



Love Should Never be Abusive – Recognising and Responding to Domestic Abuse in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Trans relationships: A Training and Awareness Raising tool.

The following training notes/discussion points should be used in conjunction with the *Love Should Never be Abusive* DVD produced by Open Clasp Theatre Company in conjunction with NEDAP and Northern Rock Foundation. This DVD depicts four scenes based on survivors' experiences which are designed to act as a catalyst for discussion around the vastly underreported issue of Domestic Abuse in LGB and/or T relationships.

The DVD and accompanying notes can be used within a variety of settings including but not exclusive to:

- Community/youth groups - as an awareness raising tool
- Professionals - as a training tool
- Services - as a prompt to think about their inclusivity

It is designed as a free resource that can be accessed via a variety of web links including MESMAC North East and Shine; the University of Sunderland, Centre for Applied Social Sciences and Open Clasp Theatre Company. .

Background Context

NEDAP - North East Domestic abuse Project

In April 2010 NEDAP (North East Domestic abuse Project) was created with the aim of improving services to LGB and/or T victims/survivors of Domestic Abuse. The project had the benefit of a steering group made up of professionals with an expertise in the field of either LGB and/or T issues, Domestic Abuse or both. It was hosted by Victim Support and funded by the Northern Rock Foundation

NEDAP was created as a response to national research carried out by Prof Catherine Donovan, a steering group member, which concludes that there is a definite problem with both under reporting and awareness of domestic abuse in same sex relationships (Donovan et al 2006). Other work by Roch et al (2010) found that trans people also experience high levels of domestic abuse. These findings were found to have regional relevance in a regional scoping exercise which


demonstrated gaps in both awareness and services. NEDAP was deliberately created with a development brief, not a front line service, as it was felt important to concentrate efforts around improving the responses of existing services – both LGB and/or T and Domestic Abuse.

The Project has proved very successful: a practitioners Forum has been developed, which has an email network, a website and a training course as well as two well attended conferences. As funding of the core project drew to a close the steering group worked to create a number of legacy projects to ensure the work of NEDAP continues. This DVD and accompanying training notes is one of those legacy projects. The hope is that it is used by practitioners with background knowledge to raise awareness/offer training around the issue of domestic abuse in LGB and/or T relationships. The ultimate aim is to see an increase in awareness and reporting of abuse from LGB and/or T communities and an improvement in services' understanding of and responses to the issue. It is also hoped that Commissioners of domestic abuse services will make efforts to ensure the needs of LGB and/or T victims/survivors are met.

Key issues in LGB and/or T Domestic Abuse

Practitioners using this resource are advised to access the material on the NEDAP website which outlines some of the key issues/findings and myths around LGB and/or T Domestic Abuse. The DVD explores some of the abusive tactics that can be used in LGB and/or T relationships including:

- Exploiting Insecurities
- Perpetuating Myths
- Using fear of “coming out” as a tool of control
- Isolation
- Identity Abuse

It questions the “public story” of domestic abuse as an issue solely for heterosexual or straight people. Practitioners are also advised to access the best Practice Guidance produced by CAADA, after consultation with NEDAP, around working with LGB and/or T victim/survivors. 

http://www.caada.org.uk/documents/LGBT_practice_briefing.pdf

Myths and Realities of LGB and/or T Domestic

Efforts to tackle Domestic abuse can sometimes be hindered by myths. These myths develop in part because it can be difficult to understand why one person would hurt another particularly in the context of an intimate relationship. They can also develop due to the heterosexual assumption in which social problems, such as domestic violence are understood as affecting only heterosexual people and thus responses are provided that assume that only heterosexual people will be service users. Understanding these myths and the actual reality of Domestic Abuse in LGB and/or T relationships is critical if we are to respond to victims and perpetrators effectively.

There are a number of myths about DV in LGB and/or T relationships that can prevent people seeking help. Sometimes an abuser will deliberately use these myths to try and stop the victim reporting their experiences.

Myth - Domestic abuse doesn't happen in LGB and/or T relationships

Reality - Recent research suggests that domestic abuse is a significant issue in LGB and/or T relationships. Whilst it is not possible to conduct the same kind of survey of LGB and/or T people as is done with heterosexual women, some research suggests that the prevalence of domestic abuse is similar across sexuality, i.e. that one in four women or LGB and/or T people will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime. Others say we should be cautious about saying that the risks are the same but that the evidence suggests domestic abuse is certainly a serious issue in LGB and/or T relationships. Research also indicates reporting levels are low within LGB and/or T relationships.

