

A collage of diverse people's faces, including men and women of various ethnicities and ages, overlaid with a rainbow gradient. The faces are partially obscured by the text and the gradient, creating a layered effect.

Queer without Fear

Domestic and Family Violence in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Relationships

This booklet contains information and referral details for people who may be experiencing abuse within an LGBT relationship

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

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 colleagues?
- ☐ Prevent you from attending LGBT events or venues?
- ☐ Have sudden outbursts of anger?
- ☐ Act over-protectively 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?
- ☐ Threaten to or actually hurt your pets?
- ☐ Force you to engage in sexual acts that you don't want to do?

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 to keep your partner happy?

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

You can also 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.

"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 LGBT* DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

1

Introduction

Most LGBT 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 LGBT relationships who are, or may be, experiencing domestic violence. It contains information on what domestic violence is, what to do if you are experiencing abuse, making a Safety Plan and the details for some important referral services. It also has information for supporting a friend or family member who is experiencing abuse. This publication focuses on domestic violence issues for people in LGBT relationships. However, we recognise that transgender, intersex and bisexual people also experience domestic violence in opposite sex relationships.

Specialist support services are needed to support transgender and intersex victims of domestic violence, and more research needs to be done into the experiences of transgender and intersex victims. Transgender and Intersex people who are experiencing domestic violence are encouraged to access services referred to in this booklet.

What is Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence is any type of abusive behaviour used to gain and maintain control over another. It often follows a cycle, and escalates in frequency and severity over time.

Domestic violence in a relationship is when one partner or ex-partner consciously tries to manipulate and dominate the other. It is about the misuse of 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 for more information on each type of abusive behaviour).

It can happen in all types of relationships: gay, lesbian or heterosexual; monogamous, open or polyamorous; dating, new relationships or long-term; live-in or not. Domestic violence 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, according to Queensland law, domestic and family violence also includes abuse within other types of relationships including; between relatives, in informal (unpaid) carer relationships or between adult children and parents.

For more information on how the Domestic Violence Protection Act applies to people in Queensland, please see www.legislation.qld.gov.au/LEGISLTN/CURRENT/D/DomeFamVPA89.pdf.

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

Types of Abuse

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

Emotional or Psychological Abuse is any type of behaviour by one partner (or ex-partner) to make the other feel afraid or worthless. It can also include one partner making the other feel responsible for their safety, or making them question their mental well-being

Common forms of emotional and psychological abuse include:

- Putting the partner down e.g. 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.
- Threatening or actually hurting pets.
- Telling, or threatening to tell, others about their HIV status without permission.
- Threatening to harm their children.
- Treating children in a disrespectful or abusive manner.
- Undermining the relationship between the children and their partner.
- Threatening to self harm or commit suicide.
- Telling them they are crazy or mad
- Telling them they are depressed
- Threats to have them 'committed'
- 'Mind games'

"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, lesbian, bisexual or transgender events and venues.
- Locking them in the house.
- Isolating them from their cultural background or preventing them practicing their religious beliefs.

Cyber stalking can include:

- Joining the same chat or online social groups to intimidate or contact them,
- Posting pictures of them on sites without permission.
- Developing fake profiles that are designed to trick you so they can continue contact with you.

"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. Sometimes, people use alcohol and other drugs to intoxicate someone before they assault or abuse them. Sexual abuse 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 Bondage and Discipline or Sadomasochism (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.
- Threatening to withdraw financial support as a means of control.
- Preventing the partner from working so they become financially vulnerable or reliant on their partner.

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 workplace.
- Cyber stalking, following or monitoring their movements online.
- Calling, texting or emailing 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.

