



National LGBTQ Institute on
Intimate Partner Violence

A GUIDE TO

Rest and Resistance

Support group for
LGBTQIA2S+ Survivors
of Intimate Partner Violence

**“If you can’t love yourself,
how in the hell you gonna love somebody else?”
- Ru Paul**

Goal/Objective:

Create a space in which LGBTQIA2S+ survivors can rest in the knowledge that they are safe, heard, and believed. Foster an environment that reduces isolation and provides opportunities for LGBTQIA2S+ survivors to develop a sense of camaraderie and resist the pervasiveness of intimate partner violence in their community together.

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Summary:

Survivors often come to support groups seeking to be among others who understand and relate to their experiences. The Rest and Resistance Support Group for LGBTQIA2S+ survivors of intimate partner violence creates a space for survivors who may hesitate to share parts of their stories and parts of themselves because other participants in mainstream support groups may not understand or relate to their experiences, or may even be openly hostile toward them because of their identity. LGBTQIA2S+ survivors experience unique challenges when accessing services from mainstream organizations, such as discrimination by other shelter clients, advocates using the wrong pronouns, shelters not accepting transgender folks, and more.

The Rest and Resistance Support Group provides a safe environment designed by and for LGBTQIA2S+ people in which the participants understand each other's lived experiences on a deeper level.

The philosophy of Rest and Resistance is a balance between two priorities. The first is a safe space in which queer survivors can express themselves freely and feel heard and understood. The second is honoring and embodying resistance and mutual aid as a core tenant of queer culture and history. Historically, when LGBTQIA2S+ people come together to discuss a form of oppression facing their communities, it isn't just to hold space for each other. It's also to organize solutions.

The culture of many nonprofit organizations providing services has evolved into a culture of hyper-professionalism, and all but abandoned the roots of mutual aid and grassroots organizing that made their work possible. Empowerment-based identity-specific services need to be adapted beyond simple things like asking for pronouns. We need to be willing to step outside of rigid practices and be willing to embrace participants' ideas and desires no matter how different they are from how we are used to doing things.



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Facilitators

Ideally, this group is facilitated as a collaborative effort between an LGBTQIA2S+ resource center or community organization, or recognized local leader in the LGBTQIA2S+ community, and an organization that specifically provides advocacy services for survivors and victims of intimate partner violence. This will require releases of information to be signed between organizations to allow communication between facilitators regarding participants' safety needs.

We encourage the group to be both survivor-led and queer-led. This means facilitators should ideally be LGBTQIA2S+ survivors of intimate partner violence themselves. This also means facilitators should involve group participants in decision-making whenever possible.

Facilitator Competencies

At least one, but ideally both, of the facilitators should have skills in these core competencies:

- LGBTQIA2S+ identity and culture
- Power and control dynamics in abusive relationships
- Danger assessment
- Safety planning
- Empowerment-based support for survivors of intimate partner violence
- Screening to identify the primary aggressor in an abusive relationship
- Trauma response
- Knowledge of specific marginalizations experienced by bisexual and transgender communities. These are the queer identities most impacted by intimate partner violence, but are often left out of training and sometimes rejected in queer spaces.
- Group facilitation
- Restorative justice principles
- Root causes of intimate partner violence in society
- Social justice principles and how they apply to communication within diverse groups

“Trauma Stewardship”

The well-being of the facilitators matters just as much as that of the group participants. Many mainstream organizations either overtly or covertly encourage martyrdom among their helper employees, glorifying overtime, a lack of boundaries, and making client emergencies into their own emergencies. This is not in the spirit of grassroots LGBTQIA2S+ and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) organizing culture. Audre Lorde, a black lesbian feminist writer, activist, and poet, famously said “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political

warfare.” If facilitators need a reason to care for themselves beyond their own self-interest, martyrdom is not culturally responsive in working with the LGBTQIA2S+ community.

The writers recommend the book *Trauma Stewardship* by Laura Vandernoot Lipsky as a practical guide to digging deep into the belief systems among helping professionals that lead to burnout, martyrdom, and resentment. Trauma Exposure Response is as natural and innate to the human condition as post-traumatic stress from a firsthand experience. Hearing survivor stories impacts us.¹ Regular check-ins with your co-facilitator, not only to discuss the dynamics of the group, but to discuss your own wellbeing can build resilience in the facilitators, which is important for the longevity of the program.

¹ Citation: Lipsky, L. van D., & Burk, C. (2009). *Trauma stewardship: an everyday guide to caring for self while caring for others*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.