Myth – Any abuse in LGB and/or T intimate relationships is mutual, so both partners are equally responsible for it

Reality – Abuse is a systematic pattern of behaviour by one person in a relationship to gain power and control over their partner. In some circumstances the abuser may physically hurt their partner, and the partner may defend themselves. However, this is not a mutual fight, but self-defence. Emotional abuse, which is another way to control the abused partner, can often cause more long lasting harm than physical abuse. It is never acceptable for anyone to live in fear of their partner. It can be difficult for front line workers to immediately ascertain who the victim is but there are tools to help with this that look at the dynamics of a relationship.

Myth -The victim and perpetrator can be identified by their physical appearance, e.g. the abuser will be butch and the victim will be more feminine, the perpetrator will be older/bigger and the victim younger/smaller.

Reality - Abuse is not about physical strength and it crosses all boundaries of physical size and appearance. It is about one person abusing their power in a relationship. This power does not come from physical strength but from manipulative controlling behaviour and can include emotional abuse (see LGB and/or T Power and Control Wheel and the COHSAR Power and Control Wheel, see back of this

document). It is a dangerous assumption to make that the abuser is always the bigger partner and could lead to a victim being arrested.

Myth - Abuse is a 'normal' part of LGB and/or T relationships caused by the 'fact' that there is something inherently wrong with LGB and/or T relationships

Reality – This is, of course, nonsense and reflects an attitude of heterosexism or even homophobia. The idea of abuse as normal however can be used as a powerful tool by a perpetrator, particularly when a victim is younger or less experienced together with the fact that there still exist with few role models of LGB and/or T relationships in society to compare experiences with.

Myth - It is easier for LGB and/or T people to leave an abusive relationship as they have fewer ties e.g. they do not have children (including where the victim is assumed not to be the 'real' parent because they are not the biological parent)

Reality - For LGB and/or T people, there are some specific circumstances that can make it even more difficult for them to leave an abuser.

LGB and/or T people may be isolated from family because of discrimination in relation to their sexual orientation or gender identity and so may not be able to draw on family support, even at the beginning of a relationship. If it is a first time same sex relationship for one partner there may be a huge amount of emotional investment in it making it more difficult to contemplate leaving.

Research demonstrates that LGB and/or T people can be reluctant to turn to mainstream services because of fears of homophobia or of being 'outed' or of an inappropriate response. They may be fearful of leaving because the abuser has threatened to 'out' them if they do leave. Research also highlights that because domestic abuse is often seen as something which heterosexual/cis gendered women experience, some LGB and/or T people may not actually realise that what they are experiencing is domestic abuse.

Lastly, many many LGB and/or T people have children and those children are of course affected by abuse in the household. Moreover not being biological parent does not lessen ties, love or a sense of parental responsibility.

Myth - The law does not protect LGB and/or T people

Reality – Since 2004 people in LGB and/or T relationships suffering domestic abuse have been equally protected under the law in England and should have the same access to legal redress. This myth, again, can be a powerful tool for a perpetrator to persuade the victim they will not be able to access help.

Conclusion – the dangers of myths

All of these myths are based on misconceptions. Domestic abuse is intentional conduct and it occurs because one person (an ex/partner or family member) is attempting to exert power and control over the victim.

Myths often blame the victim or some other factor, e.g. alcohol or anger. In the case of domestic abuse in LGB and/or T relationships, the myths are often based on prejudice and stereotypical attitudes towards LGB and/or T relationships. As a result, they divert attention away from the actions of the abuser.

Understanding the myths and realities can help practitioners focus on the responsibility of the abuser, better protect victims and hold perpetrators accountable for their behaviour. The practitioner's guide below may be useful as an aide memoire.

