

ANOTHER CLOSET



Domestic Violence In Same Sex Relationships

This booklet contains information and referral details for people in same sex relationships who are or may be experiencing abuse within their relationships

ONLY TAKE THIS BOOKLET WITH YOU IF IT IS SAFE TO DO SO

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RELATIONSHIP CHECKLIST



Domestic violence can take many forms. To assess your relationship, answer the following questions.

Has, or does, your partner:

- Humiliate you, call you names or make fun of you in a way that is designed to hurt you?
- Threaten to 'out' you to your family or work?
- Prevent you from attending gay/lesbian or other events or venues?
- Have sudden outbursts of anger?
- Act over-protective and become jealous for no reason?
- Make it difficult, or prevent you, from seeing friends or family?
- Control your money against your will?
- Threaten you with violence or hit, kick or throw things at you?
- Physically or emotionally hurt your children?
- Hurt your pets?
- Force you to engage in sexual acts that you aren't comfortable with?

Or do you ...

- Change your behaviour or your appearance so your partner doesn't get angry?
- Avoid talking about money or other topics?
- Feel scared, anxious or like you are 'walking on eggshells'?
- Cut yourself off from your friends or family?

If you answered yes to any of these questions you may be experiencing domestic violence.

You can go through this *Relationship Checklist* with a friend or family member's relationship in mind. Does their partner behave in any of the ways listed above? If so they may be experiencing domestic violence.

All types of domestic violence are wrong and some are illegal. This booklet contains information for people in same sex relationships who are or may be experiencing domestic violence. It also contains sections on recovering from domestic violence and on providing support to a friend or family member.

“There was a checklist of questions to ask yourself whether you were in an abusive relationship. When I found myself answering yes to almost everything, a crack appeared in the brainwashing and manipulation that had filled my head.” **DAVID, 27.**

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“ I became ashamed about being gay, about being sexually attractive and about having sexual desires. It was like going back in the closet. ”

DAVID, 27

INFORMATION ABOUT SAME SEX DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



Introduction

Most gay and lesbian relationships are built on love and respect. Some are built on abuse and control. Abuse and control in a relationship is domestic violence.

This booklet is written for people in same sex relationships who are, or may be, experiencing domestic violence. It contains information on what domestic violence is, domestic violence in same sex relationships, what to do if you are experiencing abuse, making a crisis plan and the details for a number of important referral services.

It also has information for supporting a friend or family member who is experiencing abuse.

What is Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence is any type of abusive behaviour by one partner that attempts to gain and maintain control over the other.

Domestic violence is when one partner consciously tries to, or does, manipulate and dominate the other. It is about power and control.

Domestic violence can take many forms including physical violence, sexual assault, emotional abuse or social or financial control. Abuse does not have to be physical or sexual to be domestic violence. *(See page 4-5 for more information on each type of abusive behaviour.)*

“She wasn’t physically violent at that stage but she was capable of shooting me down in words and making me feel humiliated and scared.” **KIM, 42.**

It can happen in all types of relationships: gay, lesbian or heterosexual; monogamous, open or three-way; dating, new relationships or long-term; live-in or not. And it happens across all communities, social classes, ages, cultural backgrounds and geographical areas.

Throughout this booklet domestic violence is referred to as abuse from one partner, or ex-partner, towards the other in an ‘intimate or romantic’ relationship. However, domestic violence also includes abuse within other types of relationships including: carer, either paid or unpaid; a housemate; or between relatives.

All types of domestic violence are wrong and some like physical violence, sexual assault and stalking are criminal offences.

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Types of Abuse

Domestic violence can take many forms. Many of these don't include physical violence.

Emotional abuse is any type of ongoing behaviour by one partner (or ex-partner) to make the other feel afraid or worthless. It can include:

- Threatening their children.
- Hurting their pets.
- Putting them down eg, telling them that they are ugly, stupid or incompetent.
- Humiliating them in front of friends, family or in public.
- 'Outing' or threatening to out them to friends, family, at work or to their cultural community.
- Telling, or threatening to tell, others about their health status without permission.

“One letter to my mother falsely claimed that I had AIDS.” **ADAM, 35.**

Social abuse is any behaviour by one partner to control the other's social life. It can include:

- Stopping them from visiting their friends or family.
- Abusing or fighting with their friends or family so they stop visiting or calling.
- Cutting off the phone or monitoring calls or bills.
- Preventing them from attending gay and lesbian or other events and venues.
- Locking them in the house.
- Isolating them from their cultural background or preventing them practicing their religious beliefs.

“She told me that my mother would never accept us, and that she would try to break us up so I saw less of my family.” **LISA, 38.**



Physical abuse is any type of physical violence that an abusive partner inflicts on the other. It can include:

- Hitting, kicking, pushing, slapping, strangling or burning.
- Breaking possessions or punching/kicking walls.
- Withholding or stopping their partner from getting medication or treatments.

“He was smashing my head repeatedly into the gravel only stopping to punch me in the chest. He then started strangling me. [When I came to he said] ‘Now look what you’ve made me do, you piece of shit.’” **KENT, 35.**

Sexual abuse is any behaviour where one partner forces the other to perform sexual acts they don’t want to. It can include:

- Pressuring them to have sex when they don’t want to.
- Pressuring, forcing or tricking them into having unsafe sex.
- Involving them in BDSM without consent.
- Making them have sex with other people.
- Sexually assaulting (raping) them.

Financial abuse is any behaviour by one partner to control the other’s money against their will. It can include:

- Taking their money or controlling their income.
- Refusing to give them money or making them account for everything they spend.
- Selling or destroying their possessions or making it difficult for them to work.
- Threatening to withdraw financial support as a means of control.