Domestic Violence in LGBT Relationships

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

To date, there is limited Australian research that records the level of domestic violence in LGBT relationships. However, a number of overseas studies suggest that the general patterns and levels of domestic violence in LGBT 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 LGBT Domestic Violence

Domestic violence in LGBT 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 LGBT 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 or gender

For some LGBT people, especially those new to LGBT relationships or those having difficulty understanding or accepting their identity, these difficulties become associated with the abuse so that they blame the abuse on being an LGBT person. So they may feel that “I’m experiencing this abuse because I’m gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender (or other) If I wasn’t gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender (or other) I wouldn’t be experiencing or doing this. I hate being this way”.

Domestic violence isn’t as well understood in the LGBT community

There hasn’t been much information or discussion in the LGBT communities about domestic violence in relationships. Most information on domestic violence relates to heterosexual relationships with the man as the perpetrator. This lack of understanding means that some people may not:

- Believe domestic violence happens in LGBT 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 friends or family members’ relationships.

LGBT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBT people

Some Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander LGBT may experience exclusion from family and friends if they have disclosed this identity to their family or community.

Many Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people face difficulties obtaining and or accessing services in general and the added issue of being LGBT may increase difficulty.

LGBT People From Culturally And Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities

In some cultures being LGBT is forbidden or actively discouraged by family and friends, therefore the LGBT person who is experiencing domestic abuse may not get support from family and friends.

The existence of LGBT people may not be acknowledged within some cultural groups.

CALD LGBT people may be at higher risk of assault by a family or community member for being openly LGBT.

Some CALD LGBT people may be more distrustful of the police and other government bodies in Australia because of their experiences in their country or origin.

Confidentiality and isolation for people in LGBT relationships

The relatively small size and close-knit nature of LGBT 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 their community against them. An abusive partner may isolate them from contact with their community by preventing them from reading community media, attending events or seeing their friends. This is especially true for people in their first LGBT relationship who may not have had much contact with the community before the relationship began.

Services may not be well developed

Although women can access most general domestic violence services, like refuges, court assistance schemes, and counselling services, these services may have limited experience in working with LGBT 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. Services with experience and training can be found on the Referral fact sheet.

Myths and Facts

There are many myths surrounding domestic violence and some specific myths surrounding LGBT domestic violence. Some myths excuse the abuse while others blame the victim. Myths make it difficult for the person experiencing abuse to seek help and they make it difficult for others to understand the real issues. Myths shift the responsibility for abuse on to the victim or an outside factor. There is no excuse for domestic violence.

Myth: Domestic violence only happens to certain people.

Fact: Domestic violence can happen to anyone. Domestic violence happens in all income brackets, countries, religions, cultures, ages, sexualities and genders.

Myth: Stress causes him/her to become violent.

Fact: Daily life is full of frustrations associated with money, work, our families and other personal relationships. Everyone experiences stress, but everyone has a choice in how they respond to it. Choosing to be abusive or violent to relieve stress is not acceptable.

Myth: The person being abused did something to provoke the violence.

Fact: No one has the right to be violent or threaten anyone. No one deserves to be beaten, battered, threatened or in any way victimised by violence. Any domestic violence is unacceptable. Putting the blame for the violence on the victim is a way of manipulating the victim and other people.

Myth: Domestic violence is caused by a loss of control.

Fact: People who use violence to control their partners are often highly self-controlled. If the rage was really uncontrollable they would explode at anyone at any time - whereas in domestic violence the abuse is usually hidden from others. Perpetrators are often able to appear calm when the police arrive and have enough control to limit the physical abuse and injuries to undetectable parts of the body such as under the hair or on the torso.

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

An abusive partner will often try to minimise the violence or deny their responsibility for it. Blaming 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: Domestic violence is always visible.

Fact: Perpetrators aren’t easy to spot. Some perpetrators can be well respected and widely liked members of society. Domestic violence is insidious and can go unnoticed. Victims aren’t always harmed physically. Many victims are psychologically traumatised, socially isolated and/or financially deprived. This abuse is more difficult to detect.

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.

