

Thoughts for supporting
people of diverse sexuality and gender
who experience
abuse in their relationships

Handle with Care.

This resource is designed to assist professionals and trained volunteers who provide counselling services and telephone support to people of diverse sexuality and gender who are, or have, experienced abuse in their relationships with others.

Rationale

The thoughts, ideas, concepts and examples covered in this publication are intended to complement the wealth of existing research, theory and practice surrounding the understandings and approaches to dealing with abusive behaviours.

The information provided is based on the premise that abuse is a behaviour which is not unique to any gender, any identity, any sexuality, or any relationship. People of diverse sexuality and gender may witness, experience, and enact behaviours which may be received, and perceived, as abusive.

This publication seeks to further open discussion and understanding of issues of abuse, as experienced by people of diverse sexuality and gender, by taking an approach which, as far as possible, remains gender, sexuality, and identity neutral and does not seek to apportion blame or promote disempowerment or helplessness.

Disclaimer

The information provided here does not purport to provide any guidance on the legality, criminality, morality, or ethics of any particular forms of behaviour or conduct which may be considered abusive.

The physical, psychological, and emotional security of individuals should be paramount at all times. Appropriate safety and security plans should be developed, as appropriate, in line with current best-practice, evidence-based models.

This resource does not cover safety planning and response, or examine the correlations between abuse and other issues such as the use of alcohol or drugs.

Acknowledgements

SSDAG wishes to thank the staff of the following organisations for their contributions and assistance in the development of this publication:

- Crisis Care
- Gay and Lesbian Community Services
- Legal Aid, Domestic Violence Legal Unit
- Life line
- Men's Domestic Helpline
- Pat Giles Women's Refuge
- Perth Inner City Youth Services
- Salvo care line
- Starick Support Services
- WA AIDS Council
- Women's Domestic Helpline
- Youth Link

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Who are people of diverse sexuality and gender?

There are many labels, badges and affiliations that people of diverse sexuality and gender identify with. Some labels are given by others, some are chosen by the individuals themselves.

People of diverse sexuality and gender include:

- asexual people
- bisexual people
- bois
- gay men
- gender dysphoric people
- intersex people
- lesbians
- men who have sex with men and who do not identify as gay
- pansexual/omnisexual people
- queens
- queer people
- questioning people
- takatāpui
- transsexual people
- transgender people
- women who have sex with women and who do not identify as lesbian or gay.

Be aware that this is not an entire list...

What do I call you?

It is useful to think across identity labels and consider sexuality, sex and gender diversity in all their facets and communities. Individuals are the sum of their feelings, thoughts, behaviours and experiences. These are diverse and unique.

Some individuals, especially those who are exploring - or coming to terms with - their sexuality, gender or identity may actively resist applying a label to themselves.

"Hear my story and you will know who I am."

What sorts of relationships are involved?

Abuse can occur across the entire spectrum of human relationships. Abusive behaviours can be experienced between intimate partners, friends, associates, family members, neighbours, colleagues and casual sexual partners.

It is useful to take the broadest understanding of relationships and think about the diversity of interactions which influence a person's life.

Relationships can be complex, unplanned and continually evolving. For people of diverse sexuality and gender, the norms and boundaries of these associations and interactions may be fluid and may not correspond to commonly understood definitions of marriage, partnership, friendship, boyfriend, girlfriend or sexual partner. The extent to which any two people share the same definition of a particular relationship can be variable.

Particularly when discussing intimate relationships, it can be useful to clarify the person's understanding of the terms they are using to describe their connections.

A person may have diverse relationships which that individual constructs in response to their desires to express their feelings, sexuality and identity. These relationships could be based around strict monogamy, asexuality or polyvalent and polymorphous sexuality. Some people choose to express their sexuality through engaging in sexual activity with more than one person, while maintaining a privileged affective or emotional relationship with one, or two people.

An open relationship may come about through negotiation, evolution, unspoken or unplanned situations. Among some sexuality and gender diverse people there is a belief that open relationships, or having multiple sexual partners is the norm. For some, this behaviour is a defining element of their identity.

Some people make a conscious and deliberate choice to avoid replicating the norms of heterosexual couples. In this way they reject the concepts of marriage or monogamy, and redefine the notions of fidelity and faithfulness.

Kim and Lesley describe themselves as being engaged to each other. They have a monogamous relationship. Kim calls Lesley her fiancée, Lesley calls Kim her girlfriend.