Stalking is any behaviour by which one partner (or ex-partner) tries to intimidate or harass the other. It can include:

- Following them when they go to work, home or out.
- Constantly watching them, their house or work.
- Calling, texting or e-mailing them or their family, friends or work colleagues more often than is appropriate or when asked not to.

“A new phase of harassment and stalking followed that included a wide range of threats ranging from ‘Come back, I’ve changed’ to ‘If you have sex with another man I’ll kill you and him’.” **DAVID, 27.**

1 INFORMATION ABOUT SAME SEX DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic Violence in Gay and Lesbian Relationships

The police, domestic violence services, gay and lesbian organisations, the courts and other services all report that they are working with individuals who have experienced or are experiencing same sex domestic violence.

To date, there is little accurate Australian research that records the level of domestic violence in gay and lesbian relationships. However, a number of overseas studies suggest that the general patterns and levels of domestic violence in same sex relationships are about the same as in heterosexual relationships. These studies also show that once the violence starts it is likely to get worse.

Unique Aspects of Same Sex Domestic Violence

Domestic violence in same sex and heterosexual relationships share many similarities, including the types of abuse and the impact on the abused partner. However, there are a number of aspects that are unique to same sex domestic violence. These include:

'Outing' as a method of control

If the abused partner isn't out to their family, friends, and workmates or within their cultural community the abusive partner may use 'outing' or the threat of 'outing' as a method of control.

The abuse becomes associated with sexuality

For many people, especially those new to gay or lesbian relationships, their sexual identity becomes associated with the abuse so that they blame the abuse on being gay or lesbian. So they may feel that *"I'm experiencing this abuse because I'm gay/lesbian. If I wasn't gay/lesbian I wouldn't be experiencing this. I hate being gay/lesbian."*

Domestic violence isn't well understood in the community

There hasn't been much information or discussion in the gay and lesbian communities about domestic violence in our relationships. Most information on domestic violence relates to heterosexual relationships with the man abusing the woman. This lack of understanding means that some people may not:

- Believe it happens in same sex relationships;
- Recognise abuse as domestic violence if it does happen to them and/or
- Know how to respond if they see domestic violence in their friend's or family members' relationships.



Confidentiality and isolation within the gay and lesbian communities

The relatively small size of the gay and lesbian communities, especially in smaller cities and rural areas, can make it difficult for the abused partner to seek help. They may feel embarrassed about the abuse or their partner may have tried to turn others in the community against them. An abusive partner may isolate the other from contact with the gay and lesbian community by preventing them reading the community press or attending gay and lesbian venues or events and preventing them seeing friends from within the community. This is especially true for people in their first same sex relationship who may not have had much contact with the gay and lesbian community before the relationship began.

Services may not be well developed

Although lesbians can access most general domestic violence services, like refuges, court assistance schemes, and counselling services, these services may have little experience in working with same sex domestic violence and therefore, may not offer the most appropriate service. For gay men there are currently few specific services that offer assistance or support. However, the Same Sex Domestic Violence Interagency and other organisations are developing strategies for addressing this issue.

Myths and Facts

There are many myths surrounding domestic violence in same sex relationships. Some myths excuse the abuse while others 'blame the victim'. Either way myths make it difficult for the person experiencing abuse to seek and get help and for them or others to understand the real issues.

Myth: Violence in gay and lesbian relationships is a mutual fight.

Fact: Domestic violence is about power and control and will almost always involve a number of forms of abuse, for example emotional or social abuse. Physical violence may only be one of those. Regardless of whether an abused partner may be able to fight back during a particular incident they are still experiencing domestic violence.

Myth: The drugs make him/her violent.

Fact: It's true that some drugs (especially amphetamines) may trigger violent or aggressive behaviour in some individuals. If the violent person lashes out at anyone who may cross their path and this is a one off or (very) infrequent occurrence then the violence may be drug related.

1 INFORMATION ABOUT SAME SEX DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

However, if the person uses the drugs knowing they may become violent or the violence is targeted towards their partner (or their partner's friends) then this is domestic violence and they are responsible for their actions.

An abusive partner will often try to minimise the violence or deny their responsibility for it. Blaming the drugs (or alcohol) may be one way of doing this.

Someone who is violent before they use drugs or alcohol is likely to become more violent after using drugs or alcohol. It is advisable for their partner to take extra precautions if they do start to use drugs or alcohol.

“There were the apologies and the making up. We both explained it as a speed induced come down drama ...” **RUTH, 48.**

Myth: The law can't help me and the police aren't interested.

Fact: Threats, stalking and physical and sexual violence are all illegal. The law in NSW offers the same protection to same sex victims of domestic violence as it does to heterosexual victims - including police protection and access to Apprehended Violence Orders. It also allows for division of joint property after two years of living together.

The police have a responsibility to provide assistance and protection to anyone in NSW experiencing illegal forms of domestic violence - regardless of their sexuality. If someone feels the police or other legal service response hasn't been adequate or appropriate they have the right to make a complaint. *(See page 32 for information on making a complaint.)*

Myth: I won't be able to meet any other gay or lesbian people.

Fact: One form of abuse is social isolation. Some people worry that if they leave their abusive partner they will end up isolated and alone. This is especially true for people in their first same sex relationship. But there are many community groups that can help people make connections with other gay men or lesbians. (The Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service has an extensive list of gay and lesbian support and social groups. Phone 8594 9596 or 1800 184 527)

Myth: Bondage and Discipline or Sadomasochism (BDSM) is about power and control. That means the submissive partner is being abused.

