

Self-help guide for LGBT women using abusive behaviours in intimate relationships

This self-help guide is for any woman who has used abusive, violent, or controlling behaviours towards a female partner and wants help to change.

What is this self-help guide for?

This self-help guide is for women who have used abusive, violent, or controlling behaviours in their intimate relationships with women; this includes women identifying as lesbian, bisexual, trans, or straight women who have occasional sex with other women.

We know it can be tough facing up to difficult problems and if you're reading this, it probably means you have some concerns about your behaviour.

We want to support you to get help and make the changes you need, so that you are safer around your partner and children (if you have or care for them).

Throughout this guide, we use the term 'partner'. For those that have been abusive in the past, partner (in this guide) can also refer to ex-partners of either gender.

When you read this self-help guide, we encourage you to think hard and face up honestly to the things you have done. You might have done something only once or twice, but in many cases, you'll notice that there is a pattern and an intent to the abusive things you do. By recognising your patterns of abusive and controlling behaviours, it will hopefully become easier to make changes and stop.

It takes effort and commitment to stop being violent, controlling and/or abusive. This guide can go as far as making you aware of some aspects of the problem. For more help you can contact the Respect Phonenumber free of charge on 0808 8024040.

Have you hurt, scared, or controlled your partner?

Domestic abuse, or domestic violence, is usually defined as any incident of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of their gender or sexuality. However, incidents are rarely isolated and most people who experience abuse find that there tends to be a

pattern of behaviours that scare, hurt and/or otherwise control them.

Coercive control refers to what goes on *between* episodes of violence and abuse, as well as to the 'incidents' themselves. Frightening and controlling your partner means that she is less able to be herself or to do as she wants. If you have children, or care for children, they are likely to be scared and upset by it, too.

Behaviours like stalking and checking on your partner isolate her from support and trap her in a world where you call the shots and are violent and abusive when she doesn't do what you want. The memories of what has happened in the past when she 'broke your rules' can be enough to keep her under your control and in your power, whether you use abuse or not.

Domestic violence and abuse can include, but is not limited, to the following:

Physical abuse

Hitting, punching, kicking, pushing, using a weapon against her, putting your hands around her throat, strangling, choking or causing her any other kind of physical harm, regulating food intake, damaging things, throwing and breaking things.

Psychological or emotional abuse

Calling her names, texting, or emailing her abusive messages, putting her down, shouting or swearing, controlling who she sees, accusing her of things or demanding that she changes her clothes or looks.

Gaslighting

Gaslighting is another form of psychological abuse where you discredit her memory, perception and sanity through lies, denial, contradiction, false information and manipulation.

Sexual abuse

Pressuring or forcing her to have sex, touching her against her will, sulking or punishing her for not wanting sex, forcing her to

watch porn or degrading her. Sexual abuse can happen in or outside of relationships.

Financial abuse and/or Economic abuse

Keeping a strict account of how much she is spending, keeping her short of money, refusing to sign paperwork, using her credit cards without permissions, building up debts. Restricting her access to essentials such as food, clothing or transport, denying her the right to have her own money by preventing her from being in education or employment, preventing her from accessing benefits or a bank account, withholding financial contributions to your child/ren's care after you have separated.

Online and digital abuse

Monitoring her social media profiles or emails, abusing her over social media such as Facebook or Twitter, sharing intimate photos or videos without his consent, using GPS locators or spyware on her phone.

Post-separation abuse

Making unwelcome contact after you have separated, calling, and texting her repeatedly, checking up on her movements or pressuring her to take you back, following her, using contact arrangements to abuse her and punish her for leaving the relationship.

LGBT specific forms of abuse

LGBT women who are victim/survivors may face a range of other abusive and violent behaviours particular to their experiences as LGBT women. These behaviours tend to focus on the sexuality or gender identity of the LGBT woman in unique ways that heterosexual women who are abused will not experience:

Disclosure abuse

Intimidation and threats to disclose sexual orientation and/or gender identity to family, friends, work colleagues, community and others. Disclosing gender history, sexual orientation or HIV consent without abuse. Using immigration law to threaten her

with deportation to their country of origin which might be unsafe due to anti-LGBT legislation or anti-LGBT stigma

Identity abuse

Undermining their sense of sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression or making a person feel guilty and ashamed of their sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. Limiting or controlling access to LGBT+ safe spaces and/or resources.