Jess and Mich describe each other as husband and husband. Mich is planning to undergo gender affirmation surgery.

What is abuse?

Abuse is a behaviour which can manifest itself in many ways. It can be explicit (such as name calling and verbal abuse), or implied or threatened (such as keeping someone in fear of losing emotional support).

Abusive deeds or actions are behaviours. It is useful to consider the behaviour and the person as separate. Even the kindest of people is capable of shouting. Whether their behaviour is abusive depends to some degree on the reception, and perception, of the person being shouted at.

People have feelings and strong emotions, such as anger and depression. How they behave in response to those feelings can be a matter of choice.

Abuse is a behaviour, not a person.

Are there any forms of abuse which are specific to people of diverse sexuality and gender?

Abuse between intimate partners is a taboo in many cultures. It is the same within the communities to which people of diverse sexuality and gender belong. Many people who are openly gay, lesbian, transgender or transsexual, are conscious of how their behaviour, and that of their associates, reflects on the perceptions of the broader society. Disclosing that abuse is an issue within that person's community or friendship circle can be seen as a betrayal of the group, or as an act of disloyalty to their partner.

Outing

"Outing" a person is the express - or implied - threat of disclosing an individual's sexuality, identity, health status, preferred gender or sexual practices. Disclosing, or threatening to disclose, personal or private information about a person can severely compromise that person's sense of emotional security, leaving them feeling vulnerable or unable to respond effectively to other forms of abuse.

Threatening to out a person to their family members, church group, colleagues, or children can have profound psychological and emotional impact and severe consequences for a person's perceived, or actual, status within their group, network, clan or mob.

Relationships

Abuse may occur when a person experiences difficulty in negotiating or accepting changes to the boundaries, limits or agreed rules of their relationship with another. For example, abusive behaviour could occur when one partner changes the terms of the relationship by:

- pressuring the other to engage in behaviours with additional partners when they had originally negotiated a monogamous relationship;
- in an already open relationship pressuring the other to engage in further behaviours outside of the original agreements;
- Explaining their new sexual behaviour, outside of the relationship, as being normal to their group, sexuality or identity.

Children

Abusive behaviours where a person has children, or responsibility for a minor, can be particularly painful – threats to disclose a person's sexuality or desire to engage in certain sexual practices can expose a person to the threat of rejection by their children, or former spouse, which could potentially result in a denial of access or visiting rights to their children.

Pets

Abusive behaviours can be associated with pets, such as threats to harm a pet, or to take a pet away.

Internalised phobias (homophobia, transphobia...)

Many people of diverse sexuality and gender grow up being told, or thinking, that their feelings, behaviours and identity are “wrong”. Some may have been punished for their difference. Many would not expect to get a fair or equal hearing from mainstream service providers, and some would even accept that it is their lot in life to experience abusive behaviour, both from their intimate partners and society in general.

Abusive behaviour can be normalised through the idea that the actions or deeds are common, or expected, within relationships of people of diverse sexuality and gender. These ideas can be expressed by society at large or within the social circles of people of diverse sexuality and gender. Expressions such as “all lesbians have punch ups in their relationships”, or “all transgender folk use party drugs” or “if you're gay you will get AIDS” are examples of “normalising” behaviours and attitudes which may become abusive.

In addition to the reasons for which abuse occurs in other relationships, internalised phobias may be at work – for example: unconsciously a person may act out their own struggle with their sexuality by directing their anger and frustration at their partner. There can be a fuzzy logic at work which goes like this: “I hate being gay, I'm gay because I'm with you, you make me gay, and therefore I hate you”...

Emotional and psychological abuse can occur through the manipulation of information, or through perpetuating beliefs about heterosexist service providers; for example, telling a person that the support services and agencies are homophobic and will not provide assistance.

“He told me I didn't have the right to call myself gay because I wouldn't use amyl and have anal intercourse...”

Peer pressure

Abuse can manifest itself as peer pressure within certain groups for whom various forms of sexual expression are related to the identity of the group. This can apply to the use of “recreational” or “party” drugs and medications – for example, coercing a person to use “poppers”, ecstasy, Viagra, etc. ...

Which words are best to use when discussing abuse with people of diverse sexuality and gender?