Fact: BDSM is a negotiated sexual activity that may involve hitting, slapping, pain, coercion, or dominance. Some people may adopt long term roles of dominance or submission. These are conscious and consensual activities where all parties agree to their roles as well as the time and place for a particular scene. In a domestic violence situation the abused partner does not consent to the abusive activities.



Same Sex Domestic Violence in Rural Areas

The patterns, effects and impacts of same sex domestic violence in rural, regional and remote areas shares many similarities to that in metropolitan areas. However there are a number of factors that are unique to the experiences of domestic violence in rural areas, including:

- There may be few support or legal services available in the local area.
- It may be difficult to maintain privacy and confidentiality.
- Physical isolation may make it difficult to contact friends, family, neighbours or services.
- The greater chance that someone seeking help may encounter homophobia or discrimination from services.

There are a number of strategies that someone experiencing domestic violence in rural areas can use to lessen the difficulty of seeking help, including:

- Developing a comprehensive Crisis Plan (*see page 17-19*).
- Seeking the support of a few trusted friends or services, even if they are outside the area.
- Seeking services in neighbouring towns or regional centres.
- Talking with state-wide services, eg the Domestic Violence Line (1800 65 64 63).

Chronic Illnesses, Including HIV/AIDS, and Domestic Violence

Chronic illnesses (eg HIV/AIDS, cancer, Multiple Sclerosis, Alzheimers, etc) can cause tension, stress and a range of other problems within a relationship but they do not cause domestic violence. Abusive partners (or ex-partners) choose the weapons of abuse and control they use, and their or their partners' health can be used as one of these weapons. In some abusive relationships the domestic violence began at or around the time that the illness was diagnosed.

In some cases of domestic violence the abusive partner is the one with the illness while in others it is the one without the illness that is abusive. Within an abusive relationship where either or both of the partners has a chronic illness many of the forms of abuse and control discussed earlier (*pages 4-5*) may exist. However there are a number of forms of domestic violence that are specific to relationships where either or both partners have a chronic illness.

1 INFORMATION ABOUT SAME SEX DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

If the abusive partner does not have a chronic illness (eg is HIV negative) they may:

- Threaten to, or actually, disclose their partner's health status to friends, family or colleagues.
- Withhold medication, treatments or access to other medical services.
- Threaten to cut off support or to leave.
- Verbally abuse their partner by saying they are 'diseased, sick, unclean' or other inappropriate comments about their illness, or otherwise undermine their partner's confidence.

"At one point I became very sick. I couldn't even walk to the bathroom. She refused to drive me to the doctor and she said I was exaggerating." **RUTH, 48.**

If the abusive partner does have a chronic illness (eg is HIV positive) they may:

- Use guilt or other psychological abuse to manipulate their partner.
- Refuse to take medication or seek medical services.
- Use their illness to manipulate services, eg saying 'I'm weak and sick, how could I control him/her?'.
- Where relevant, threaten to, or actually, infect their partner to prevent them leaving.

As sexual assault is a common form of domestic violence, sexually transmissible infections (eg HIV, Hepatitis B) pose a special risk to the uninfected partner.

As well as the domestic violence services listed in the back of the booklet (*pages 30-32*) there are a range of support services that someone with a chronic illness may be able to contact. These include:

- A trusted doctor, nurse or other health care worker or a hospital social worker or counsellor.
- Centrelink (13 10 21).
- The AIDS Council of NSW (9206 2000 / 1800 063 060).
- Illness specific support groups eg the Cancer Council (9334 1846 / 13 11 20) or MS Society, NSW (1800 04 21 38) for information on treatments, legal rights, support services, and so on. These groups may not have experience providing support to gay men or lesbians escaping domestic violence but may be able to provide support around the specific requirements of the illness. Look in the White Pages for contact details for specific groups.



Children and Domestic Violence

Children can experience domestic violence as:

- Witnesses to domestic violence. This includes seeing or hearing abuse, seeing physical signs after the violence or witnessing the effects of domestic violence on the abused person.
- Weapons of abuse. An abusive partner can use access to their children as a form of abuse and control. They may try to turn children against the other partner or undermine the other partner's parenting role.
- Victims of abuse. Children may be physically or emotionally abused by the abusive partner (or even in some cases by the abused partner).

Children who experience domestic violence, whether in same sex or heterosexual relationships, can suffer from a wide range of negative effects from short term physical injuries to long term emotional or psychological trauma. All children who experience domestic violence are affected by it in some way.

All service providers in NSW are legally bound to report to the Department of Community Services if they believe a child is experiencing domestic violence and is at risk of serious harm. They will usually tell the client they are going to do this and what the possible consequences might be.

Under the Family Law Act (1975) biological and adoptive parents automatically have what is known as '*parental responsibility*' for children. This means they are responsible for all decisions relating to the welfare and upbringing of that child. Non-biological parents and donors, regardless of their relationship with the child, do not have any automatic legal right or responsibilities over a child unless there is a Parenting Order issued by the Family Court.

If you are experiencing domestic violence and you have children with your partner or from a previous relationship you should seek legal advice. The Domestic Violence Line (1800 65 64 63) can refer you to appropriate services.)



“ She said I was wasting my time with my family and friends as they didn’t understand me and didn’t understand us. The good times together were getting few and far between. She controlled my days, my social calendar, the clothes that I wore and the people I would speak to.”

KIM, 42

IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



The most important thing to remember if you are experiencing domestic violence is that the abuse is not your fault and you don't have to put up with it.

