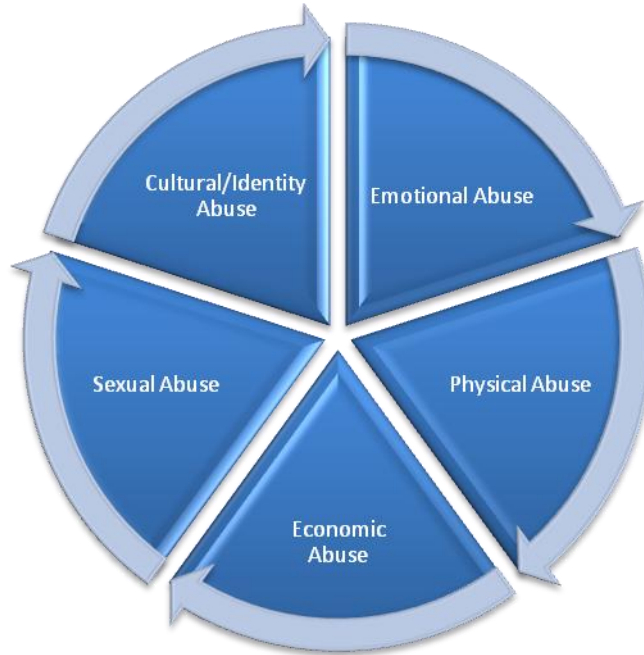
Abuse is NOT just happening in heterosexual, male/female relationships (where neither partner is transgender).

1 in 4 Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender people are abused by a partner during their lifetime.

How does someone abuse his or her partner?

Those who abuse may use a number of tactics of abuse to control their partner. Oppressions such as racism, classism, sexism, abelism, anti-Semitism, transphobia and homophobia support the abuser in feeling entitled to have power and control over their partner and give the abuser tools with which to exert that control.

Tactics of Abuse:



Emotional Abuse: name-calling, lying, undermining self esteem, manipulation, isolation, humiliation, monitoring whereabouts, blaming, threats and/or intimidation

Physical Abuse: pushing, hitting, punching, choking, withholding medications or hormones, sleep deprivation, forced substance abuse, hurting pets, depriving prosthetics, locking in or out of the house, threats of suicide, stalking, murder

Sexual Abuse: rape, forcing sex and/or sex with others, exposure to HIV or sexually transmitted infections, non-consensual sex acts, not respecting boundaries

Economic Abuse: controlling money & resources, forcing partner to pay for most things, stealing, getting someone fired from job, running up credit, forcing partner to live beyond their means, not allowing partner to go to work or school, identity theft

Cultural/Identity Abuse: threat of outing partner's sexual orientation, gender identity, S/M, polyamory, HIV status, or any other personal information. Using partner's race, class, age, immigration status, religion, size, physical ability, language, and/or ethnicity, against them.

An abuser may use only one of the tactics or a combination of many tactics. An abuser can change tactics over time. Often abuse escalates and increases over time.

Differences from Straight Domestic Violence (where neither partner is transgender):

LGBT community does not identify partner abuse as a community issue which increases isolation for survivors.

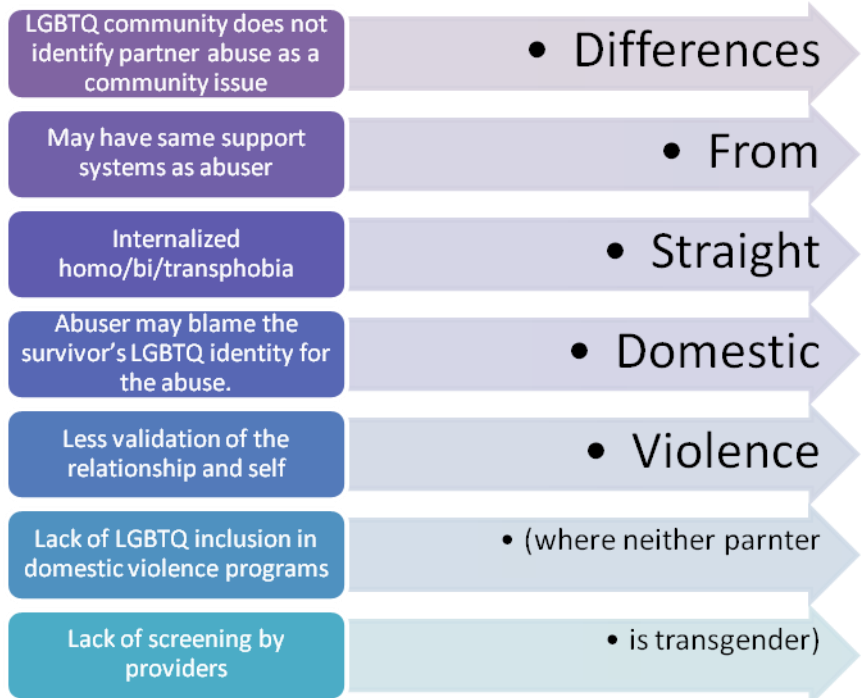
The survivor is likely to have the same support system, such as friends and social spaces, as the abuser.