Terms such as “domestic abuse”, “family violence”, and “intimate partner abuse” are frequently used in the literature available on the subject. While these terms can be useful for searching for more studies and research in the field, they can narrow the focus of understanding where people of diverse sexuality and gender are concerned, especially in the family setting where a person may be at risk of abuse from parents, siblings, their own children or members of their clan or mob.

People of diverse sexuality and gender may not perceive the abuse they are experiencing as “domestic abuse”, or “family violence”.

From studies of predominantly heterosexual couples, numerous models have been developed to explain abuse between partners. Much of this work focuses on explanations around power and control and a cycle of violence. Some studies are founded on paradigms based in patriarchal hierarchies and heteronormative socialisations. Underlying some of these models of understanding of abuse, between heterosexual couples, is the assumption of a power differential between male and female – these paradigms may not be appropriate for people of diverse sexuality and gender.

While established frameworks for understanding patterns of abusive behaviour may be useful, gender-based assumptions may not be appropriate, or relevant, in the exploration of abuse for people of diverse sexuality and gender. In fact, if applied unthinkingly, these paradigms lead to erroneous and trivialising conclusions such as “all men are equal”. Thus abuse between two same-sex attracted men is just “boys being boys” or likewise, that two women partners fighting is “just a cat fight”.

The diversity of abuse experienced by people of diverse sexuality and gender has not been well researched or documented. “One-size-fits-all” explanations of situations, feelings and behaviours may not be appropriate for people of diverse sexuality and gender whose experience of their difference and uniqueness can be a core element of their identity.

Similarly, labels such as “victim”, “perpetrator” and “abuser”, while common in older literature on the subject of abuse, can stigmatize both parties and set up barriers to understanding and remedy.

Remember: name-calling and labelling are forms of abuse. Many people of diverse sexuality and gender have painful experiences of being teased and called names because of their sexuality or identity. Be careful to avoid adding “victim” and “perpetrator” to that list. . .

“I was sick of being put-down and I just wanted to get that off my chest – I didn’t need to hear that I was a down-trodden victim”

Let the abusive behaviours describe themselves.

What is the incidence of abuse in relationships involving people of diverse sexuality and gender?

Abuse within relationships between people of diverse sexuality and gender is little researched and is likely to be under reported.

The studies conducted within Australia have indicated that people of diverse sexuality and gender are less likely to identify or describe their experiences of abuse with intimate partners as that of “domestic” abuse – thus contributing to under reporting.

Additionally, the lack of support services contributes to non-presentation and non-reporting of incidents of abuse.

Studies conducted among people of diverse sexuality and gender, in relation to all forms of abuse, show rates of greater than 70% of respondents having experienced, public insult and verbal abuse.

Those studies which have focused on elements of intimate partner abuse have shown that it is at least as common between same-sex attracted male couples as it is between heterosexual couples. For same-sex attracted female couples, some studies have indicated that the incidence of abuse is higher than that found between heterosexual couples. Higher levels of abuse have been reported among transgender males.

Overall, abuse is likely to be at least as common for people of diverse sexuality and gender as it is for the Australian community as a whole.

The main difference is that people of diverse sexuality and gender are less likely to describe or recognise their experience as abuse, and are less likely to report it. Many report modifying their daily activities for fear of prejudice or discrimination.

Barriers to seeking assistance

The broad social, political, legal and cultural context can have a significant influence on whether a person seeks assistance for abuse. Until recently homosexuality was a criminal activity. Homophobic violence is a reality and discrimination does occur. Media reporting of social issues, relating to people of diverse sexuality and gender, can sensationalise, trivialize and reinforce negative stereotypes.

The communities and social circles of many people of diverse sexuality and gender can be very small and there can be a sense that “everyone knows everyone”. Within this social context, revealing that abuse has occurred, or is occurring, can be seen as a betrayal of the group. This could expose the person to exclusion from their social support network. People may not report abuse due to feelings of shame or fear of retaliation.

Research indicates that lesbians and gay men tend to report crime less frequently than other groups.

For some people abuse is conceptualised and “normalised” as being part of their sexuality or identity. This could mean that the person accepts or believes that abuse always occurs within gay/trans/lesbian relationships. A person who sees abusive behaviour as a customary part of relationships is unlikely to seek outside assistance, report the abuse, or perceive the degree of harm that the behaviour can cause.

People of diverse sexuality and gender may feel that services provided by the police, health department and other non-government providers are not designed for them, or not able to provide assistance with their unique circumstances.

A person who reports physical abuse to the Police may fear that their case may be trivialised and not be given the appropriate attention.

