



Are you worried about a friend/family member during the Covid-19 restrictions?

Advice for friends/family of LGB and/or T+ people who might be in abusive relationships

Being confined to your home could be the worst message to hear for somebody whose partner is violent, abusive or coercively controlling. Lack of privacy, space apart, escape routes are all made worse by government guidance that we should stay at home unless for essential activities.

The research tells us that LGB and/or T+ people turn to their friends first and then family, if they are experiencing violent, abusive or coercive behaviour from their former or current partners.



Birmingham LGBT



If you are worried about a friend/family member who is LGB and/or T+ because of their partner's behaviour then you can consider helping in the following ways:

- **Keep in touch** – be careful when you do this in case your friend/family member isn't in a position to speak freely on the phone – when you ring you could feed them a line so that they can end the call if they need to, e.g. you could say 'if you can't talk now just tell me I've got the wrong number and hang up'.
- If they are able to speak, **agree a code word or phrase** to use in case they have to finish the call abruptly – it could be something like 'no, I'm not interested, thank you'.
- If they are able to speak to you, **keep it friendly**, ask them how things are going, ask them how their partner is doing given the circumstances of being restricted to the house etc.
- **Let them know you've noticed something is wrong** and that you're just checking in to make sure that they're ok because of the new measures to stay at home.

- **Most people don't think they're experiencing domestic violence and abuse** and wouldn't use these words to describe their experiences. However, they might talk about behavior from their partner that is violent, abusive or coercively controlling.

- You might be able to challenge statements that abusive partners have said about domestic violence and abuse being something that only happens in straight relationships by gently reinforcing the fact that **domestic violence and abuse is something that happens in the relationships of LGB and/or T+ people** and that there is a national help line and online chat service to help those suffering:

National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline

0800 999 5428

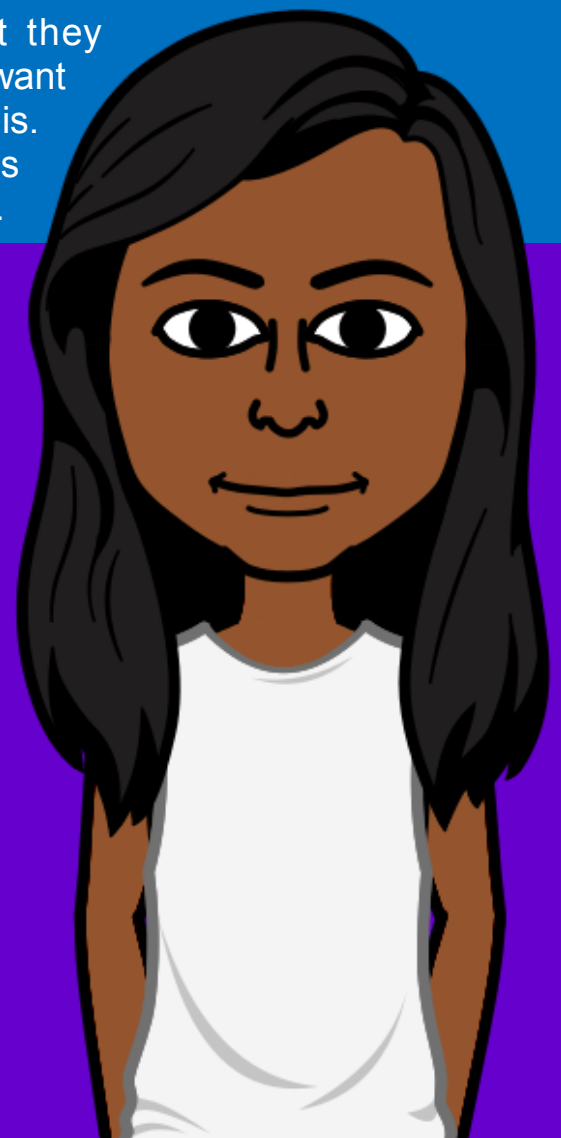
www.galop.org.uk/domesticabuse

- It might help to **have a note pad and pen** with you to write down objective information that your friend/family member is giving you, and advise them to do the same regarding incidents (if this is safe to do so).



If a friend/family member confides in you that they're experiencing violence, abuse or coercively controlling behaviour from a current or former partner then think about the following before you respond: the first response you give could make a lot of difference to what they do or

- **Just listen** – sometimes it can help people to just talk about what is happening to them to somebody who listens, isn't judgmental and doesn't try to fix everything immediately, and doesn't take decisions out of their hands (for e.g. it's usually not a good idea to say something like 'well if you won't, I'm going to phone the police')
- Make sure you don't accidentally imply that what is happening to them is their fault. This is something abusive partners often do so it's helpful not to reinforce this message. Instead try saying things like '**I don't think that is your fault**', 'that sounds like they're trying to put the blame onto you for their behaviour – what do you think?', 'I know you're in a relationship with her/him/them but that sounds a bit like bullying to me – what do you think?', or ask them to consider what they might say to you if you had described what they are describing, "if it was me who was telling you these things, what would you tell me/what advice would you give me/how would it make you feel?"
- **Try not to pressure them** at all about what they should do. Let them take the lead in what they want to talk about and what they think the problem is. Encourage them in their judgement of what is going on and in what, if any, risks they are facing.
- **Let them know that you know how much it takes to talk to you about experiencing abuse.** Depending on how well you know them you might tell them something about you to build trust with them.
- **Don't push them to say anything more than they're comfortable with.**
- **Very often people experiencing violence, abuse or coercively controlling behaviour still love their partner.** Recognise this and find ways to suggest that how their partner is behaving isn't loving, caring, respectful.



Don't tell them to leave the relationship if they're not ready – that's their decision but explain, if necessary, that leaving a household to escape danger is a valid reason to leave under the Covid-19 guidelines.

- If they do say that they want to leave, **suggest things they could take with them/to prepare:** passport/driving license, change of clothes, money, safe place to go, taking location off/ checking for tracking on mobile, keeping safe by deleting internet history, keeping passwords safe on social media etc., being aware of the closest police station, reminding them of police numbers to ring: 101 and 999.
- **Check whether they have experienced any physical harm** – If so, let them know that they can leave their house for medical help, which could include going to A&E or their GP if they have injuries. You might also suggest that they take photos of any injuries they have to keep as evidence.
- As well as the Galop national helpline/chat service **you can also report any hate crime** your friend/family member reports to you to True Vision www.report-it.org.uk/home if that feels like a safe thing to do.
- If they **explain that they feel in immediate danger, help them report to the police - if they want to.** They can dial 999 or 101 for advice/help.
- **Say that you will ring again and/or that they can contact you.**
- Understand that they might not ring you but that this does not mean you can't ring them back to check in. You might also **offer to have scheduled calls/texts/messaging** with your friend/family member.
- If your friend hangs up abruptly and/or then blocks your number or won't answer the phone to you/reply to your texts/messages then you can consider contacting other mutual friends/family members to ask if they've heard from your friend/family member. **If, on balance you believe they might be at risk you can speak to 101 and ask advice or a local domestic violence organisation/ or Galop national helpline.** One thing to consider is whether there is any risk attached to outing your friend/family member without their consent but if you are worried about their safety then perhaps this will outweigh that risk.
- **Share your concerns with a trusted friend/family member and/or you can ring Galop National Helpline for advice and support for your own wellbeing.**

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