Trans abuse

In addition to everything listed above Trans victim/survivors of domestic abuse may also suffer very specific forms of violence and abuse related to their trans identity which may include, but are not limited, to the following:

- Disclosing a person's trans identity or gender history without consent
- Coercing a person to perform a gender they do not wish to present as or deliberately using their 'deadname' and incorrect pronouns
- Withholding access to medical treatments for those who are pursuing gender transition
- Ridiculing body parts and assaulting medically altered body parts. Exposing surgical scars without consent

If you have used any of these behaviours towards your partner or ex-partner, you are being abusive.

How would **you** feel if someone treated you like that?

Remember

- You do not have the right to control your partner's life or behaviour.
- No matter how angry you are, it is never ok to abuse her.
- No matter how she behaves, she has a right to live free from abuse – as have any children you have or care for together.
- You can change your behaviour if you choose to do so.

Choose to change!

What's causing your abusive behaviour?

Abuse doesn't just happen – it is always a choice. Even though it may feel like you are losing control when you are abusive, it is often quite the opposite. To make sure you are not abusive in the future, you need to recognise and understand your *intent* in using abusive behaviour, and what purpose it is serving.

Think about the times you have abused your partner and if you are honest with yourself, you will probably be able to work out what your intent was.

Maybe you wanted:

- To stop her doing something or make him do something.
- To shut her up.
- To punish her for something you didn't like or hurting your feelings.
- To stop her having independence and freedom.
- To show her who is boss.
- To win the argument and get your own way.

This is what we mean when we say that domestic violence and abuse is about power and control. Whenever you use fear, force or coercion to make her do something she doesn't want to do or stop her doing something she does want to do, you're being abusive.

Remember:

- Violence and abuse is a choice, and you can choose differently
- If you want to move away from a relationship based on power, fear, and control to one based on intimacy, care and respect, you must stop blaming your partner for your behaviour and choose to change
- Just because you have been violent and abusive in the past doesn't mean you have to be in the future

What's it like for her?

How does your abuse affect your partner?

As difficult as it can be, many people find that facing up to how their behaviour has affected – and still affects – their partner can make it easier to change. People very often find it easier to change when they think about the impact of their behaviour on others: if you can understand what it's like for her being on the receiving end of violence, abuse and controlling behaviour, it might be easier for you to change.

Your abuse is likely to be having a serious effect on your partner's health and wellbeing. If you have used physical violence you may have caused injuries such as:

Stiffness, soreness, aching, throbbing, numbness, headaches; cuts and other wounds; black eyes and bruising; lost teeth and hair; burst ear drums; broken bones, weight loss.

In some cases, women have been killed or permanently disabled by their female partner.

Even if you have not used physical violence, abusive and controlling behaviour impacts women in a multitude of ways:

- Your partner may develop physical health difficulties from the abuse: feeling physically tense and on edge; having difficulty sleeping; feeling exhausted; having panic attacks; catching Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs); being physically sick; if medication is being withheld your partner may become very ill.
- Your partner may feel she is walking on eggshells: terrified of when the abuse might start again or whether the abuse might escalate. Your partner is constantly assessing every aspect of their life to pacify you and to keep things calm.
- Your partner might feel some, or all, of the following: depressed, stressed, vulnerable, ashamed, drained, terrified, angry, confused, anxious, unloved, worthless, destroyed, humiliated, lost, alone, isolated.
- Your partner may feel like she has lost who she is and cannot make any decisions freely. She may not feel able to

say anything due to her fear of the consequences. She may be afraid of friends, family, work colleagues and her community finding out about her sexual orientation or gender identity/expression if she seeks help or tells anyone what is happening.

- Your partner may feel that what they are experiencing is not domestic abuse due to societal misconceptions, or that they deserve abuse due to being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender and may not know where to seek safe support.