“My advice to anyone is ‘Don’t blame yourself’ - that is part of the cycle of abuse and control. The other person (the abuser) needs to take responsibility for their own behaviour ...” **RUTH, 48.**

Listed below are a range of things you might think about to reduce the risk to yourself, help you understand what is happening to you and to take control of your life again.

In an Emergency Call the Police

If your partner (or ex-partner) has assaulted you or you are afraid for your own or for others' safety you can call the police. The police have the power to provide you with immediate protection at any time of the day or night.

Call 000.

The police have guidelines that instruct them to respond to domestic violence in a particular way. They should: respond promptly; ensure your safety; stop the violence; thoroughly investigate what has happened; speak to you and your partner separately; get a statement from you and any witnesses; collect evidence; take photos of any injuries and the scene; and, arrest the violent person if they have committed a criminal offence. They should also notify the Department of Community Services if there are children.

Talk to Someone You Trust

If you have a friend or a family member you trust, tell them what is going on and how it makes you feel. Talking to someone else can help you understand what is happening to you. They may also be able to help you contact support services and/or to make a Crisis Plan (*see pages 17-19 for details on making a Crisis Plan*).

Call the Domestic Violence Line

The NSW Department of Community Services runs the 24-hour Domestic Violence Line (DV Line). If you are, or think you are, experiencing domestic violence you can call them. Calls to the DV Line can be anonymous - you don't need to give your or your partner's name.

2 IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Staff at the Line have had training in working with gay men and lesbians who are experiencing domestic violence. The DV Line will focus on your (and your children's) safety.

The DV Line staff can help you:

- Arrange accommodation in emergencies.
- Explain what refuges are and refer you to an appropriate one. (Please note that domestic violence specific refuges exist for women and children only. Gay men may be able to access other emergency accommodation).
- Refer you to other services like family support, counselling, the police, legal services, local (women's) court assistance schemes, hospitals and health centres.
- Explain what an Apprehended Violence Order (AVO) is and how to apply for one.

To contact the DV Line call **1800 65 64 63**. This number is free from public phones and landlines. Calls from mobiles will be billed to your account and will appear on your bill.

Apply for an Apprehended Violence Order

Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs) are court orders designed to protect you from physical assault, stalking, harassment, intimidation or damage to property. You do not have to have experienced violence to apply for an AVO - fearing that you will experience violence is enough to make an application.

An AVO usually states that your partner or ex-partner cannot '*assault, threaten, harass, molest or stalk*' you. You can also ask the police or chamber magistrate to add specific conditions to the AVO to suit your particular situation for example adding other people like family, children or friends, who may be in danger.

There are two ways to apply for an AVO:

1. If police attend an incident and a domestic violence offence, stalking offence or an offence against children has occurred or is likely to occur police must apply for an AVO on your behalf. If the incident occurs after hours, police may apply for a telephone interim order.
2. If you haven't or don't want to call the police you can make an appointment with the chamber magistrate at your local court and apply through them.

AVOs and interim AVOs do not have any effect until they have been served on (given to) your partner.

Having an AVO doesn't give your partner a criminal record, however, if your partner breaks any of the conditions of the AVO it is called a breach. A breach



is a crime. You can/should call the police if your partner breaches the AVO. If a person is convicted of breaching an AVO they will have a criminal record.

The next stage of the AVO process is for you and your partner to appear in court. If your partner agrees to stick by the conditions of the AVO it will become binding. If they don't agree to the conditions of the AVO another court date will be set. At that hearing you will be asked to say why you need protection from your partner. Your partner will be given the opportunity to say why they don't believe the order should be made. The magistrate will then decide whether the AVO becomes binding.

If the hearing is adjourned for any reason you can ask the magistrate to make an interim order until the next hearing date.

AVOs are not automatically effective in other States or Territories. However, an AVO can be registered in New Zealand and other States (except WA) by providing a copy of it and proof that it has been served on your partner.

If the police have applied for an AVO on your behalf, the police prosecutor or the domestic violence officer can advise you and will represent you in court.

If you are applying for an AVO it is good idea to seek legal advice. You can call the DV Line (1800 65 64 63) or the Law Access Line (1300 888 529) to find out more about AVOs and for other legal information.

Talk To a Counsellor

Talking with a counsellor can help you work out if what you are experiencing is domestic violence. You can also talk with them about strategies for protecting yourself within the relationship or for leaving the relationship. Sometimes speaking to a counsellor is easier than speaking to someone who knows you and your partner.

Counsellors can be found at a range of services including specific domestic violence services (generally for women only), some gay and lesbian services like ACON, and local community health services. The DV Line (1800 65 64 63) has a list of counsellors.

A range of private counsellors and therapists advertise in the gay and lesbian media. These generally charge market rates for their services but they usually have specific experience with lesbian and gay clients.

2 IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Make Yourself as Safe as You Can

Many people experiencing domestic violence say they don't want to leave their home or their relationship, they just want the violence to stop. For others a lack of finances, wanting to maintain access to children or limited outside support may mean they feel they can't leave. If you are staying in the relationship try to make yourself as safe as you can.

Think about and identify some of the ways you have coped until now and work out how you might use those strategies in the future. You understand your situation better than anyone else so use that knowledge to help minimise the risks to yourself.

Find out about your options, and who can help you, even if you don't want to use them yet. For example, finding out how to apply for an AVO (*pages 14-15*) before you actually need one means that you will be better prepared if it becomes necessary. Knowing what you can do and how to do it can help you to feel more in control of your situation and your safety.

If you do decide to stay in the house it's important to remember that once violence begins it is likely to get worse over time.

