

Fostering a Welcoming Environment Brief Case Study

Step 1: Review the following brief case study. IMPORTANT NOTE: The case study ends *at the beginning* of an intake appointment and does not describe what a full intake with an LGBTQ client would likely entail.

A woman sees a poster in a community center with an image of a same-sex relationship and the words – “*No one deserves to be abused.*” She makes a mental note of the local domestic violence agency website address and stops by the public library to look up the website. She clicks on the link called “*Are you safe in your relationship?*” and finds information about domestic violence, including domestic violence in relationships among people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning. She decides to call the hotline number to ask for help.

The Hotline Counselor is warm, caring and attentive. The woman shares that her boyfriend has been physically, financially and sexually abusive for the past 3 years. She wants the abuse to stop, though she is not sure she wants to leave the relationship. The Counselor listens and reflects back what she hears without making assumptions about the caller and her situation. The Counselor helps her with basic safety planning and tells her how to schedule an intake appointment with an Advocate.

On the day of her intake appointment, the woman enters the office and finds it to be a warm space. A poster on a wall says, “*We are committed to providing the best possible services to all domestic violence victims/survivors regardless of age, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability/disability and health/mental health status.*” There is also a bright rainbow flag hanging and brochures about domestic violence, including domestic violence among people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning. She fills out a few forms, including one that asks, “What is your sexual orientation?” The options for responses include: bisexual, gay, heterosexual, lesbian, questioning/unsure, and decline to answer. The form also asks, “What is your gender identity?” The options for responses include: female, male, transgender (female-to-male), transgender (male-to-female), and decline to answer. She leaves both questions blank.

When the Advocate begins the intake, she tells the woman that the agency has a non-discriminatory policy and reiterates that they serve all victims/survivors of domestic violence. Throughout the intake, the Advocate respects and reflects back the language the woman uses to describe herself and her relationship. The Advocate tells the woman she is glad she reached out for help and that no one deserves to be abused. The client then reveals that her abusive partner is a woman, not a man. She explains that she wasn’t sure how the Advocate would react, but she felt she could share this information at this point, based on her positive experiences with the organization so far...

Step 2: What did the organization, Hotline Counselor and Advocate do well in providing accessible services to this woman? Share your thoughts with the large group.

Intake Interview Case Study

Part 1: A woman comes in for an intake. She is about 5 feet 3 inches tall and has a small frame. She is dressed in a skirt and high heels. She's cheerful, smiles, shakes your hand and sits down. After you explain your agency's commitment to inclusion and non-discrimination, she tells you that she's a lesbian and that she's being abused by her partner.

1. How would you take (or not take) into consideration her size, presentation, apparent physical strength and gender expression (e.g., masculine, feminine, androgynous, etc.)?

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Part 2: You ask her, "What brings you to (your organization's name) today?" She begins to describe an incident that happened the night before.

"Well, my partner and I were supposed to meet at a restaurant for a special dinner at 8:15," she begins. "She didn't show up 'til 8:20. I was so mad. She doesn't know how to show respect. It just ruined the evening for me. I got up and left. She followed me and wanted to talk. We got into an argument. I was fed up with her so I got in my car to go. Then she started hitting and kicking on my car door. She's so out of control and abusive. So that's why I came here today."

2. How would you respond? What questions might you ask in order to get a fuller picture of the relationship?

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Part 3: She tells you that she was supposed to give her partner a ride home that evening but decided to leave her in the city because she was fed up with the abuse. She also tells you that her partner is abusive because her partner controls a sum of money she's inherited, even though she's given her partner money in the past. She also says that the partner was "nothing" before she met her and that her partner is ungrateful for everything she's done for her. She tells you that she made sure that her partner knew she was seeking domestic violence victim services today and that she's been reaching out to all of her partner's friends to get support around her partner's abusive behavior.

3. What behavior patterns are you looking for in order to determine if this person is a victim or potentially an abusive partner?

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Part 4: She reiterates her partner's culpability in creating the incident – that if she hadn't been late, none of it would have happened. She focuses the conversation on her own needs, wants and dissatisfactions in the relationship and puts her partner down. She's concerned that her partner is cheating, taking advantage of everything that she's done for her and could possibly leave her. She wants help to make sure that her partner doesn't get away with this.

4. What is your assessment of the situation? Would you approve this person for services?

5. What resources might you access in order to get professional advice on this case?

Intake Interview Case Study Discussion Guide

Part 1:

1. How would you take (or not take) into consideration her size, presentation, apparent physical strength and gender expression (e.g., masculine, feminine, androgynous, etc.)?

Many people have the misconception that the larger, more masculine-looking or masculine identified partner is the batterer in same-sex abusive relationships. However, gender identity and presentation do not determine one's behavioral patterns with regard to power, control and abuse. Caution should be taken not to make the assumption that there is a correlation between size or stature or identity and abusive behavioral patterns. Be cautious and self-aware about any stereotypes, biases, prejudices, or assumptions that you may bring to your work. The focus should be on determining behavioral patterns and the feelings behind them, rather than on making determinations based on the individual's appearance or identity.