The following myths are common in LGBT relationships where there is domestic violence:

Myth: Violence in LGBT 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 law can’t help me and the police aren’t interested because I’m in an LGBT relationship.

Fact: Threats, stalking and physical and sexual violence are all illegal. The law in QLD offers the same protection to LGBT victims of domestic violence as it does to non-LGBT victims including police protection and access to Domestic Violence Protection Orders. The police have a duty of care to provide protection to anyone in QLD experiencing domestic violence - regardless of their sexuality. If someone feels the police response hasn’t been adequate or appropriate they have the right to make a complaint.

Myth: I won’t be able to meet any other LGBT 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 a common fear for people in their first LGBT relationship. But there are many community groups that can help people make connections with other people who have been through similar experiences.

LGBT Domestic Violence in Rural Areas

The patterns, effects and impacts of LGBT domestic violence in rural, regional and remote areas share many similarities to metropolitan areas. However there are a number of factors that are unique to the experience of domestic violence in rural areas. These include:

- 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.
- There is a greater chance that someone seeking help may encounter (or be concerned about) homophobia or discrimination from services.

There are a number of strategies that someone experiencing domestic violence in rural areas can use to make seeking help easier. They include:

- Developing a comprehensive Safety Plan.
- 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 phone services, e.g. the national Sexual Assault Hotline, Family & Domestic Violence Counselling Line **DVConnect 1800 811 811** or **1800 RESPECT**.
- Accessing services and information via the internet.

Chronic Illnesses, Including HIV, and Domestic Violence

Chronic illnesses (e.g. HIV, cancer, multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer's, 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 partner's 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 other cases 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 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.

If the abusive partner does not have a chronic illness (e.g. 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 (e.g. 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, e.g. 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 physical and sexual assault are serious forms of domestic violence, sexually transmissible illnesses (e.g. HIV, hepatitis B) pose a special risk to the uninfected partner.

There is 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.
- Illness-specific support groups for information on treatments, legal rights, support services, and so on. These groups may not have experience providing support to LGBT people escaping domestic violence but they may be able to provide support around the specific requirements of the illness.

Look in the White Pages or search online for contact details for specific groups.

Children and Domestic Violence

Children can experience domestic violence as:

- Victims of abuse. Children may be physically or emotionally abused by the abusive partner (or even in some cases by the abused partner).
- 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.

Children who experience domestic violence, whether in LGBT or non-LGBT relationships, can suffer from many negative effects ranging 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.

Service providers in QLD are obligated to report to the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability 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.

Abusive partners sometimes tell the victim that they have to stay in the relationship, or else they will have no rights to see the children. This is not true.

If you have a child together or have been caring for a child together, then your rights will depend on what is recorded on the birth certificate, or whether there are any existing court orders, such as family law orders or domestic violence protection orders. If you leave an abusive relationship, your children still have a right to a relationship with you. It is best to talk to a solicitor about your options in relation to children.

Under the Family Law Act 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.

Division of Property and Finances

Abusive partners sometimes tell the victim that they have to stay in the relationship, or else they will have no rights to the property or finances. This is not true.

Anyone who has been in a de facto relationship is eligible to make a claim on the property of the relationship. To do this:

- You must have been living together for 2 years; or
- You must have made a substantial contribution to the property of the relationship; or
- There must be a child of the relationship.

There is a time limit of two years after you have separated to make an application to the court for property orders or orders for spousal maintenance. The court will look at the financial and the non-financial contributions to the relationship.

If you haven't lived together and the abusive person owes you money, there may be some action you can take to get your money back. In this situation, it is best to seek legal advice.

It is important to protect your financial interests when you leave an abusive relationship. If your partner knows your PIN or the details of your bank accounts, you can talk to your bank about changing the details. If you have joint accounts or credit cards, contact your bank and talk to them about protecting your share of the money and making sure your partner does not run up any debts in your name.



13



“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

2

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. You do not deserve to be abused.

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.