Develop a Crisis Plan for yourself (*pages 17-19*).

Leave Home For a While

You might decide it is best to leave the place you live in for a while. You could go to a friend or family member's place, a refuge, emergency housing, a hotel or backpacker hostel.

Lesbians can generally access women's refuges. Refuges are safe houses that provide short-term accommodation for women and children escaping domestic violence. To find out more about refuges call the DV Line (1800 65 64 63).

For gay men short term housing options include staying with friends or family, a hotel or low cost hostel, emergency housing through Department of Housing or a designated men's service.

Find Somewhere New to Live

If you decide that you need to find a new place to live there are a number of options including moving in with friends or family or, if you can afford it, finding a private rental property.

You may also be able to apply to the Department of Housing (DoH) for accommodation. Anybody escaping domestic violence may apply for housing assistance from the DoH. In general, to be eligible for most forms of public



housing, you will need to be a citizen or permanent resident of Australia and live in NSW. You must also be within the Department's income and asset limits and be able to successfully sustain a tenancy either independently or with appropriate support.

Escaping from same sex domestic violence is recognised as sufficient criteria to apply for emergency housing through the DoH. Apart from emergency accommodation the DoH has a number of other programs, including priority housing and RentStart that, subject to certain criteria, you may be eligible to apply for.

For more information about any of the types of service or whether you are eligible to apply contact the nearest office of the DoH. Look in the white pages under *H* for your local office or look at www.housing.nsw.gov.au.

Immigration and Same Sex Domestic Violence

If you have applied for residency in Australia on the basis of your relationship and you are experiencing domestic violence the domestic violence provisions of Australia's immigration laws may apply to you. These provisions may enable you to leave the violent relationship and still be eligible to apply for permanent residency. If this applies to you, you should seek legal advice. For more information call the **Immigration Advice and Rights Service (02 9281 8355)**.

Planning Ahead - Making a Crisis Plan

If you are experiencing any form of domestic violence you might consider making a crisis plan. A crisis plan can set out what you could do under certain circumstances to help reduce the risk of emotional or physical injury to yourself (and your children). Your crisis plan can include strategies for reducing risk to yourself while living with your partner or it may outline how you could get away. You can make a crisis plan on your own or speak with a trusted friend, a counsellor or the Domestic Violence Line (1800 65 64 63).

If you write your crisis plan down ensure you hide it so that your partner can't find it. You could leave it at a friend or family member's house or with a support service. You might just think about and memorise the details of your plan.

When developing your crisis plan think about the times your partner is most likely to be violent or abusive and how s/he acts during these times so you can develop strategies that best suit your needs.

If you are experiencing domestic violence you should constantly remind yourself that it's not your fault and the abuse isn't your responsibility.

2 INFORMATION ABOUT SAME SEX DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Living with an abusive partner

If you are living with an abusive partner there are a number of things you can try to reduce the risk of injury to yourself (and your children):

- Plan and practice (with your children) how you might escape from the house.
- Where possible, keep weapons and knives locked up or inaccessible (eg removing knife-blocks from kitchen benches).
- Let trusted friends, family or neighbours know about the abuse and let them know about your crisis plan.
- Develop a code word or signal for friends, children or neighbours to call the police.
- Teach your children that their responsibility during an incident is to stay safe - not to rescue you.
- Program the police or a friend's number into the speed dial on your phone.
- Keep essential items like money, keys and identification you can access them quickly.
- Plan where you will go and how you will get there in case you need to leave in a hurry.
- If possible keep a record of any physical abuse, eg photos, maybe at your doctors or a friends.

During a violent incident

- Try to stay away from, or leave, the kitchen or other rooms with potential weapons.
- Try to stay out of rooms without exits like the bathroom or closets.
- Press the emergency speed dial number or call out your code word.
- Depending upon your capacity to do so, defend yourself.
- Trust your instincts.

Planning to leave

- Put aside some money for travel expenses, accommodation, food etc.
- Collect all your forms of identification together, including Medicare card, drivers licence, Centrelink details, Tax File Number etc.
- Make copies of important documents eg car rego, title deeds, loan records, etc.
- Hide a bag (maybe at family/friend's place) with clothes, keys, jewellery.
- Pack important possessions, eg photos and keepsakes.
- Take small sellable items like jewellery.





- If you have children, take clothes, medical records, bottles and some of their favourite toys.

“I played along being as nice to him as I could. And saying nothing. I secretly did extra work and saved enough money to move out.” **KENT, 35.**

After leaving the relationship

The period after leaving an abusive relationship can be especially dangerous. To reduce this risk you could:

- Apply for an AVO.
- If you have an AVO carry it with you at all times and give a copy of it and a photo of your partner to your children’s school.
- Redirect your mail and/or get a post office box.
- Be careful who you give your new address or phone number to and get a ‘silent’ number.
- Where ever possible, change your regular patterns of movement eg travel to and from work by a different route, buy your groceries at a different shop, change the time and maybe location of regular appointments, maybe move your children to a new day care centre or school.
- Ensure where you are staying is as safe as possible, eg security doors, lockable windows, motion-sensitive external lights etc.
- Let important people know about your situation, eg your boss and other work colleagues or your children’s teachers, so they know not to give out your details or can screen your calls etc.
- Continue to seek support from the DV Line and other services during this time.

“One of the biggest head-fucks was being told that violence was part of his ‘culture’ and the fact that I had a problem with it meant I was racist.” **DAVID, 27.**

3

“ Finally I woke up.

I couldn't let her do any more damage to me.