The most important thing is that you must let go of wanting to control or change your partner's behaviour; you can only change your own behaviour. You might not like her behaviour, but that does not ever excuse your choice to use violence and abuse.

If you or your partner have, or care for children, how are they affected by the abuse to your partner?

It's easy to tell yourself that children aren't aware of abuse in the household, especially if they aren't in the same room where the abuse takes place. However, even if your children haven't seen you be violent, abusive, or controlling, they will have overhead things.

Imagine how terrifying it is for children to hear abuse and violence, trying to piece together what is happening and worrying how it will end without being able to do anything.

I remember being in bed and hearing it all the time. I know I saw, but I can't remember seeing it, can't explain it, it's really weird, just blocked it out, put it to the back of my mind.

Jackie, aged 19

Some of the ways abuse affects children can include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Experiencing direct abuse, getting hurt intervening: trying to protect their parent/carer/sibling.
- Hearing or seeing the violence and abuse, being woken up or kept awake by shouting and arguments.
- Being used to divide loyalties, or to hold back or pass on information between the two of you, being used to ridicule or humiliate their parent or carer.
- Knowing that this is something that they mustn't talk about at any cost, especially outside.
- Having to leave their family home, their school, and friends; this might be temporary or permanently and will be for the safety of them and their parent or carer.
- Having to call the police, being made subject of child protection investigations or court proceedings.

Children who live in a house where abuse takes place are suffering harm whether it is aimed at them or not. Children are completely dependent on the adults around them and if they do not feel safe in their own homes or families, this can have long lasting effects now and in the future.

Physical effects: Children can get physically hurt if abuse is taking place near them or they try to intervene to make it stop, they can find it difficult to sleep when they live with domestic abuse, and they can also find it hard to concentrate, feel scared, wet the bed, and have panic attacks.

Emotional effects: Children often experience fear; anger; distrust; anxiety; low self-esteem; growing up too fast; not being able to talk about what is going on.

Behavioural effects: models him/herself on your abusive behaviour; protective over their parent or carer- may use violence to protect them; expects/accepts abuse; is bullied at school; misses time from school; does poorly or over performs at school; use alcohol/drugs to cope; wary of other adults particularly professionals; developing eating disorders.

I failed all my exams, I put it down to what had happened at home. The atmosphere at school was exactly the same, and whenever I heard the teacher shouting at a child, I just used to cover my ears 'cause I don't want to hear no one shouting. It's like, every time I heard someone shouting, it was like bells ringing in my head. I just don't want no more shouting, I used to just want to run out of the room and burst out crying because I don't want to hear no more shouting.

Karina, aged 16

For children:

- Fear doesn't end when you stop abusing.
- Your abuse harms your children even if they don't see it.
- Children are victims of abuse even if they are not directly harmed.

Facing up to what you've done

It can be hard to face up to what you've done and how it's affected your partner. You may feel bad about how you have behaved. Your relationship is unlikely to be a happy one and many people who contact the helpline say that they feel a range of different feelings about themselves and their behaviour: regret, disgust, concern, anger, sadness and shame are all common.

In the short term, and often because of shame and guilt, it is easier not to take responsibility for your abusive behaviour. If you are telling yourself you are not responsible then you don't have to feel bad about it. You don't have to look at your behaviour and attitudes or change anything.

Minimising/denying your behaviour:

I'm not a violent woman

It doesn't happen often



I didn't *actually* hit her, it was just a little push

Playing down your actions serves to make it easier for you to live with your abusive behaviour and avoid judgements by others.

It is not until you accept sole responsibility for making changes that your abuse and violence can stop. If you continue to tell yourself, and others, that the abuse is not that bad, or that the abuse isn't having as much impact on you, your partner and your family, then it will become harder and harder to accept how serious the abuse is and motivate yourself to change.