A lesbian who seeks assistance at a women’s refuge may not feel safe there. For example, while men may be forbidden from entering the refuge, her abusive partner may still be able to walk straight in.

Previous experiences with service providers and previous experiences of discrimination, especially for people of diverse cultural or linguistic backgrounds, would reduce the likelihood of a person accessing services in the future, especially if the person were from a country where the expression of certain behaviours or sexual activity is illegal.

A person of diverse sexuality or gender who has not made public their sexual or gender identity may feel that they would have to “out” themselves to obtain services. To explain the circumstances of the abuse they are experiencing would require them to reveal the gender or sexuality of their partner.

Feelings, Behaviour, Identity

People are affected by many things; how they were brought up, their own thoughts and beliefs, the context or situation they find themselves in, or wanting to please or be pleased by others.

Many people take the world of growing from a girl or boy to a man or woman for granted. The process just happens by itself and falling in love, having sex, getting married, and having children just fits for them.

For others being male, female or unsure, or being attracted to a different sex are not so clear or are clearly different from the thoughts and feelings of those around them.

While some people plan and organise their lives, life just happens for others, so situations arise that were not prepared for, leaving the person unsure, insecure and unsafe.

Sexual orientation, physical and emotional attractions, gender and identity can be complex. A person's identity may be quite different from their sexual attraction and their behaviour. For example, a person may feel sexually attracted to members of the same sex but may, or may not, act on those feelings, and may, or may not, identify themselves as gay, or lesbian.

Sexuality: who or what you are attracted to, what turns you on or off, how much or how little you like to engage in sexual activity. Sexuality can be described as the sexual activity a person engages in or fantasizes about.

Gender: being male, female, intersex, transsexual, queer, bisexual - this may, or may not, be related to a person's genitals. Gender can be described as the body a person was born with.

Identity: who you think you are - the story you tell yourself about you.

Just because a person has sex with someone of the same gender they do not necessarily see themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual. A person's gender, sexuality and identity may each be very different. An otherwise happily married woman who has engaged in sexual activity with her close female friend may not identify as bisexual, or even consider herself as anything other than a married mother.

One way to think about sexuality, gender, and identity is along a series of continuous lines.

Feelings

A person's feelings, fantasies, and sexual or emotional attractions may be somewhere between

Same sex ----- Different sex

A person may be only attracted to members of the same gender, or members of another sex, or they may at different times feel attracted to others regardless of the gender of the other person.

Behaviour

A person's behaviour (who they actually have sex with) may be somewhere between

Same sex ----- Different sex

Identity

A person's identity (how they see themselves) may be somewhere between

Lesbian/Gay ----- Transsexual ----- Bisexual ----- Queer ----- Straight

Gender identity

A person's sense of how they feel, matched with their body or biology, may fall along the line from

Transgender ----- Cisgender

A person who sees themselves as transgender may feel that they were born into the wrong body. A cisgender person feels that their body matches their experience of themselves as male, female, or intersex.

Jane has only ever had sex with other women, and occasionally fantasises about a sexual relationship with men. She sees herself as bisexual but sometimes she thinks about living as a man. Her partner, Lee, has had male sexual partners, but she considers herself to be a lesbian and feels very comfortable in her female body.

Feelings, behaviour, identity and abusive behaviours

The spectrums of feelings, behaviours and identity can provide a useful way to initiate discussion about responding to feelings and engaging in abusive behaviours.

Just as a heterosexual person who occasionally feels sexual attraction to a person of the same gender may never act on those feelings - or identify as lesbian or gay - in the same way a person who feels anger or frustration at their partner may never engage in abusive behaviour, and would not identify as a “perpetrator”. Similarly, a person who is having a relationship with a person of the same sex may not identify as gay or lesbian, and when that person experiences abusive behaviour, they may not see themselves as a victim.

Feelings and behaviour can be placed on a spectrum which describes the transition from a person experiencing a particular emotion, and expressing that feeling, with actions that may be consistent, or not, with that feeling. For example, a person who feels very sad may express that in terms of being quiet and subdued, or by crying, or by putting on a brave face.

Feelings ----- Behaviour

Relationships with others often evoke powerful feelings and emotions – love, anger, frustration, desire . . .