I went to counselling, stopped drinking, moved back to the city, got a great job and went back to school.”

MAREE, 22

RECOVERING FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



Recovering From Domestic Violence

Everyone who experiences domestic violence has a different reaction to it. The way in which you respond to and recover from your experience depends upon a number of things, which might include: the types of abuse you experienced; any past experiences of abuse and violence; the strategies you used to survive the abuse; other stress in your life; and the support or lack of support you received from friends, family and services. Whatever your experience, recovering from domestic violence is a recovery from a significant trauma.

Leaving an abusive relationship can be the beginning of a process of healing and recovering. There is a range of common reactions that you may experience. These may include:

- Disturbed sleep patterns.
- Feelings of fear, anxiety, self doubt or vulnerability.
- Anger, ranging from irritability to rage.
- Repeated thoughts about the abuse.
- Feelings of sadness, loss or grief.

You might notice that your reactions to the abuse may have been useful survival techniques while you were in the relationship but if they continue after the abuse has stopped they can become a problem. For example, always being on the alert is useful for avoiding an attack but will increase your stress if you are no longer in danger.

All of these feelings and experiences are normal and are a part of the recovery process. However if any of them become overpowering and prevent you from carrying out daily tasks like eating, looking after yourself, going to work and maintaining relationships with friends or family, you might seek professional support from a counsellor.

“Sometimes I become fearful of things blowing up in my face and losing everything again.” **ADAM, 35.**

3 RECOVERING FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Looking After Yourself

There is a range of things you can do to care for yourself and to recover a sense of safety, self-worth and control over your life. These can include:

- Ensure you are as safe as possible. If necessary or possible move house, maybe change the locks on the doors (the NSW Police have a booklet on Residential Security which you can get from your local station) and/or apply for an AVO (*see pages 14-15 for details*).
- Recognise that recovery will take time. Give yourself that time to grieve the loss of the relationship and the hopes and expectations you had of it.
- Accept that there are going to be good days and bad days. Think about ways you might deal with the bad days. If there continue to be more bad days than good you might be experiencing depression and it's advisable to seek a professional counsellor.
- Talk about your feelings. You could talk to trusted friends or family or to a professional counsellor. You can talk to staff at the Domestic Violence Line (1800 65 64 63) anonymously.
- Continue to use professional support services. If you're seeing a counsellor then keep seeing them after the relationship has finished.
- Do things to spoil yourself. It's important that you practice looking after yourself. Think about things that make you feel happy and put time and (if necessary) money aside to do them.
- If you lost contact with friends or family during the relationship make contact with them again.
- Make new friends by joining a gay and lesbian or other support, social or special interest group. If you're into playing sport join a local sporting group or maybe do a TAFE or adult education class. (The Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service has an extensive data base of gay and lesbian groups. 8594 9596 or 1800 184 527, 5.30pm to 10.30pm, 7 days.)
- If eligible, apply for victims' compensation. Victims of some forms of violence may be able to apply for financial compensation. To find out more call the Victims' Compensation Tribunal (9374 3111 or 1800 069 054).



Starting a New Relationship

Eventually you may be ready to begin a new relationship. Your past experiences may impact upon your thoughts and feelings about a new relationship. You may:

- Be very cautious, find it difficult to trust your new partner or be anxious that they may try to control you.
- Find it difficult to share your independence within the new relationship.

It can be very useful to be cautious about your new relationship. It is also important not to let your experiences get in the way of the possibility of a positive and trusting relationship with your new partner.

There is a range of things you can do to help yourself feel comfortable in a new relationship:

- Take it slowly, you have a right to have the relationship develop in a way you are comfortable with.
- Stay in contact with all of the people who support you, they might be good reality checks for you.
- Be clear with yourself and your new partner about what sort of behaviour you will and won't accept.
- Talk with your new partner about your experiences so they understand what you have been through.
- Keep your finances and other essentials separate until you feel confident to combine them. You may decide that you don't ever want to combine these aspects of your life.
- Talk to a counsellor, either by yourself or with your new partner, about any anxieties you may be feeling.

4

“ I only had two friends left by the time the relationship ended. But thank God for them. If they hadn't stuck by me I don't know if I ever would have had the courage to leave him. ”

PAULO, 51

**SUPPORTING A
FRIEND OR FAMILY
MEMBER**



Providing Support

There are a number of things you can look out for if you think a friend is experiencing domestic violence. These include your friend:

- Being unusually nervous, depressed or withdrawn;
- Being overly anxious about their partner or their partner's moods;
- Becoming increasingly isolated from friends or family; or
- Having unexplained physical injuries eg cuts, bruises or sprains.

Or that their partner:

- Puts them down a lot in front of you or others;
- Orders them about or seems to make all the decisions; or
- Controls all the money or social activities or contact with friends.

Any of these things may indicate that your friend/family member is experiencing domestic violence. If you are not sure, you could call the DV Line (1800 65 64 63) to talk to them about what you have noticed. Remember to keep the person's details confidential. You can describe what is happening without saying who the person is.

Approaching a Friend

If you think a friend is experiencing abuse but they haven't said anything to you, you could ask them if they need support or information. If you decide to approach a friend:

- Make sure you are somewhere where they can talk without others hearing or interrupting - especially their partner.
- Maybe start by saying something like, 'I'm worried about you because you seem unhappy ...'
- Don't push them into talking if they aren't comfortable.
- Don't be surprised if they are defensive or reject your support - it may not be the right time for them to talk about it.

If they downplay or deny the abuse or aren't willing to talk let them know you are there to support them and wait for a sign that they are ready to talk.