Recognising Domestic Violence/abuse in Lesbian Gay Bisexual and/or Trans Relationships: Key issues for Practitioners

1. Remember research suggests DV is as prevalent in LGB and/or T relationships as in straight ones but is not always recognised by practitioners and is hugely underreported. It is important to **consider the possibility**.
2. Abusive behaviours in LGB and/or T relationships encompass all the tactics employed in straight relationships but can also include threats of outing someone, playing on a victim's fears of how authorities will respond and playing on their sense of unworthiness (internalised homophobia or transphobia). It may also be that someone in a same sex relationship is being abused by an ex straight partner.
3. Research also tells us that people in LGB and/or T relationships can lack role models and do not always recognise themselves that they are in an abusive relationship. It maybe that a practitioner needs to work to raise their awareness and alert them to risks.
4. Practitioners need to be wary of abusive partners presenting as "friends" at appointments or abusers presenting as victims. Services need to have screening procedures in place to establish who is the abusive partner (this is not complex, it is just about asking questions and teasing out the dynamics of the relationship).
5. Practitioners need to be aware of not buying into the myths that can surround LGB and/or T DV. It is not necessarily the bigger partner who is the abuser, LGB and/or T relationships are just as committed and leaving is just as hard. Remember too that there may well be children involved and the effects of the DV on them need to be considered.
6. Monitoring all clients' sexual orientation or gender identity is important. Not only is it a way into a conversation, it shows that the practitioner is neither uncomfortable talking about sexuality and/or gender identity nor making assumptions. It is also a way of demonstrating the need for LGB and/or T friendly services and of checking your service is meeting the needs of LGBT people.
7. Research indicates those in first time same sex relationships can be particularly at risk of DV particularly if there is a disparity in age or experience of being 'out'. Moreover, given the investment in the relationship, leaving can be especially hard. Practitioners need to be alert to this.

8. Practitioners need to be alert to the fact that some men and women, boys and girls can be forced into marriage/threatened with honour based violence on the basis of their sexual orientation so as not to bring shame on a family/community. These are not issues confined to straight people.
9. Practitioners need to be alert to the possibility of young LGB and/or T people being abused by family members on the basis of their sexual orientation/gender identity. The DV definition includes "intimate or family relationships"
10. Research also demonstrates that if a service does not proactively specify it is for Lesbian, Gay, Bi and/or or Trans people, victims will assume it is just for people in straight relationships. Services need to give thought to their literature and websites. A woman only service should develop referral pathways to a service that will work with gay, bi and/or trans men.
11. The limited research available indicates that Trans victims of DV are even less likely to report than L, G and B victims, often due to a lack of trust as to what response they will get from professionals. Practitioners need to give thought as to how trans friendly their organisation is and how well trained staff are.
12. There are currently few specialist services **specifically** for LGB and/or T victims of DV so practitioners need to work with existing DV services and build an awareness of who works with women only and who with men. They also need to build links with LGBT specific organisations from whom they can get advice/work in partnership (not dump clients on).

Love Should Never Be Abusive: A Synopsis of and Discussion Points for each scenario.

Below are a range of discussion points which practitioners may want to raise during and/or after viewing each of the four scenarios. These are not prescriptive but are designed as possible prompts to fuel discussion with a variety of audiences.

1. A Fresh Start

Jo and Sam have come away for the w/e with another lesbian couple. They have been having 'difficulties' and had almost split up previously. This didn't happen partly because Sammy said she did not have anywhere to go. This weekend is part of their 'fresh start'.

Discussion points:

What elements of domestic violence and abuse can be seen in this scenario? Consider physical abuse, emotional abuse, financial abuse and coercion.

How is Jo's use of prescription drugs being picked on by Sammy to emotionally abuse her?

How has Sammy undermined Jo's sense of herself? Think about identity abuse as well as other examples?

How has Sammy persuaded Jo to 'feel sorry' for her? Think of how Jo talks about their housing circumstances and Sammy's previous relationships.

Do you think Jo and Sammy love each other? What impact does love have in their relationship?

How does the broader societal context impact on how Jo might see herself and whether or not Jo might seek help – from friends, family – particularly her mother, or more mainstream services?

Will Jo end the relationship? What barriers might be in the way of this? Conversely what opportunities could there be for her to genuinely make a 'fresh start' without Sammy? Would Jo feel comfortable about coming to your service?

How do you think you would assess the risk Jo faces in this relationship using the CAADA DASH-RIC¹

If you were Jo's friend what might you do?

If this or something like this was happening to you what would you do? Is there anybody you would feel able to talk to about it?

¹ See CAADA



http://www.caada.org.uk/marac/RIC_with_guidance.pdf

2. It's Not About You

Michaela has been transitioning over a couple of years. She lives with her wife, Judith, and they have two children. In this scenario it becomes clear that Judith has opened a letter addressed to Michaela inviting her to an appointment at the local gender dysphoria clinic.

Discussion Points

What elements of domestic violence and abuse can be seen in this scenario? Consider physical abuse, emotional abuse, financial abuse and coercion.

Is there any evidence of sexual violence?

