

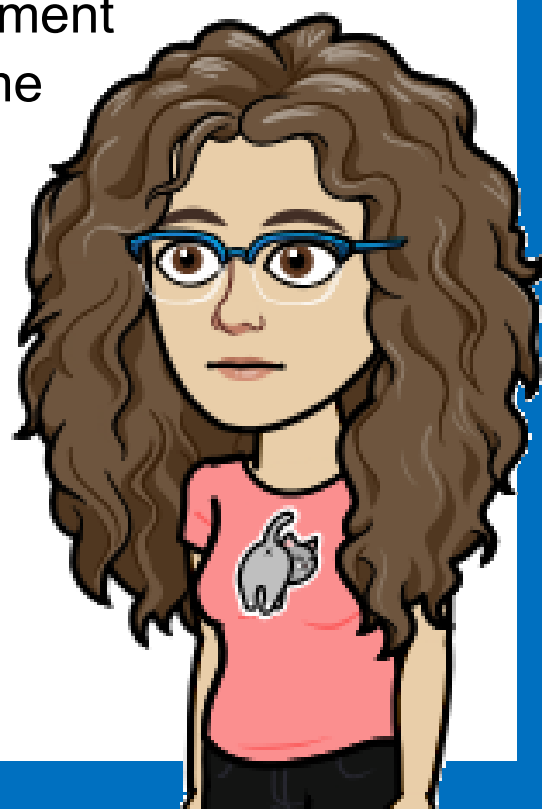


Are you worried about a friend/family member during the Covid-19 restrictions?

Advice for friends/family of LGB and/or T+ people who might be an abusive/controlling partner.

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 if they are experiencing violent, abusive or coercive behaviour from their former or current partner, whether they are being victimised or being the abusive/controlling partner.



Birmingham LGBT



Violent, abusive or coercive behaviour includes a range of behaviours; physical, emotional, financial, sexual, that are used by one partner in a relationship to control, punish, subdue their partner. Emotional abuse can include identity abuse where, for example, partners undermine what their partner wears, looks like, whether they are 'real' or 'good enough' gay/lesbian/bisexual/queer/trans/non-binary people.

Speaking to somebody you think might be being violent/abusive/controlling can be risky – for their partner as well as for your relationship with them. You will need to consider the degree to which you feel safe speaking to them about their behaviour as well as the safety of their partner. For example, you should be careful not to imply that you have spoken to their partner because this could increase the risk of your friend/family member being violent/abusive towards them. If you are not sure, you could talk about it with another friend/family member you trust and/or you could ring the free **Respect Phonenumber for confidential advice**

Respect Phonenumber

0808 8024040

www.respectphonenumber.org.uk



If you are worried about a friend who is LGB and/or T because of their behaviour then you can consider helping in the following ways:

Keep in touch. If they are able to speak to you, keep it friendly, ask them how things are going, ask them how they are doing given the circumstances of being restricted to the house etc. and being forced into spending more time with their partner. You might **check if they're able to speak freely before talking in any detail about your concerns/about their relationship.** You might also make a judgement of how they seem when you first speak to them about whether they are in a good place to talk about what is happening in their relationship. If they seem to be in a bad mood or a you feel that 'something is up' then don't bring up the subject of their behaviour just keep it friendly, ask how they are, ask what they've been doing, be supportive of them.

If it feels that they're able to have a more in-depth conversation, 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. Be careful to only talk using 'I' statements – 'I've been worried about you', 'I've been a bit concerned' – don't imply that other people have been talking about your friend/family member, and avoid, implying that their partner has been talking about them. This is important as it could raise the risk of your friend/family member being violent/abusive/controlling of their partner.

- **Most people don't think they're perpetrators.** However, they might talk about how their partner is winding them up, getting in their way, driving them crazy, not doing as they should, pissing them off. They might also talk about losing their temper, saying/doing things they wouldn't normally do but for their partner – and the circumstances - driving them to it. Typically, controlling partners want their relationship to be on their terms and often blame their partner for causing their violence/controlling/abusive behaviour – 'if they didn't do I wouldn't have to ...'

