

Wondering about your relationship?

- Is your relationship a lot of work?
- Are you always fighting?
- Are you changing yourself to please your partner?
- Do you often feel like nothing you do is 'good enough' for your partner?
- Do you find yourself making excuses for the way your partner treats you?
- Do you feel afraid of your partner?
- Are you afraid that your relationship is negatively affecting your children?

If so, you may be in an abusive relationship.

What is abuse?

Abuse is any behaviour used to manipulate, force, dominate or isolate the other partner. Your partner may use any aspect of your identity to control you. She may use your age, race, class, culture, spirituality, ability, sexual identity/ orientation, immigration status, body size appearance, or your HIV status.

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

Partner abuse – between people of any sexual orientation – is a crime.

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It's not easy to talk about abuse.

Lesbian relationships can be satisfying, wonderful and challenging. However, for some of us, abuse is a confusing and sometimes dangerous reality. We live in a society that does not fully support the rights of LGBTQ individuals. Our relationships are often viewed as being not as serious or committed as heterosexual relationships. As lesbian and queer women, we face many stereotypes.

Myths:

- Women are not abusive – only men are.
- Lesbian abusers are more “butch” or larger than their partners.
- Abuse in lesbian relationships is often mutual.

These attitudes can make us question the value of our relationships or feel isolated. This can make it difficult for us to acknowledge that we are being abused and to hold our abusers accountable. The racism and classism that some of us face pose even greater challenges.

Community Resources

Another Closet: Domestic Violence in Gay and Lesbian Relationships

Information about same sex domestic violence.
Based in Australia.
<http://ssdv.acon.org.au>

Assaulted Women's Helpline

A province-wide 24-hour helpline for women who have experienced abuse.
Telephone • 1.866.863.0511
TTY • 1.866.863.7868
www.awhl.org

Family Service Toronto

Resources on abuse in LGBTQ relationships.
www.familyservicetoronto.org/programs/dks/res_samesex.html

Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line

A toll-free Ontario-wide peer-support phone line for LGBT youth
1-800-268-9688 • www.youthline.ca

Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres

A list of rape crisis/sexual assault centres across the province.
www.occcc.ca/centres.html

Ontario Network of Sexual Assault / Domestic Violence Treatment Centres

A province-wide network of hospital-based treatment centres that provide 24/7 emergency care to women, children and men.
www.satontario.com

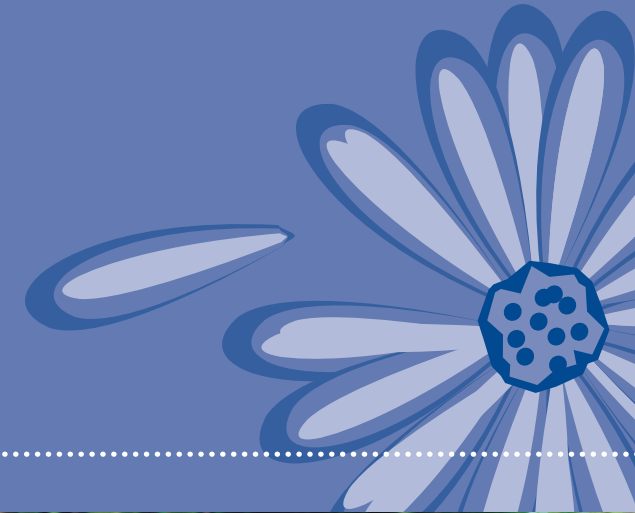
Rainbow Health Ontario

A province-wide program providing LGBT health information, consultation, training, research and policy services.
www.RainbowHealthOntario.ca



To download or purchase go to www.rainbowhealthontario.ca

Loves Me, Loves Me Not



*A resource for lesbians
who may be wondering about
their relationship.*

What does abuse look like?

Does your partner:

- Kick, hit, slap, bite, punch, shove, scratch.....
- Tell you where you can go and keep track of your every movement;
- Take your money;
- Get jealous if you talk to or smile at someone else;
- Put you down or humiliate you in front of others;
- Make fun of your spiritual or cultural beliefs and practices;
- Withhold medication or prevent you from getting the care you need;
- Destroy your property;
- Threaten to harm your children;
- Threaten to call immigration and have you deported;
- Threaten to out you to your cultural community, family or workplace;
- Control communication in the relationship so only they get to speak or sign;
- Force you to have sex;
- Threaten to call the child protection services.

Your partner's behaviour will usually become more abusive over time. She has learned that abuse works to get what she wants and she has made the choice to be abusive. You may care very much about your partner and really want to believe she will change. You may feel that you too have made mistakes in the relationship or that you did something to provoke your partner. You may feel guilty because you fought back or fear that admitting the abuse is a betrayal of your community.

Abuse is not your fault.

Without intervention, abuse will not stop.

The effects of abuse.

Abuse can affect your health. Effects may include:

- Physical injuries;
- Depression;
- Overwhelming feelings of anger, fear or shame;
- Suicidal feelings;
- Anxiety or panic attacks;
- Flashbacks;
- Mood swings.

What to do if you're being abused.

It is hard to leave an abusive relationship.

Getting help may be difficult. Domestic abuse and child welfare services are not always available or sensitive to lesbians. LGBTQ services may not always be knowledgeable about your cultural community. If you don't get the help you need, don't give up.

Tell a friend or family member about the abuse and keep talking until you get help.

Seek professional help from a qualified counsellor who is knowledgeable about partner abuse, LGBTQ-positive and culturally sensitive. They can help you to explore your options and support you to make decisions.

Calling a crisis line can be a first step.

Make a plan

Only you can decide what to do about your relationship - whether to stay or leave is your decision. However, it is important to develop a safety plan in case you or your children are at risk. Make sure that your plan includes how to leave and how to stay safe after you have left.

- Learn about resources in the community and how to access them (shelters, counselling, legal aid, emergency phone numbers);
- Decide what you will do if the violence escalates (e.g. calling the police, running to a neighbour);
- Find a safe place to stay where your partner is least likely to find you;
- Teach your children to dial 911;
- Put aside some money or open your own bank account;
- Pack and hide a bag of essential items in case you need to leave in a hurry;
- Collect and make copies of essential documents (immigration papers, passport, children's birth certificates, etc.) and keep them in a safe place.

Leaving the relationship

If you leave, change your routine (your route to work, where you shop, when you have appointments). You may also want to have someone accompany you when you go out.

If your ex-partner continues to harass you after leaving the relationship, have your phone number(s) changed and/or get support from the police.

Consider reporting incidents of violence to the police. If you are unsure about this, discuss it with someone you trust who has knowledge about the police and court system. Be prepared to disclose the nature of your relationship to the officers. Your relationship has the same legal status as a heterosexual relationship. Many urban police services have a LGBTQ liaison officer whose job is to support you when you are dealing with the police. If possible, take pictures of your injuries or go to the nearest Sexual Assault Domestic Violence Care Centre (located in some hospitals) where specially trained staff can document your injuries.

If you call the police and you have children, the police will contact the Children's Aid Society. Children need protection from chronic conflict and violence. Sexual orientation is not a child protection concern. Being a good and protective parent is more important to the courts than being lesbian or queer. The best way for your children to be happy is for you to be happy. There are services for LGBTQ parents and their children.

If you don't want to leave but are concerned about the effect that your partner's behaviour is having on you, create a plan to increase your social support network and become financially independent.

You have the right to live free from violence and fear.