"One good friend said that one day I would find the strength [to leave her] and that he and his boyfriend would support my decision. He was one of her closest friends and I started to think about things and talk to people and decided that enough was enough."

KIM, 42.

4 SUPPORTING A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER

Emotional and Practical Support

If the person experiencing the violence tells you about it there are a number of things you can do to support them. They include:

- Listening to what they tell you without judging them.
- Believing what they tell you - remember most people down-play the abuse they are experiencing so in most cases it will be worse than they are describing.
- Acknowledging their fear and taking their concerns seriously.
- Letting them know the abuse is not their fault and that they don't have to put up with it.
- Asking them what you can do to help them.
- In general, keep what they have told you confidential unless they give you permission to tell others. If, in a crisis, you believe your friend or their children are at immediate risk of harm you can call the police on 000.

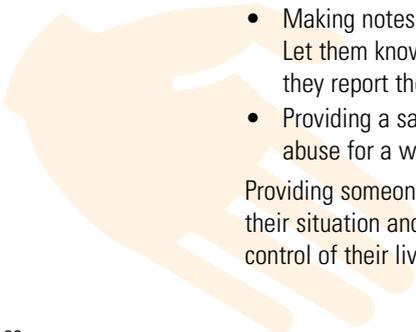
Encourage the person to make his or her own decisions. You can help them to make decisions if they want you too but don't tell them what to do.

“I took the leap of confiding in someone I worked with ... he generously lent me his spare room for a week while I disappeared from home.” **DAVID, 27.**

As well as providing emotional support you may be able to assist in a range of practical ways, including:

- Providing them with, or helping them find, a safe place to stay.
- Accompanying them to the police, legal services or doctor etc.
- Getting information they may need eg how to apply for an AVO, the name of the local Police Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer etc.
- Looking after important items eg money, documents etc.
- Making notes of what they have told you and record any visible injuries. Let them know you are doing this and that the information may be useful if they report the violence.
- Providing a safe place where they can get short-term respite from the abuse for a while.

Providing someone with practical support can help them feel more in control of their situation and better able to make the decision they need to to start taking control of their lives again.





What Not To Do

If you are supporting a friend who is experiencing domestic violence there are a number of things you should avoid doing. They include:

- Telling them what to do.
- Letting them know you are disappointed if they don't do what you have suggested or if they go back to their partner.
- Making comments that imply they are to blame for the abuse,
- Trying to mediate between the partners.
- Confronting the abusive partner - this can be dangerous for you and for the abused partner.

Getting involved doesn't mean you have to solve the situation. If someone turns to you for help and support it means helping them find their own answers. You cannot 'save' them and it is important not to be disappointed if they don't do what you think they should. Leaving a violent relationship is difficult, it can be dangerous and it may take time.

Looking After Yourself

Supporting someone who is experiencing domestic violence can be difficult and frustrating. If you are supporting a friend or family member you could:

- Get some support for yourself: talk to a counsellor, the Domestic Violence Line (1800 65 64 63), a trusted friend or family (but be careful not to break confidentiality).
- Be clear with yourself and your friend about how much and what type of support you can give.
- Remember that your support, whether you see it or not, is very valuable.

4 SUPPORTING A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER

Why People Stay in Abusive Relationships

There are many reasons why people stay in abusive relationships. They include:

- They may not recognise their partner's behaviour as abuse. Some gay men and lesbians think that domestic violence only happens in heterosexual relationships, so they don't see it as something that can happen to them.
- Fear of being 'outed' or discriminated against if they seek help.
- They are committed to the relationship and may believe that they can work it out with their partner.
- They don't want to leave their home, their children or their pets.
- They are afraid of what their partner will do if they leave.
- They are dependent on their partner financially or for care needs.
- The abusive partner is sick and their partner doesn't want to leave them alone.
- They feel shame and don't want everyone to know about the abuse.
- They love their partner and want to believe the promises that *'it will never happen again'*.
- Domestic violence is about power and control - they may not yet feel strong enough to make the break.

“I was not happy in the relationship but I knew no one, had no money and much to my detriment I loved him. I was living on the memory of the good times ...” **KENT, 35.**



“ I found a new place to
live and, with a Police
Gay and Lesbian Liaison
Officer as an escort, went
to pick up my belongings
and left. ”

DAVID, 27

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**FINDING
INFORMATION, HELP
AND SUPPORT**

5 FINDING INFORMATION, HELP AND SUPPORT

Contact and Referral Information

There are a range of services that can provide you with information, referral, help and support. These include:

Police

In an emergency, call **000**. The police have the power and responsibility to intervene to protect you from physical or sexual violence or stalking. If it is not an emergency, you may prefer to speak with a Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer (GLLO) who has had training in working with members of the gay and lesbian community. Alternately, you may wish to speak with a Domestic Violence Liaison Officer (DVLO) who has special training in working with people who are experiencing domestic violence. Most stations have a DVLO.

To contact a GLLO or DVLO call the Police Switchboard on (02) 9281 0000 and ask for the station or officer nearest you.

Domestic Violence Line

The Department of Community Services Domestic Violence Line is the primary information service for people experiencing domestic violence in NSW. For more information on the Domestic Violence Line see pages 13-14.

The DV Line is free and staffed 24-hours, 7-days a week.

Freecall: 1800 65 64 63 TTY: 1800 67 14 42

(Please note - if you call the 1800 number from your mobile it will be billed to your account and appear on your bill. If you call from a landline or pay phone it is free and will not appear on your bill.)

Sexual Assault Services

For women the NSW Rape Crisis Centre offers 24-hour counselling, support and information.