How does Judith undermine Michaela's sense of herself? Think about identity abuse as well as other examples (the washing on the line, the comments about her appearance, comments about Michaela being 'sick')

How has Judith persuaded Michaela to 'feel sorry' for her? Think of how Judith talks about shame, their children and wider relationships in the family and community.

Why doesn't Judith end the relationship?

Do you think Michaela and Judith love each other? What impact does love have in this relationship? (including the parental love for the children)

Will Michaela end the relationship? What barriers might be in the way of this? Conversely what opportunities could there be for her to genuinely make a 'fresh start' without Judith? Would Michaela feel comfortable about coming to your service.

How do you think you would assess the risk Michaela faces in this relationship using the CAADA DASH-RIC.

How does the broader societal context impact on Michaela's sense of herself in relation to gender, femininity and masculinity – does this reinforce or challenge what Judith is saying to her?

To what extent does the broader social context impact on whether or not Michaela might seek help – from friends, family, or more mainstream services?

If you were Michaela's friend what might you do?

If this or something like this was happening to you what would you do? Is there anybody you would feel able to talk to about it?

3. Prove You Love Me

Arlene is a bisexual woman who is going out with Jackie, a lesbian. In this scenario they have been out for the evening with Jackie's lesbian friends who have previously made negative comments about Arlene being a bisexual and therefore untrustworthy. Arlene has spent some time talking to a man she knows in the bar.

Discussion Points

What elements of domestic violence and abuse can be seen in this scenario? Consider physical abuse, emotional abuse, financial abuse and coercion.

Is there any evidence of sexual violence?

How does Jackie undermine Arlene's sense of herself? Think about identity abuse as well as other examples

How does Jackie persuade Arlene to 'feel sorry' for her? (Think of how Jackie talks about how she looks in front of her friends and the issues of trust and respect)

Why doesn't Jackie end the relationship?

Do you think Arlene and Jackie love each other? What impact does love have in this relationship? For example, what do you think of when Jackie says to Arlene 'you're my woman'?

Will Arlene end the relationship? What barriers might be in the way of this? Conversely what opportunities could there be for her to make a 'fresh start' without Jackie? Would Arlene feel comfortable about coming to your service.

What role do the witnesses to this scene have? In the toilets and in the club?

How do you think you would assess the risk Arlene faces in this relationship using the CAADA DASH-RIC.

How does the broader societal context impact on Arlene's sense of herself in relation to her sexuality? – does this reinforce or challenge what Jackie is saying to her?

To what extent does the broader social context impact on whether or not Arlene might seek help – from friends, family, or more mainstream services?

If you were Arlene's friend what might you do?

If this or something like this was happening to you what would you do? Is there anybody you would feel able to talk to about it?

4. He's Been Good to You

Ed is a young gay man who lives with his mother. His mother knows that Ed is in debt. What she doesn't know is that this is because Ed has been involved in a relationship with his boss, Martin. After a trip to Blackpool something happened and since then Ed has been avoiding any contact with Martin. However, his mother is very keen that Ed takes up all offers of work from Martin in order to pay off his debt.

What elements of domestic violence and abuse can be seen in this scenario? Consider physical abuse, emotional abuse, financial abuse and coercion.

Is there any evidence of sexual violence/ exploitation?

How has Martin persuaded Ed to 'feel sorry' for him? Think about how he talks about the threat of suicide and how 'pathetic' Martin feels he is.

Do you think Ed and Martin love each other? What impact does love or care have in this relationship?

Does the fact that Martin is Ed's boss make any difference?

What is Ed's mam's role in this – are there any unintended consequences of her behaviour?

Will Ed end the relationship? What barriers might be in the way of this? Conversely what opportunities could there be for him to genuinely make a 'fresh start' without Martin? Would Ed feel comfortable about coming to your service.

How do you think you would assess the risk Ed faces in this relationship using the CAADA DASH-RIC.

How does the broader societal context impact on Ed's sense of himself as a young gay man and his ability to be out to his mother? Do you think it would make any difference if Ed's mother knew he was gay?

To what extent does the broader social context impact on whether or not Ed might seek help – from friends, family, or more mainstream services?

If you were Ed's friend what might you do?

If this or something like this was happening to you what would you do? Is there anybody you would feel able to talk to about it?

Contacts

If you have any questions about the use of this DVD and accompanying notes or in relation to the NEDAP legacy projects please contact any member of the NEDAP Steering Group:

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