Feelings do not have to dictate behaviours and behaviours do not have to define a person.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not a homogenous group, they originate from distinct cultural, linguistic and family groups with diverse social conventions. Previous experiences of oppression, dispossession, loss of cultural identity and racism are relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders of diverse sexuality and gender. Abuse may be experienced, perceived and interpreted, in a variety of ways.

While a high percentage of the incidents of abuse reported to the police involve Aboriginal people, in many instances Aboriginal people may not report abuse for fear of negative reaction and reprisals from community or family members.

Among some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the term “family violence” may be used as it is seen to be inclusive of intimate, family and other relationships of mutual obligation and support, and to describe abuse occurring across the full spectrum of family and caring relationships.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can be at increased risk of serious injury or hospitalisation, as a result of incidents of abuse.

When relating to people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background it may be appropriate to provide them with the option of speaking with a person of the same or different gender.

A sense of shame can particularly influence the person’s ability to comfortably describe the abuse they have experienced, especially where this may relate to taboo subjects such as sexual interactions, or where relating to people of diverse sexuality and gender.

For some Aboriginal people, English is their second language and this may present a barrier to explaining a situation and seeking assistance.

Clan, mob, or “collusion” in abuse can be a significant issue for some Aboriginal people. Leaving an abusive relationship, or going to the police, may result in reprisal by extended family members. The entire person’s group may disown them, or threaten to do so, in response to a disclosure of matters relating to sexuality, gender, sexual abuse, health status, or disability.

Some people of Aboriginal background who have gained acceptance of their sexuality, identity or gender, may not have found acceptance of their aboriginality. Some Aboriginal people of diverse sexuality and gender have “adopted” other ethnicities or origins; for example, saying they are Indonesian.

Trevor’s partner Mick is of Aboriginal descent. Whenever asked about his background Mick says he’s from India, otherwise he “gets an ear bashing” from Trevor.

People with disabilities

People with disabilities may rely, to varying degrees, on others such as family members, friends, carers (paid and voluntary) to assist them in meeting their day to day needs. Abusive behaviours can occur within these relationships, especially where the wishes of the person with the disability are different to those of the person assisting them.

A person who is otherwise well supported by their family or network may risk the threat of losing that support if they disclose their sexuality, or wish to act upon it. A family which supports the disability may not support sexuality or gender difference.

Different cultures and groups perceive and respond to disabilities in different ways. Within some belief systems, disability is seen as a path to enlightenment or greater human or spiritual understanding, either for the individual or their family, or both. However, diversity of sexuality and gender may be contrary to that belief system and a person who wishes to express their sexuality, or diverse identity, may be shunned by their group.

Abusive behaviours that may be of concern for people with disabilities could include:

- withholding medications, or delaying their purchase;
- controlling finances - obliging the person with the disability to disclose their PIN for “practical” reasons;
- neglect or failing to provide sufficient food or water;
- delaying toileting;
- refusing to assist, or actively preventing, a person from meeting their sexual needs or expressing their desires;
- exclusion from decision making.

People with disabilities may have particular logistic and physical difficulties in removing themselves from abusive situations; friends or refuges may not be able to cater for their daily needs, and they may need assistance from others to gain access to their own finances.

People living with HIV/AIDS

While the health status of people living with HIV/AIDS generally continues to improve for most Australians, prejudice and discrimination around a person's HIV status, or perceived status, remains high. HIV/AIDS are notifiable infections and when a person is identified as being HIV positive, there can be a sense of a loss of privacy, or "outing", where a person would not wish to communicate their HIV status to their partner, friends, or family. For some people an HIV diagnosis is also the point at which their sexuality is disclosed.

As with any private information which intimate friends, family, or carers may have access to, this information can be used in an abusive way.

It does not matter whether one partner, or both, or neither is HIV+, for the threat of infection, or cross-infection, to be used in an abusive way.

One person may coerce another to engage in unprotected sexual activity, by saying that their relationship would be better for it, or improved, if both partners were HIV+.

Abusive behaviours can occur around:

- withholding food, or transport;
- withholding medications, delaying filling prescriptions;
- refusing to take medications;
- threats to disclose a person's HIV status;
- false accusation of a person's HIV status (e.g. threatening to say someone is HIV+ when they are not);
- protected and unprotected sexual activity.

Transgender and Transsexual people

There is little acknowledgement within Australian society and bureaucracy of the gender continuums which exist across social and biological variations.