Outreach

Growing participation for a new support group, especially with a marginalized community, often takes time, patience, effort, and trust-building. LGBTQIA2S+ folks may not identify what they are experiencing as domestic violence for a variety of reasons. They may not believe services are for them. They may worry about who else will be part of the group. There are many deterrents to consider and address when doing outreach.

Accessibility

Assess the accessibility of the group before doing outreach. Be honest with yourself and improve where you can, but be transparent with potential participants about shortcomings in the accessibility of your group.

Some things to consider:

- Is the group hosted in a wheelchair-accessible location?
- Is handicap parking available?
- Do emergency signals, like fire alarms, include a visual element for deaf folks?
- Are there gender inclusive bathrooms in the location?
- Can you travel to the location using public transit?
- Do you have a budget for an interpreter to be present for all sessions?
- Is the group racially diverse, or can a new member of color anticipate being the only BIPOC person there?
- Are both the facilitators white?
- Are both the facilitators cisgender?
- Are most of the people in the group cisgender? Are they mostly women?

- Is the group specifically for women or are all genders welcome?
- Is childcare provided?
- Is a meal provided?
- Will group take place after regular work hours to accommodate those who work 9-5, or will it be during the morning or afternoon to accommodate those who work at night?
- Are your materials available in braille or in large print?
- Are your materials available in other languages?
- Are there nuts or other potential airborne allergens in the location?
- Does the location have a robust security system?
- Can participants' cars be seen from the street?
- Do participants need to have an ID?
- Do you have to be sober to attend the group or to be at the host location?
- Is the group for survivors at all stages of an abusive relationship, or is it specifically for survivors who have left?
- What else can you think of as it relates to accessibility?

Gender specific groups

We strongly recommend LGBTQIA2S+ groups be open to people of all gender identities. Statements like “women and nonbinary people” can be dismissive and invalidating of nonbinary people who present as feminine. Ask yourself if your group for “women and nonbinary people” would be welcoming for nonbinary people who present as masculine. If you don't want men and masculine people in your group, just say it's a women's group. Don't say the group is inclusive of people along the spectrum of gender if it's not.

Some potential members may not be comfortable with an all-gender group. They may express discomfort with men and masculine people being in the group. While their feelings may be rooted in very real traumatic experiences, “women+” or “women and femme” groups require facilitators to make inappropriate and problematic decisions

about who is “feminine enough” to be in the group. It is best to refer those folks to a group that is just for women.

TERF stands for “trans-exclusionary radical feminist.” TERFs falsely believe that transgender women are men trying to infiltrate women’s spaces and undermine the progress of the feminist movement. Someone who is invested in the ideas of TERFs may express discomfort with transgender women being included in the group.

We choose to center the needs of the most marginalized rather than the biases of those in dominant groups. If a group member expresses this type of discomfort or TERF philosophy, consider the impact that could have on other members of the group, and whether it is appropriate for them to be included.



For Domestic Violence Advocates

Some domestic violence providers make the mistake of jumping into outreach before they are prepared to provide culturally responsive services for a minority population. Word travels fast within the community if an LGBTQIA2S+ person has a good or bad experience with an organization. Having one LGBTQIA2S+ employee and sending all the LGBTQIA2S+ referrals to them is inadequate. The domestic violence provider involved in the support group should ensure all staff and volunteers within their organization receive training on how to work with the LGBTQIA2S+ community and are prepared to provide services to them outside of group. They should also work to recruit and *retain* LGBTQIA2S+ advocates, which could involve transforming the culture of the organization and institutionalizing changes that go beyond training. Providing LGBTQIA2S+ employees with leadership opportunities and involving them in decision-making is important for guiding those changes, but the insight they provide based on their lived experiences must be valued equally or perhaps more than institutional knowledge, or we may be engaging in tokenizing.

Intake paperwork can play a major role in identifying LGBTQIA2S+ clients who may be interested in group. Many LGBTQIA2S+ people, including the populations most affected by domestic violence, have hidden identities. We may assume a bisexual+ women or “passing” transgender women seeking services for an abusive relationship with a man are not LGBTQIA2S+, and we may screen them out of essential culturally responsive services, like the Rest and Resistance Support Group. Some organizations leave questions about sexual orientation and gender identity off of intake forms for fear they will offend straight and cisgender clients who are homophobic and transphobic. If you are prioritizing the comfort of clients who harbor biases toward minority groups over providing adequate services to LGBTQIA2S+ clients on a systemic level as an organization, such as through intake paperwork, consider that your organization may have some work to do before it is ready to launch a support group for LGBTQIA2S+ survivors.