Blaming your partner

She pushes my buttons

She has a mental health problem

She knows how to upset me and does it on purpose

She's a bad parent

She doesn't listen to me

I was trying to leave to get away, but she wouldn't let me

We speak to many women who feel their partner provoked them into being abusive. You are blaming your partner when:

- You talk about her behaviour when you are asked, or try to discuss, your own
- You think 'if only she would do/not do X, Y or Z, then I wouldn't be abusive'
- You believe that she needs to change for you to stop your abusive behaviour

The first step to stop your abusive behaviour is to take full responsibility for your behaviour. This means recognising that it's up to you to change how you behave. It is never your partner's fault if you choose to be abusive and blaming her won't help.

Next time you notice yourself blaming your partner, try to:

- Focus on your behaviour
- Think about your partner's needs and feelings
- Remind yourself why you don't want to abuse her
- Remind yourself that you are in control of what you do
- Remind yourself that you can choose not to be abusive

Even when your partner has behaved in ways that are not ok, you are still responsible for how you choose to behave. Your partner may have broken some rules that you have agreed or may have done something that you find unacceptable. Either way, your choice to use violent or abusive behaviours is a

problem that you must take responsibility for. There is always a choice: if your partner is not the perfect partner you wanted, or if she behaves in ways that you don't approve of, you have the choice of reconsidering whether you want to be in this relationship or not. Choosing violence or abuse is always the wrong choice.

Alcohol/drugs

Alcohol and drugs don't *cause* violence, but they can make it worse. Many people use alcohol and drugs and aren't violent or abusive; you are still responsible for your behaviour if you are drunk or high. If you find that your abuse is worse when you drink or use drugs and you still do it, then you are choosing to be abusive.

I was ashamed to admit what was going on. I used to kid myself that I was out of control or that it was the drugs making me violent and that it wasn't really my fault. I've begun to realise that it was my problem – and although I didn't like facing up to that at first, it made me realise that if it was my problem then I could change things.

Fay, 28

Remember:

- You may be more likely to hurt or scare your partner or family members when you have been drinking alcohol or using drugs.
- Being out of it is not an excuse. You are still responsible for your behaviour – drunk, high, or sober.
- Help is available (see below).

Most people can choose how much and where to use drugs or alcohol. If you are one of these people you could try cutting back on your use of alcohol/drugs or keep it away from your family.

This may mean staying at a friend's house after the pub or making sure you are sober when you go home.

If you are someone who cannot choose how much and where to use drugs/alcohol, you could consider getting some professional advice around your alcohol or drug use. [Click here to find local services](#)

Other things to blame

There are many other excuses women use for abusive behaviour such as:

- Work problems
- Money worries
- Children
- Things that happened when you were a child

None of these things cause you to be abusive.

They may be issues that you and your partner argue about a lot, so may feel linked to your abusive behaviour. However, a lot of people experience these things and never use violence or abuse. You will be able to think of a time that you might have been stressed about any of the above and you didn't choose to be abusive.

Other excuses

Momentary insanity

When you're struggling to understand your violent and abusive behaviour you may be tempted to explain that you lost control and had what we might refer to as momentary insanity. You might say:

'I lost control'
'I just flipped'
'I saw red'

The 'human pressure cooker'

You may feel that the build of pressure inside you was too much and by that point it was too late to make any other choice than to be violent/abusive. You might say:

'I just exploded'

'I just blew'

Most of the time, your abusive behaviour isn't random. You don't explode randomly at passers-by, neither do you 'see red' and hit just anyone who happens to be near you.

If you believe that you felt so overwhelmed that you were abusive you won't be able to stop. It's one of the ways to avoid understanding what abusive behaviour is about and what it is for. You can always make different choices.

If you're honest with yourself, you can identify lots of things you choose to control:

- What type of abuse you use and when
- What rules you have for your partner and when you change those rules
- Where to hit her, how hard and how long for
- Who the abuse is in front of
- When to stop the abuse

So, what can you do?

Get support

Take a time-out

Learn how to stop yourself from being violent. The guided time-out resource on the Respect Phonenumber website can help you identify when you are about to become violent, so you can choose to remove yourself and keep your partner safe.