Part 2:

2. How would you respond? What questions might you ask in order to get a fuller picture of the relationship?

Learn as much about the situation as possible by encouraging the client to tell their story without any leading or direction. Open-ended questions can elicit information about the situation, how the client views the situation and what the client needs. If the incident seems unclear to you, you can ask follow-up questions to determine what else happened that night, before and after the incident the client described. Ask open-ended questions that will provide you with more information that can help you determine if there is a pattern of abuse. Sample questions include:

- What else has happened recently?
- How did that make you feel?
- How do you feel about your partner?
- How are decisions made in your relationship?
- Does she know you're here today?

Part 3:

3. What behavior patterns are you looking for in order to determine if this person is a victim or potentially an abusive partner?

Survivors typically take more responsibility for incidents that occur in the relationship, while batterers typically take little responsibility for the relationship. Survivors typically behave in a way to please their partner so that they will calm down or keep their anger at bay, while batterers often try to control their partner in order to manage their anxiety. Survivors usually have less concern for their own well-being yet want to help their partner, while batterers tend to be overly concerned about themselves personally, with little regard for their partner. Some behavioral patterns to assess include:

- How they describe their partner.
- Who is blaming whom, and who is taking responsibility.
- How they feel about their partner.
- If they are unable to do something they need or want to do, like leave the house.
- How they feel when they don't get their way.
- If one party has more control in the relationship.
- Who they are most concerned about in the relationship, themselves or their partner.

Part 4:

4. What is your assessment of the situation? Would you approve this person for services?

Based on the information, you may determine that it does not appear that she is being abused and would not be eligible for services.

5. What resources might you access in order to get professional advice on this case?

Contact the Lead Training and Technical Assistance Providers for your region.

**Same-Sex Domestic Violence
Questions to Assess Relationship Dynamics and Behavioral Patterns**

Note: These are questions for the intake interviewer to reflect and review, not questions that should be directly asked to a client. Clients should be asked open-ended, non-leading questions.

General

1. How do they describe their partner?
2. How do they feel about their partner?
3. How does the client describe the abuse and the impact has had on them?

Awareness and Concern

4. How aware are they of their partner's needs/feelings?
5. Who are they most concerned about?

Blame and Responsibility

6. Do they blame their partner?
7. Do they take responsibility for their actions?
8. Does their primary motivation appear to be to protect themselves or to blame others?
9. Does either partner admit to abuse/violence against their partner and how do they explain it? Is there blame or responsibility taken?

Power and Control

10. How do they feel when they don't get what they want?
11. Do they describe being unable to do something they need or want to do, like leave the house?
12. Does one person seem to have more control over more aspects of the relationship?
13. Who seems to be more in control of the other person? Who seems to make most of the decisions? Who gets their way most of the time?
14. Has one partner changed their job, friends, socialization patterns, ideas and activities in response to the other person's requirements?
15. What have been the consequences of disagreement?
16. Distinguish between abusive and assertive behavior. Some people label any behavior that they dislike or find painful, 'abuse.' It is important to find out exactly what happened before labeling the behavior.

Cycle of Violence

17. Who initiated the violent incident? (It is important to remember here that although someone may strike the first 'blow,' they may have done so because a past pattern of abuse alerted them to imminent violence.)
18. Is this a pattern of behavior? Has the abusive partner committed one or more of these acts more than once?
19. Who is afraid of whom? Without prompting, has the client indicated they are afraid of their partner? Are they afraid to stay in their home with their partner? Are they afraid to fight or disagree with their partner? (Some people will not say that they are afraid but their behavior patterns may suggest that indeed they are.)

If a client has been aggressive or violent:

- What was the intent behind their violent behavior? Was it to: control the partner or cause their partner to change their behavior?; hurt or injure their partner?; to retaliate against their partner who was abusive in the past?; to protect themselves?
- Have they ever inflicted an injury on their partner (either emotional or physical)? How severe were those injuries? What was the effect of this violent behavior on their partner?
- Was the person's use of physical or verbal aggression a pattern of behavior or an isolated incident?
- What was the sequence of events leading up to the violence? What do they see as being the cause of the violence?
- Has their style of 'fighting' changed over time and how has it changed?
- Have they ever had a previous violent relationship? If so, how do they describe that relationship?
- How do they feel about the violent incident? Who do they see as being to blame or responsible?

Questions adapted from Veinot, Tiffany. Intake and Screening with LGBTQ Individuals. Retrieved on August 9, 2007 from <http://www.springtideresources.net/resources/show.cfm?id=144>.

**Screening to Differentiate Between Batterer and Victim
Additional Resources**

Becky Marrujo and Mary Kreger. "Definition of Roles in Abusive Relationships." In *Violence in Gay and Lesbian Domestic Partnerships*. Clare Renzetti and Charles Harvey Miley, eds. (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 1996).

Beth Zemsky. "Screening for Survivor Services (or "Are We Serving the 'Right Woman?')." In *Confronting Lesbian Battering: A Manual for the Battered Women's Movement*. (St. Paul, Minnesota, 1990).

Chris Heer. "Battering or Mutual Abuse? How to Assess Battering in Lesbian Couples." *New Jersey Coalition of Battered Women Newsletter* (Spring 1992).

Clare Renzetti. *Violent Betrayal: Partner Abuse in Lesbian Relationships*. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992).

Daniel G. Saunders. "Wife Abuse, Husband Abuse or Mutual Combat?: A Feminist Perspective on the Empirical Findings." In *Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse*. Kersti Yllo and Michele Bograd, eds. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988).

Nancy Hammond. "Lesbian victims of relationship violence". *Women and therapy*. 8, 1/2 (1988).