The term “transgendered” is usually used to describe people who behave, or identify, in ways which are not aligned with the socially constructed understanding of gender roles and boundaries. “Transgender” covers a diverse range of people such as:

- Cross-dressers – people who chose to wear clothing usually associated with a different gender;
- Intersex people – who may have been born with ambiguous, unclear, or dual sex characteristics;
- Gender dysphoric people – those who feel at odds with their biological gender;
- Transsexual women – biological men with a female identity;
- Transsexual men – biological women with a male identity.

Transgender people may identify as male, female or neither. Their identification as transgender may be distinct from their sexuality or gender preference in terms of sexual partner.

For a person who wishes to live in accordance with their preferred gender, their body and official documents revealing birth sex may be a source of tension and vulnerability. Abusive behaviours may be experienced in relation to:

- issues relating to gender affirmation surgery;
- medically or surgically altered body parts;
- medications and hormone treatments;
- “performance” – how closely does the person “pass” as being their preferred gender;
- legitimacy of relationships – is marriage possible?
- refusal to accept the person’s preferred gender, for example always using an differently gendered first name;
- blaming abusive behaviours on hormone treatments.

Diverse sexual activities

Diverse sexual activities are not unique to people of diverse sexuality and gender. Activities such as bondage and discipline and sadomasochism may be part of a subculture which is not necessarily associated with diverse sexuality and gender – the same goes for activities such as:

- arse play and anal sex
- biting
- dogging
- fisting
- orgies or sex parties
- piercing
- rimming
- scarification
- scat
- tit torture
- trampling
- urination
- use of sex aids and toys (dildos, cock rings, whips, leathers, viewing or reading pornography)
- use of sex enhancing drugs (amyl nitrate, erection enhancing drugs and creams)
- voyeurism

Sexual activity which is mutually agreed by all participants, that may involve hitting, slapping, pain, use of force, or dominance, is not necessarily abusive behaviour. These can be conscious and consensual activities where all parties agree to their roles, as well as the time and place, for a particular scene. Some people may take on roles of dominance or submission which are fully negotiated with their partner. As such, these roles and activities are not in themselves abusive.

Some people may be reluctant to discuss their engagement in sexual practices. It is useful to remember that acts such as sodomy are illegal in many countries and, in some cases, punishable by death.

Abusive behaviour occurs where the person does not consent to the behaviours and activities at a particular time. A person who may sometimes engage in a particular activity may, at any time, withdraw their consent or permission to take part in that activity.

Abusive behaviours can also be exhibited in ways such as threatening to disclose a person's preferred sexual activities or roles, or to publish photographs of a person engaged in particular activities - where this is against the wishes of the person - or coercing a person to repeat an activity which they had experimented with once, but found they didn't like.

Abuse can also occur where one person uses another's desire for a particular activity to coerce them into other situations. This can occur through withholding sexual activities. There is a diverse range of media and opportunities to initiate sexual relationships. Contacts may be made:

- at beats;
- at "sex on premises venues";
- at brothels;
- through sms networks which provide details of hook ups, parties or dogging activity;
- through response to newspaper advertisements (e.g. personal column);
- through online social networks and dating sites (e.g. Facebook, RSVP, Gaydar, EBay dating, chatrooms);
- through response to advertisements placed on noticeboards in adult bookstores.

Considerations when assisting people of diverse sexuality and gender

When assisting a person of diverse sexuality and gender, consider:

- safety first - plan for the physical, psychological and emotional safety of the person;
- the methodologies or models you are familiar with for providing various forms of psychological, emotional or social support (e.g. Egan model, Rogerian psychotherapy) may not be appropriate for that person;
- taking your cues from the language the person is using themselves – allow the person to use their own words to describe situations, acts and deeds;
- the meanings of words to describe relationships do not mean the same thing to everyone, for example “partner” may, or may not, imply a monogamous sexual relationship, and an “uncle” may, or may not, be a biological relation. Not everyone shares the same understanding of gay, straight, bisexual, or queer;
- that a person may not perceive the situation, or their experiences, as abusive;
- using supportive language;
- asking questions if you do not understand the meaning of something;
- being mindful of the stereotypes which apply to people of diverse sexuality and gender;
- there are limited appropriate formal support structures and services for people of diverse sexuality and gender;
- how appropriate, or how safe, a particular service provider may be for a particular person of diverse sexuality and gender.

Is your organisation ready to assist people of diverse sexuality and gender?

The perception of an organisation, by a person of diverse sexuality and gender, may greatly affect their ability and willingness to seek assistance and services.