Some suggested outreach tactics for domestic violence (DV) programs to recruit group participants:

- Ask about sexual orientation and gender identity on intake paperwork so you can identify potential participants.
- Staff and volunteers know about the group and how to refer people.
- Have an engaging booth at pride events and other local LGBTQIA2S+ events.
- Repeatedly attend LGBTQIA2S+ events in the community so people get to know you and see you show up consistently and all year, not just at pride.
- Invest in LGBTQIA2S+ specific merchandise and promotional materials.
- Have pamphlets specifically for the Rest and Resistance Support Group displayed prominently in your space.
- Have information specifically for LGBTQIA2S+ survivors on your website.
- Have images of LGBTQIA2S+ people on your website and materials.
- Have LGBTQIA2S+ speakers at your awareness events.
- Put up posters about the group in coffee shops, gay bars, and other public spaces where LGBTQIA2S+ people gather.
- Inform community partners such as therapists, healthcare providers, school social workers, law enforcement, local colleges, etc. about the group and how to refer people.
- Train partnering organizations, especially those providing culturally-specific services to BIPOC communities and LGBTQIA2S+ communities, on how to recognize the signs of intimate partner violence so that they can refer people.

For LGBTQIA2S+ organizations

Many people are invested in the myth that domestic violence is always a straight, cisgender, man abusing a straight, cisgender, woman. Abuse toward LGBTQIA2S+ folks can sometimes appear to follow that trend even when it doesn't. Due to these myths and the "behind closed doors" nature of the problem, many LGBTQIA2S+ organizations do not consider domestic violence a "queer issue," but the numbers tell a different story.

Statistically LGBTQIA2S+ people as a whole are just as likely to experience intimate partner abuse as straight and cisgender people, but some identities- specifically bisexual+ and transgender- are at a dramatically exacerbated risk.

LGBTQIA2S+ organizations that do not invest resources and time in supporting survivors of domestic violence should consider that they may be perpetuating bisexual+ erasure and missing an important element of addressing the pervasive violence toward the transgender community.



Some suggested outreach tactics for LGBTQIA2S+ programs to recruit group participants:

- Signage, pamphlets, and resources about the warning signs of domestic violence prominently displayed in your space.
- Signage and pamphlets about the Rest and Resistance support group at events.
- Information about domestic violence and resources for survivors on your website.
- Educational workshops on healthy vs. unhealthy relationships for community members.
- Awareness campaign during domestic violence awareness month.

- Presence at awareness events and other events hosted by the local domestic violence advocacy organization.
- Staff and volunteers know the warning signs of domestic violence and how to refer people to the group.
- Training local domestic violence advocates, police, and other first responders on best practices for working with the LGBTQIA2S+ community and how to refer people to the group.
- Talking about the support group at LGBTQIA2S+ community gatherings.
- Hosting bisexual+ affinity spaces and talking about the group.
- Hosting transgender affinity spaces and talking about the group.
- Hosting BIPOC affinity spaces and talking about the group.

Collaborative

We found that a combined social media campaign was one effective way to recruit group participants and broaden both organizations' reach and influence. While social media trends change over time, reels of the group facilitators talking about the group were found to be especially effective. We learned that it's important for the first few seconds to be interesting, so the viewer stays engaged and continues watching the video. We like to start reels with a blooper. Here are some topics for reels and other social media content that can be engaging, informative, and helpful:

- Get to know the facilitators
- What is the Rest and Resistance Support Group?
- How do you join the group? What is the intake process? How do I know my abuser won't be in the group?
- Confidentiality and other group norms
- Dynamics of DV in LGBTQIA2S+ relationships
- Warning signs of an abusive relationship
- Bisexual+ people are "queer enough" for group
- Group is trans-affirming

- People who were abused in a heterosexual-presenting relationship are welcome
- Myth busting (ex. DV does happen in the lesbian community)
- Statistics about DV in the LGBTQIA2S+ community
- Barriers unique to LGBTQIA2S+ people in abusive relationships
- How to support LGBTQIA2S+ survivors in our lives and how to refer them to the Rest and Resistance Support Group



Referrals and Screening



Referrals can come from anywhere, but participants must be screened by the domestic violence advocacy organization. Promotional materials will direct those who are interested in group to the domestic violence advocacy organization for screening and any individual support that might be needed for them to safely participate. Releases of information will be collected so that inter-agency communication can be facilitated and both organizations can document services that they are providing to each individual.