Internalized homo/bi/transphobia increases the self-blame of the survivor.

Abuser and/or others may blame the survivor's sexual and/or gender identity for the abuse.

There is less validation of the relationships and self.

Lack of visibility of LGBTQ inclusion in domestic violence programs.



Lack of screening for who is the abuser and who is the survivor by police, courts, support groups, shelters and other services.

How can we tell who is the abuser and who is the survivor?

In order to figure out who the victim is and who the survivor is, programs can screen. Screening is a process of looking a wide range of behaviors of both partners in the relationship and determining who has the power and control over the other person.

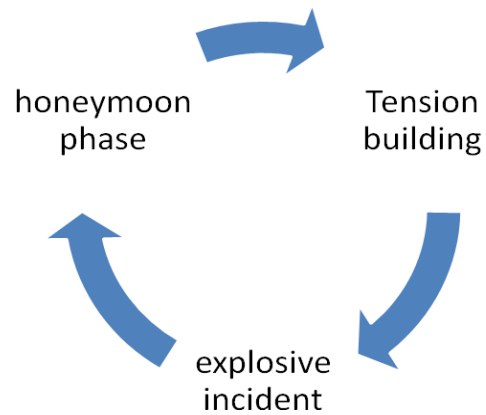
Screening for survivors*: Why screen?

- To provide appropriate services, referrals, and support for survivors.
- To provide appropriate services, referrals and support for abusers.
- Abuser's may claim to be survivors:
 - To block the survivor from using the service.
 - To find out information about the survivor.
 - To gain the benefits of the service (housing, aide, validation, etc.).
 - To find the survivor in a shelter or a support group.
 - To convince the survivor that the survivor is the abusive partner.

***There are no shortcuts or quick checklists for determining whether an individual is an abuser or a survivor. Screening is a process and requires training. It is recommended that those who work with LGBTQ communities learn to screen by attending the GLBT Domestic Violence Coalition's annual Screening Tool Conference or a full day screening training by The Network/La Red.**

Cycle of Abuse:

Survivors often express how their relationships have patterns. At times that the abuse is “not bad” or not happening. This pattern is sometimes called the cycle of violence, which includes 3 phases:



Tension Building- time during which the abuser may use subtle controlling behaviors to create an atmosphere

that the survivor feels like they are walking on eggshells. Survivors often become aware of their own behavior and try to change their behavior to avoid conflict, or “not get in trouble”. Abuser maybe using tactics such as guilt and blame against the survivor.

Explosive- time in which abuser uses a tactic or multiple tactics of control to gain or regain power over their partner. This includes not only physical violence, but can be any of the tactics of control, such as financial, sexual or emotional abuse.

Honeymoon/Seductive- time during which the abuser is trying to gain the trust of their partner at the beginning of the relationship. Later in the relationship this is the time that the abuser may appear apologetic for the abuse, sometimes saying “this will never happen again” or “I will get help,” suggests couples counseling, blame abuse on other factors such as drugs/alcohol, stress, etc. In some cases abusers may become nurturing and/or for some time may stop using tactics of control or use more subtle control.

While going through the cycle there is a great deal of confusion for the survivor. The cycle is often repeated over and over again, more and more rapidly over time. The survivors are also going through their own cycle that includes:

They feel Love...

for their partner; they are reminded that the relationship has/had its good points, and that everything in the relationship is not all bad.

They feel Hope...

That things will change, and remember that the relationship didn't begin like this.

They feel Fear...

That the threats to hurt or kill them or their family will become reality.

**While the Cycle of Abuse is a useful model it does have its limitations. Abusive relationships are about power and control. The Cycle of violence in some ways over simplifies what survivors feel. It also separates the abuser's behaviors into “good” and “bad.” The reality is that the entire cycle about control. Even the “good” behaviors are a means of trying to control their partner to keep them invested in the relationship and to control their thoughts, beliefs and/or actions. **