Phone: (02) 9819 6565 TTY: 9181 4349 or 1800 42 40 17

For men and women the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital's Sexual Assault Service offers 24-hour counselling, support and referral.

Business hours: (02) 9515 3680 **After Hours: (02) 9515 6111**

Victims' Support Line

If you have experienced physical or sexual assault you can call the 24-hour Victims' Support Line for information, support and referral. The staff can tell you about your right to claim compensation and help you complete an application, as well as provide you with information about preparing a victim impact statement. You may also be able to apply for counselling through the



Victims of Crime Bureau. Staff of the Victim Support Line can tell you how to do this.

Phone: (02) 9374 3005

Freecall: 1800 63 30 63.

LawAccess NSW

LawAccess NSW provides free telephone legal information, advice, referral and assistance to people in NSW. You can contact LawAccess NSW on

Phone and TTY: 1300 888 529

Plain language legal information resources can be accessed on the LawAccess NSW website at www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au. These may not relate directly to same sex domestic violence but have useful information on general legal matters eg applying for AVOs.

Inner City Legal Centre (ICLC), Lesbian and Gay Legal Rights Service

The ICLC operates the Lesbian and Gay Legal Rights Service on Wednesday evenings from 4pm (by appointment only). Both services offer information and advice on a range of legal matters.

To make an appointment call between 10am-6pm Monday to Thursday or 10am-5pm Friday.

Phone: (02) 9332 1966

ACON's Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project

The Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project runs a Report-Line and information and referral service. Reports made to the Report-Line can be anonymous.

Reports are used to develop education resources, advocate on behalf of individuals and to map incidents of same sex domestic violence.

(In emergencies call the police.)

The line is generally open 10am-6pm, Monday to Friday.

Phone: (02) 9206 2116

Freecall: 1800 063 060

Online Report: <http://avp.acon.org.au>

Other ACON Services

The AIDS Council of NSW is a health organisation based in the gay and lesbian community. ACON has a range of services that may be appropriate for people experiencing same sex domestic violence. These include information, referral, counselling or support.

For more information call between 10am and 6pm, Monday to Friday.

Phone: (02) 9206 2000

Freecall: 1800 063 060

TTY: 9283 2088

Website: www.acon.org.au

5 FINDING INFORMATION, HELP AND SUPPORT

The Gender Centre

The Gender Centre provides information and services to transgender people in NSW. Phone: (02) 9569 2366

Translating and Interpreting Service

Phone: 13 1450 (24 hours)

Making a Complaint

In NSW it is illegal to discriminate against someone on the basis of their homosexuality, gender, age, race or marital status. If you feel you have not received the appropriate response you may be able to take action against the particular service.

Remember, however, certain services like women's refuges can legally refuse to offer service to men. This is to ensure the safety and appropriateness of services to their clients.

The Police

If the police do not respond as they should or they refuse to acknowledge your relationship or behave in other inappropriate ways, you can:

- Request that they follow the steps listed on page 13.
- Ask to speak to the officer in charge. If necessary, call the station while the police are still at your home.
- Make a complaint to the Police Customer Services Unit by calling 1800 62 25 71.
- Contact the NSW Ombudsman's Office on (02) 9286 1000 or 1800 45 15 24.

Chamber Magistrates and Court Staff

If the chamber magistrate or other court staff do not do what they are supposed to, if they refuse to acknowledge your relationship or if they discriminate against you you can:

- Make a complaint to the Clerk of the Court.
- If this doesn't resolve your complaint you can contact the Community Relations Division of the Attorney General's Department on 1800 68 44 49.

Discrimination From Service Providers

If you believe you have experienced discrimination from a service provider on the basis of your sexuality contact the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board.
Phone: (02) 9268 5544 Freecall: 1800 67 08 12 TTY: (02) 9268 5522

LOVE AND RESPECT

Most gay and lesbian relationships are based on love and respect and everyone has the right to seek a safe and healthy relationship.

“Day by day, I am rediscovering who I am. The most important thing for me now is that I’m safe and I control my own life.” **DAVID, 27.**

“Healing for me had been talking about it and here I am eighteen years later still talking about it.” **KIM, 42.**

“I have been in a relationship with a loving, caring, gentle and understanding guy for more than nine years now. I’ve learnt that he isn’t trying to control me and have let him in to every part of my life.” **BRAD, 35**

“My relationship with my family has healed and I’m in a loving and respectful relationship - life is good.” **LISA, 38.**

“I am now 35, I’m happy with my appearance and have a new career. My quality of life is better and I am independent.” **ADAM, 35.**

SAME SEX DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Most gay and lesbian relationships, like heterosexual relationships, are based on love and respect. Some however are based on abuse and control.

Abuse and control within a relationship is domestic violence.

This booklet is written for people in same sex relationships who are, or may be, experiencing domestic violence. It includes information on:

- What domestic violence is.
- Domestic violence in same sex relationships.
- Types of abuse.
- How to get help and support.
- Making a safety plan.
- Domestic violence and children.

It also has a chapter for friends or family members of someone experiencing domestic violence. This chapter provides strategies for providing emotional and practical support.

This booklet also contains the contact details for a range of services that can offer information, support and referral to individuals experiencing domestic violence.

Acknowledgments

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Information in this booklet has been adapted from a range of sources including:

A guide for family and friends
2000, DVIRC Inc.

*Abuse in lesbian relationships:
Information and Resources*

L Chesley, D Macaulay, and J Ristock, Health Canada

It's not love, it's violence
NSW Women's Refuge Movement.

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Attorney General's
department of nsw