Your organisation may already provide high quality, bias-free services to all potential clients and may be well-known in the mainstream community, but is it really ready to assist a person of diverse sexuality and gender? Would that person know that you are available to assist them and understand their needs?

How many of the following apply to your organisation?

- My organisation actively and openly seeks to support people of diverse sexuality and gender.
- My organisation openly advertises its services to people of diverse sexuality and gender.
- My organisation has current policies and procedures which cover people of diverse sexuality and gender.
- My organisation has a resource list which includes specific safe places and organisations for people of diverse sexuality and gender.
- My organisation keeps statistical information in relation to people of diverse sexuality and gender.
- My organisation maintains regular communication with other organisations that support people of diverse sexuality and gender.
- My organisation provides regular staff training in relation to people of diverse sexuality and gender.

Glossary

The following terms are provided as a guide to understanding. It is useful to note that many of these terms have different meanings and connotations for individual people of diverse sexuality and gender.

Asexual people may experience no sexual desire for any person, or may not engage in any form of sexual activity. An asexual person may form a romantic relationship with another person of any gender, sexuality or identity.

Beats are also known as “tearooms” in the USA, or “cottages” in the UK. These are predominantly public places, such as parks, toilets or car parks, at which people (primarily men) meet for anonymous sexual activity. Encounters are usually random and unplanned. Known beats may be the target of homophobic violence and police patrols may be common.

Bisexual people may be sexually attracted to people of the same gender and the opposite gender. For some, bisexuality implies that there are two opposed genders or sexes (male and female) and that both are sexually attractive. For others bisexuality includes an attraction to people regardless of the gender of the other person.

A Boi may be a woman who behaves in a manner similar to a heterosexual male, a male who behaves in a submissive sexual manner, or a gay male who displays effeminate traits. The term Boi may have a wide range of meanings relating to sexual and gender roles.

Gay men identify predominantly as men who are same sex attracted.

Gender dysphoric people may describe themselves as being at odds emotionally, or psychologically, with their gender, or birth sex some, or all, of the time. They may display behaviours that are attributed more commonly with people of another gender. They may be sexually attracted to a person regardless of that person’s gender identity or biological sex.

Intersex people may have characteristics which are considered to be biologically male and female, or they may have atypical physical features which do not allow for classification as male or female.

Lesbians identify predominantly as women who are same sex attracted.

Men who have sex with men and who do not identify as gay (MSMs) are men who may engage in same sex sexual activity, but who may identify as bisexual, or straight. Many MSMs may be heterosexually partnered men who engage in casual sex with other men, possibly at beats or SOPVs.

Omnisexual or **pansexual people** may experience sexual, romantic, or aesthetic attraction to others, regardless of the gender identity or biological sex of the other person. Gender and sex are often insignificant or irrelevant in determining whether a pansexual person is attracted to another.

Polysexual people may be attracted to more than one gender or sex. They may choose not to identify as bisexual as this implies that there are only two opposed genders or sexes.

Queens may be gay men who adopt identities and behaviours which are perceived as effeminate. They may also take on a female persona in speech and mannerism, or dress as a woman.

Queer people may question the social and biological essentialism of the genders and sexes and experience a fluid or multifaceted sexuality or identity. The term Queer, may be considered offensive by some people of diverse sexuality and gender, however it is frequently used as an umbrella term to include lesbian, gay, transgender, intersex and other people.

Questioning people may avoid labelling themselves so as to explore the possibilities of their sexuality and gender identity.

Sex on premises venues (SOPVs). The vast majority of these venues are legitimate businesses. Patrons pay an entry fee that allows them access to saunas, spas and rooms, in which they then can have sexual contact with other patrons. The sexual activity which occurs at these venues may be between anonymous strangers, or between regular clients.

Takatāpui is a Maori word which means “partner of the same sex”. Recently it has been adopted by Maori people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or transsexual.

Transgender people may identify as male, female or neither. Their identification as transgender may be distinct from their sexuality, or gender preference, in terms of sexual partners.

A transsexual woman may be a biological man with a female identity.

A transsexual man may be a biological woman with a male identity.

Women who have sex with women and who do not identify as gay or lesbian (WSWs) are women who may engage in same sex sexual activity but who may identify as bisexual, or straight. Many WSWs may be heterosexually partnered women who engage in casual sex with other women, or who establish a sexual friendship with another woman.

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