"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.

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. Police 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 Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services if there are children involved. Some police officers are specialist Domestic and Family Violence Coordinators or LGBTI Liaison Officers, and you can ask if one is available.

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 Safety Plan. Call, DVConnect **1800 811 811** (Queensland line) or **1800 RESPECT** (National line).

If you are, or think you are, experiencing domestic violence you can call any of these services. Calls to these services can be anonymous - you don't need to give your or your partner's name.

DVConnect 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. Men may be able to access other emergency accommodation).
- Refer you to other services like family support, counselling, the police, legal services, court assistance schemes, and hospitals and health centres.
- Explain what a Domestic Violence Protection Order (DVPO) is and how to apply for one.

To contact DVConnect call 1800 811 811. This number is free from public phones and landlines. Calls from mobiles will be billed to your account and will appear on your bill.

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, some LGBT services like Healthy Communities and local community health services.

Make Yourself as Safe as Possible

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 a DVPO 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.

Some people develop a Safety Plan to protect themselves (and their children).

Leave Home for a While

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

All LGBT people experiencing domestic violence are encouraged to ring 000 in an emergency, or to contact DVConnect (1800 811 811) to discuss their options for safety.

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 DVConnect (1800 811 811).

For men short term housing options include staying with friends or family, a hotel or low cost hostel, emergency housing through Department of Housing and Public Works 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 or purchasing your own property.

People escaping LGBT domestic violence may apply for housing assistance from the Department of Housing and Public Works. In general, to be eligible, you will need to be a citizen or permanent resident of Australia and live in QLD. 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.

Apart from emergency accommodation the Department of Housing and Public Works has a number of other programs, including priority housing and Rent Connect that you may be eligible to apply for.

For more information contact your nearest office. Look in the white pages or visit <http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/housing/housing-and-homelessness-services>

Immigration and LGBT 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 you think this applies to your situation, you should seek legal advice. For more information call the Refugee and Immigrant Legal Service (RAILS) 07 3846 3189.

Planning Ahead - Making a Safety Plan

If you are experiencing any form of domestic violence you might consider making a Safety Plan. A Safety Plan sets out what you could do under certain circumstances to help reduce the risk of emotional or physical injury to yourself (and your children). Your Safety 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 Safety Plan on your own or speak with a trusted friend, a counsellor or a worker from a domestic violence service.

If you write your Safety 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 Safety Plan think about the times your partner is most likely to be violent or abusive and how she/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. You do not deserve to be abused.

Living With an Abusive Partner

If you are living with your 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 (e.g. removing knife-blocks from kitchen benches).
- Let trusted friends, family or neighbours know about the abuse and let them know about your Safety 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, identification and essential medications for you and your children somewhere that you can access them quickly.
- Plan out 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, e.g. photos, maybe at your doctor's or a friend's house.

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

- Hide a bag (maybe at family/friend's place) with clothes, keys and other essentials like medication etc.
- If you can, put aside some money for travel expenses, accommodation, food etc.
- Collect or make copies of essential forms of identification, including Medicare card, drivers license, Centrelink details, Tax File Number etc and store them in one place.
- Make copies of important documents e.g. car rego, title deeds, loan records, etc.
- Pack important possessions, e.g. photos and keepsakes.
- Take small sellable items like jewellery.
- If you have children take clothes, medical records, birth certificates, bottles and some of their favourite toys.