Build a support network

Building a positive support network is an effective way to ensure you have back up when you are worried about becoming violent

and abusive. When thinking about who should be in your support network, the following guidance will help you:

- Identify people who want you to succeed in being non-abusive. Choose people in your life you trust: friends, family, a professional you trust, community or religious leaders. You need people who will help you in choosing non-abusive behaviour, will have the safety of your partner and children at the forefront of their mind and will hold you accountable for your abusive behaviour.
- Explain to the people you have chosen that you have identified them as a support and ask if they are willing to be on-call/available if you are concerned about becoming violent and abusive. Discuss how they are best able to offer support to you e.g. over the phone or meeting face to face?
- Identify times in the past when it would have helped you to contact your support network and keep these in mind for future situations when you are concerned about your escalating behaviour.
- When seeking support keep your conversation focused on yourself and what you can control. Do not use your support network to blame, criticise, shame, or frighten your partner and family.
- Any contact with your support network should not be in the presence of your partner or children. Having privacy will enable you to talk freely about your behaviour and protects them hearing anything that might frighten or upset them further.

If you cannot reach anyone in your support network, you could consider some of the options below.

If you are finding it hard to change

If you don't feel able to stop your violence and abuse, you should think about moving out of the house and not seeing her for a while. It may be the only way to keep her and your children safe.

Look after your wellbeing

You might want to pray or meditate. Even a simple breathing exercise can help you to interrupt negative thoughts and manage your emotions when you are feeling stressed or like your behaviour is going to escalate. You could try the following:

4-7-8 Breathing

Step 1. Exhale completely through your mouth.

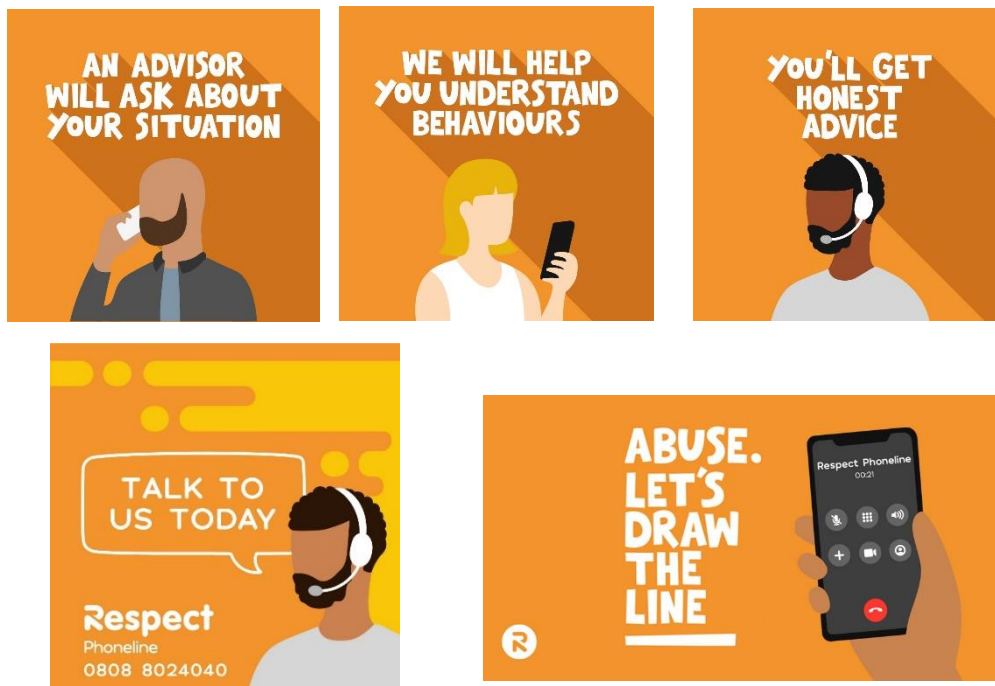
Step 2. Close your mouth and inhale through your nose to a mental count of four.

Step 3. Hold your breath for a count of seven.

Step 4. Exhale completely through your mouth, to a count of eight. (This is one breath).

Now repeat steps 2-4 three more times, until you've taken 4 breaths. Don't take more than four breaths in a row, or you might start to feel dizzy.

Call the Respect Phonenumber freephone 0808 8024040



We will listen to you in a non-judgemental way, discuss your situation and help you think about how to change. Our helpline is confidential.