

If it's still all about power and control, why is it important to talk specifically about abuse in LGBTQ+ relationships?

Our culture has historically marginalized and erased the experiences of LGBTQ+ people, and despite recent progress, we continue these oppressive dynamics today. Thus, LGBTQ+ victims face particular kinds of barriers that differ from those faced by heterosexual, cisgender people who are dealing with abuse.

Our public institutions—which are supposed to help people—have a long and real history of responding to LGBTQ+ people in ways that do more harm than good, leaving victims of violence and abuse understandably reluctant to reach out for help. Many not only worry about what disclosing abuse might mean for themselves (Will I be believed? Will my community learn I am LGBTQ+? Will I still have rights to our children?), but also about what will happen to their partners, once these institutions become involved in their lives: Will they be treated fairly by the justice system? Will they be incarcerated in a facility inappropriate for their gender identity? Will they face violence and harassment while incarcerated?

The fact that many wonder whether abuse can even happen within LGBTQ+ relationships is a clear indicator of the work we have yet to do. If we only discuss violence as a singular experience that looks a particular way, then we miss reaching out to people who don't feel included in that picture.

Additionally, if we fail to provide LGBTQ+ victims with clear messages of hope and support, then we may increase their isolation and their risk of continuing and worsening abuse.

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This brochure was developed with help from volunteers from Maine Family Planning, Equality Maine, Safe Voices, and Hope & Justice Project. We are grateful to our partners for their considerable assistance in creating this material.

This project is supported with funds provided through a contract with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, CFS-15-2011.

How can we help?

The Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence's member resource centers offer...

- Safe, nonjudgmental LGBTQ+ affirming spaces and support
- Specialized safety planning
- Understanding, compassionate advocates
- Confidential services
- Connections to safe, affirming community resources
- 24/7 access to support

We are here to help you, regardless of your sexual orientation or gender identity, or the makeup of your relationship.

Anyone impacted by abuse can call us, at any time. You don't have to want to come to a shelter. You don't have to want to leave your partner. You don't even have to share your partner's name.

We work hard to be sure that when you call us, you can be safe.

To reach an advocate, call **1.866.834.HELP**, or visit mcedv.org to find a resource center for anyone affected by abuse near you.



The Maine Coalition
to End Domestic Violence

Connecting people,
creating frameworks for change.
mcedv.org



Reaching Out to LGBTQ+ Survivors of Partner Abuse



The Maine Coalition
to End Domestic Violence

1-866-834-HELP
1-800-437-1220 (Relay Line)
mcedv.org

Terms we use in this brochure:

Abuse: In this brochure, we are talking about domestic abuse—also sometimes known as “domestic violence,” “dating violence,” or “intimate partner violence”—as a pattern of coercive behaviors used by one partner in a relationship to control the other.

LGBTQ+: An acronym standing for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer. The “+” signifies that one acronym doesn’t capture everyone’s experience of their gender identity and/or sexual orientation. We want this brochure to be inclusive of you, whether your gender identity or sexual orientation is represented by one of the letters or not.

Gender identity: One person’s experience and understanding of their own gender.

Gender expression: The way a person conveys or displays characteristics commonly referred to as masculine and feminine.

Sexual orientation: One person’s experience and understanding of their own patterns of sexual, romantic or emotional attraction.

Transgender/Trans: A person whose gender identity differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender/Trans are umbrella terms that represent a wide variety of identities.

Cisgender: A person whose gender identity matches what is typically associated with the sex with which they were born.

Transphobia/biphobia/homophobia:

Discriminatory and antagonistic attitudes and beliefs about people who are transgender/ bisexual/homosexual. It is important to note these as distinct terms. Someone can be accepting of homosexuality, for example, while still discriminating against bisexual or trans people.

There is a lot of silence and misinformation surrounding abuse in the LGBTQ+ community...

...and many myths about it in popular culture, so we want to start by acknowledging this most basic fact: abuse happens in LGBTQ+ relationships, too. Research shows that abuse occurs in LGBTQ+ relationships at about the same—if not higher—rates as within non-LGBTQ+ relationships.

Many people dismiss violence within LGBTQ+ relationships as “mutual” and equally perpetrated, but doing so misses the reality. The truth is, LGBTQ+ individuals sometimes choose to employ coercive and violent tactics in order to control their partners.

Unfortunately, because of the stigma and the myths surrounding this topic, LGBTQ+ people impacted by abuse are often left further isolated and unsure where to turn for help.

Is abuse in LGBTQ+ relationships different than it is in heterosexual relationships?

It depends. In many ways, it can look the same. The abuse is still about one person in a relationship seeking to have control over the other person—and believing they are entitled to it.

But in other ways, the tactics can differ. The abusive person may:

- Attack their partner’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.
- Use homophobic, biphobic or transphobic messages to justify their actions.
- Threaten to “out” their partner, or use the fact that their partner isn’t out to ensure that they won’t reach out for help.

- Keep the partner isolated—from their family, from the LGBTQ+ community, from much needed services (i.e. healthcare, legal services and DV helplines).
- Use their own vulnerabilities as an LGBTQ+ person to coerce or guilt their partner into taking care of them, or staying in the relationship.
- Minimize the abuse, relying on popular myths that LGBTQ+ abuse must be mutual to shift blame onto their non-abusive partner.
- Present themselves as the victim, in order to ally family, friends or other supports against the victim.
- Use their privilege or ability to “pass” to discredit or endanger their partner.

Additionally, in the face of recent gains for equality there is sometimes pressure for LGBTQ+ people to conform to a “perfect ideal” of a monogamous relationship; some may be therefore reluctant to reach out for help because they worry about the repercussions for the LGBTQ+ community as a whole.

It is important to remember that no matter what, abuse is never okay. All of us deserve to be treated with respect and care by our partners. We also deserve families and communities who will support our safety and wellbeing, and who will hold abusive people accountable for their actions.

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