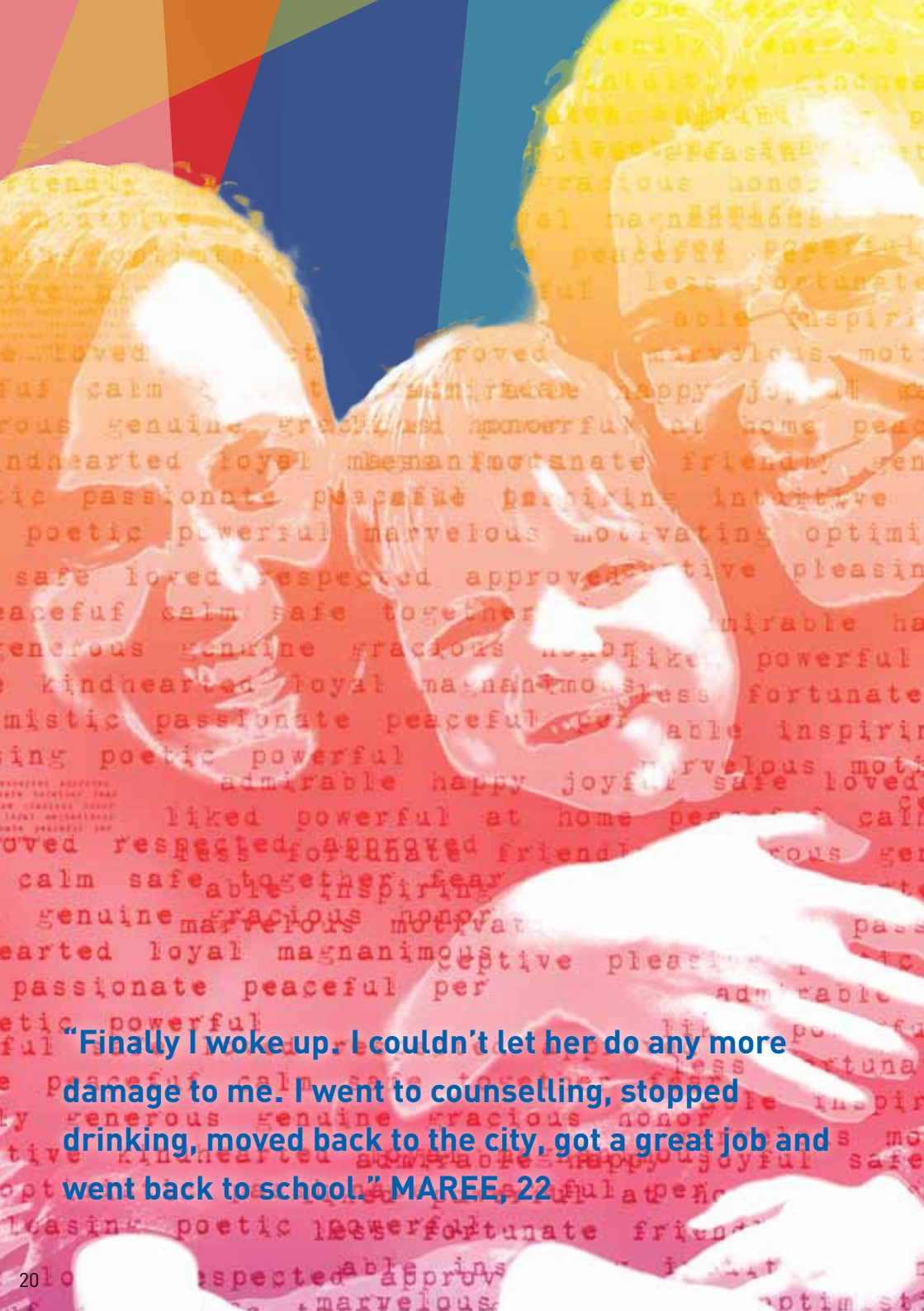
"I played along being as nice to him as I could. And saying nothing. I secretly did extra work and saved enough money to move out." KENT, 35.

After Leaving the Relationship

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

- Apply for a DVPO.
- If you have a DVPO carry it with you at all times and give a copy of it and a photo of your partner to your children's school and your workplace.
- 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.
- Wherever 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, e.g. security doors, lockable windows, motion-sensitive external lights etc.
- Let important people know about your situation, e.g. your boss and other work colleagues or your children's teachers, so they know not to give out your details or they can screen your calls etc.
- Continue to seek support from relevant services during this time.