Explain that you're worried about how they are behaving – that they seem too stressed out, too out of control, too quick to anger. Try to make the following suggestions:

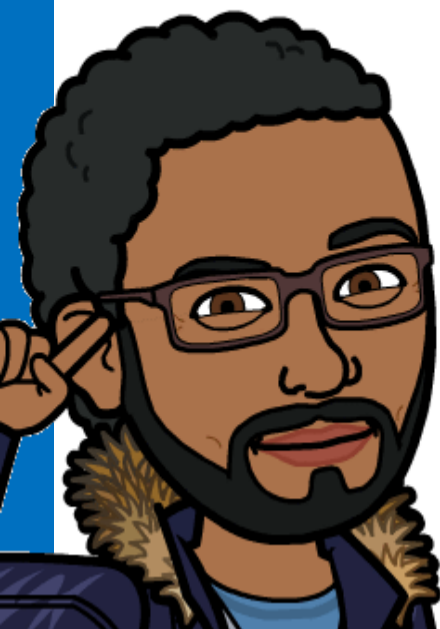
- They **take themselves away when they feel themselves getting angry or upset** – they could leave the room, go into their garden if they have one, go for a walk, step outside their flat/house. 'Time out' can sometimes be a useful way of defusing a situation and prevent escalation.
- Suggest they speak to the **Respect national Phoneline** who can help them make changes to their behaviours and with ways of defusing the situation: (freephone) **0808 8024040** www.respectphoneline.org.uk



Suggest they try to avoid alcohol or drugs when they are feeling angry, resentful, pissed off – that this will make things worse and that they might do/say things they will regret. You could suggest that they contact local substance use organisations to get some help with this.

- Suggest that they might leave their flat/house and move somewhere else for a time. **Moving to avoid violence/abuse is a legitimate reason for travel at this time.** They could contact their local housing department for help with this.
- They might minimise or deny what is happening. This is normal and that might mean more than one conversation with them to **gently challenge their attitude that their behaviours are not serious or harmful.**
- They might say that what goes on in their relationship is none of your business. You can gently challenge this by **saying that you are being a friend by trying to get them to change their behaviour** or that you do not like to see anybody being harmed and that when that happens it becomes your business and that you want to help your friend/family member.

You might risk your friendship if you push them too hard. Few of us like being challenged about the things we say or do that are wrong, often we become defensive. If you want to stay friends/keep your relationship with them you will have to make a judgement about your own limits as to how far you go with your conversation with them. However, **unless we all begin to challenge people using violent/abusive behaviours where we see them, the message they get is that their behaviour is ok** and the partners they are violent/abusive towards are left isolated and unsupported.



- **Be aware that it can sometimes be difficult to tell who the victim is and who the perpetrator is in violent, abusive and coercively controlling relationships.** It is important not to make assumptions that the physically bigger or stronger-looking partner is the perpetrator, and that the physically smaller or weaker-looking partner is the victim. And remember that violent, abusive or coercive behaviour is not only about physical violence.
- **When victims/survivors of abuse fight back or engage in acts of resistance against an abusive partner, this does not make it 'mutual abuse'.** It's easy to dismiss such situations by thinking that 'they're both as bad as one another'. However, thinking this can stop both partners from getting the help and support that they need.

Try to work out who is in control – your friend may be trying to re-gain some equality in their relationship and carve out ‘space for reaction’ through acts of violence and resistance, which may or may not prove effective.

- Friends who are using violence or abusive behaviours in resistance may be afraid of their partner, or may talk about losing a sense of who they are, and they may also feel angry because of the impact which the abusive partner is having on their life. Abusive/controlling partners can really undermine their partner’s sense of self/identity. If, after talking to your friend/family member you believe that they are in fact being victimised by their partner you could suggest that they telephone the Galop national helpline

National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline

0800 999 5428

or access the chat service at

www.galop.org.uk/domesticabuse

to get help and support.

- You could also encourage them in a range of activities to support their sense of identity (watching LGBT films, listening to LGBT music, researching LGBT history/role models, etc)

If you want further advice before you speak to your friend please ring

Respect Phoneline (freephone) 0808 8024040

www.respectphoneline.org.uk