"One of the biggest head-f*\$ks 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.



“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

3

Recovering From Domestic Violence

Everyone experiences domestic violence differently. The way in which you respond to, and recover from your experience, depends upon a number of things. These 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.

Looking After Yourself

There are 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, or change the locks on your doors.
- Recognise that recovery will take time. Give yourself 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 see a professional counsellor.
- Talk about your feelings. You could talk to trusted friends or family or to a professional counsellor.

- Continue to use professional support services. If you're seeing a counsellor then keep seeing them after the relationship has finished.
- Do things to treat 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. This could be as simple as having a bubble bath or taking yourself to the movies.
- If you lost contact with friends or family during the relationship make contact with them again.
- Make new friends by joining an LGBT 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.
- Find out if you are eligible for victim's compensation. To find out more call Victims Assist Queensland **1300 546 587**.
- Look into volunteer work. Many people find supporting others to be a nurturing experience.

Starting a New Relationship

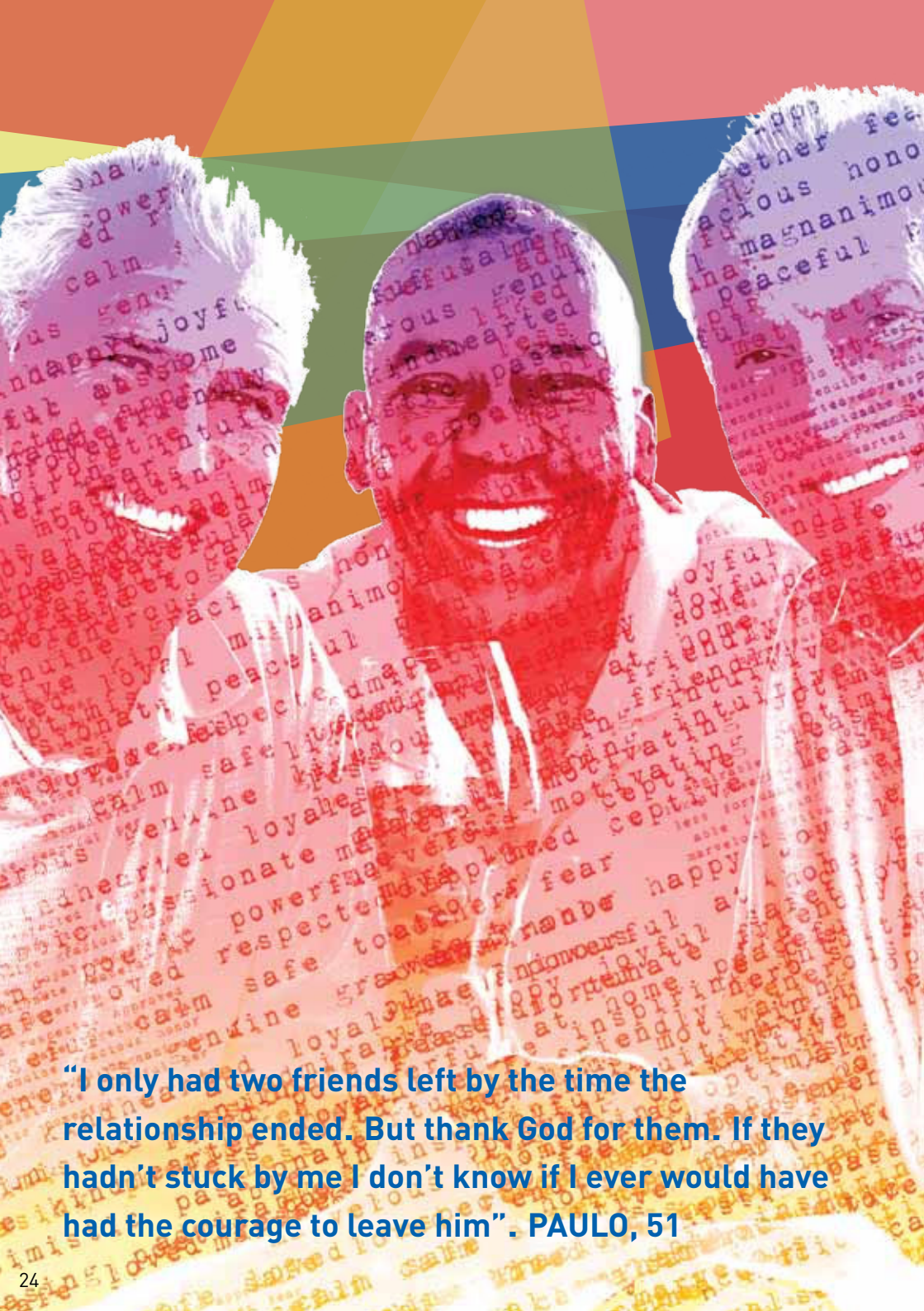
Eventually you may be ready to begin a new relationship. Your past experiences may impact upon your thoughts and feelings about a new relationship. You may:

- Be very cautious, find it difficult to trust your new partner or be anxious that they may try to control you.
- Be reluctant to give up newfound independence for a 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 are a range of things you can do to help yourself feel comfortable in a new relationship:

- Take it slowly, you have the right to have the relationship develop at a pace 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 lives.
- Talk to a counsellor, either by yourself or with your new partner, about any anxieties you may be feeling.
- For more information including a collection of real life stories and the latest research and articles on LGBT domestic violence go to **www.anothercloset.com.au**





“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

4

Providing Support

There are a number of things you can look out for if you think a friend is experiencing domestic violence. Your friend may be:

- Unusually nervous, depressed or withdrawn.
- Overly anxious about their partner or their partner's moods.
- Increasingly isolated from friends or family.
- May have unexplained physical injuries eg cuts, bruises or sprains.

Your friend's partner may:

- Put them down a lot in front of you or others.
- Order them about or seems to make all the decisions.
- Control all the money or social activities or contact with friends.

Any of these things may indicate that your friend or family member is experiencing domestic violence. If you are not sure, you could call a domestic violence service to talk about what you have noticed. You can keep your friend's identity confidential.

Approaching a Friend

If you think a friend or family member 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 them:

- 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.

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, they don't deserve it 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 imminent risk of harm 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 to 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 a DVPO, the name of the local police LGBTI Liaison Officers or Domestic and Family Violence Coordinator etc.
- Looking after important items, e.g. 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 decisions they need to start taking control of their lives again.

"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.

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. These 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, a DV service, 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.

Why People Stay in Abusive Relationships

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

- They may not recognise their partner's behaviour as abuse. Some people think that domestic violence only happens in heterosexual relationships, so they don't see it as something that can happen to them.
- They may fear 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 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.

LOVE AND RESPECT

Most LGBT 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.

For your local service please call...



Brisbane Domestic Violence Advocacy Service:07 3217 2544



Healthy Communities:07 3017 1777



Micah Projects Inc:07 3029 7000

LGBT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Most LGBT 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 LGBT relationships who are, or may be, experiencing domestic violence. It includes information on:

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

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

Acknowledgements

We'd like to pay a special thanks to all the people who contributed their personal experiences for use in this resource.

This booklet is based on the original concept/booklet first produced by LGBTIQ Domestic Violence Interagency.

Adapted for Queensland by the Brisbane domestic Violence Advocacy Service (Micah Projects Inc) and Healthy Communities, in consultation with Caxton St Legal Centre and members of the Queensland Domestic Violence Services Network (QDVSN).

This resource was funded by the Queensland Government Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services



MICAH PROJECTS INC

Breaking Social Isolation
Building Community