It is important for the domestic violence advocacy agency to take on the intake process because they collect information about abusers from survivors across the community and can cross reference their system for red flags or safety issues. This initial meeting is also an opportunity to talk about safety concerns, conduct risk assessments, and discuss the goals and objectives of the group to ensure it is a good fit. Lastly, it is an opportunity to assess if the survivor needs any accommodation or has other support needs that should be addressed prior to attending group.

In a same sex relationship in which abuse is occurring, we found that it is more common for both parties to seek advocacy services than in heterosexual relationships. This group is for people who have been the victim of their intimate partner systematically seeking power and control over them. The use of violence or abusive tactics doesn't necessarily indicate which party should be in the group; we look specifically at power dynamics when we are screening participants. While the safety of the client and advocate come first, the process of screening and declining services should be respectful, restorative, and compassionate wherever possible. Those who are declined should be offered other more appropriate resources.

Screening procedure:

Follow-up questions can be asked at the discretion of the person screening the survivor, but standardized questions can help us avoid bias. These standardized questions should be asked of everyone to reduce bias that may come up.

- Can you tell me a bit about why you are interested in this group?
- What are some things the person who harmed you has done to make you feel unsafe, disrespected, or in control of you?
- Your answer to this question doesn't disqualify you from participating in this group. Have you ever used tactics that might be considered abusive in your relationship?
 - If the person discloses that they've used these tactics in self-defense or to regain a sense of autonomy and control in the context of an abusive relationship, but not as a method of exerting power and control over their partner, respond with validating and normalizing statements. (Ex. "It's common for victims to use methods in self-defense or to stay safe that could be considered abusive out of context or even get them arrested.")
- Are you currently in a relationship with the person who caused you harm? If so, are they aware you're participating in this group?
- Do you believe the person who caused you harm may be stalking or monitoring you?
- Are you concerned about your own or other group participants' safety if you choose to participate?
- Are you a mandated reporter yourself?
 - This doesn't disqualify them from the group. Domestic violence advocates have different mandated reporting requirements than other types of professionals in many states. It's important to be open and forthcoming with everyone in the group about information that might need to be shared outside of the group.

Group Agreements

Establishing Group Agreements:

Why It Matters

When individuals come together in a support group, they often share personal experiences and emotions in a vulnerable space. To foster a supportive and constructive environment for discussions, it is essential to establish group agreements from the beginning. These provide a framework for how members will interact with one another, ensuring that the group operates in a way that is respectful, safe, and effective. Setting these guidelines in the first session helps to establish a clear foundation and sets the tone for all future interactions. Reviewing them at the beginning of each group informs new members of the agreements and gives them a chance to ask questions or add agreements that are important to them. It also reminds returning members of what they've agreed to.

One of the primary goals of any support group is to foster a sense of safety. When participants feel safe, they are more likely to share openly and honestly, knowing their experiences and feelings will be respected. Group norms help to create this sense of safety by outlining expectations around confidentiality, respectful communication, and empathy, for instance. As an example, norms around “listening without interrupting” or “maintaining confidentiality outside of the group” help to ensure that participants feel secure in expressing themselves without fear of judgment.

When group members are unsure about how the group will function, it can lead to uncertainty and anxiety. Having clear expectations established early on provides structure, so everyone knows what to expect in terms of behavior, participation, and group dynamics. This can

include guidelines around speaking turns, staying on topic, or respecting each person's individual pace in sharing. This early agreement on behavior and expectations helps communicate to the group that there is a commitment to creating a positive and safe space for all involved, where everyone's voice is valued.

Involving Participants in Creating Group Norms:

A Collaborative Approach

One of the most powerful ways to establish group agreements is to involve the participants directly in the process. By engaging the group in a collaborative activity where they help define the rules and expectations, you create a sense of ownership and investment in the group's culture. This not only helps people feel more connected to the group but also makes them more likely to buy into and follow the agreed-upon norms. Additionally, participating in this exercise as a group helps to begin building rapport among members. As people share their thoughts on what makes them feel safe and supported, they may recognize that they share similar needs and experiences.

Another valuable aspect of involving participants in setting group agreements is the opportunity to tap into the diverse lived experiences that each person brings to the group. Different backgrounds, experiences, and values can lead to the identification of important factors that might not have been considered otherwise. For instance, someone may suggest a norm around ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities, or another might propose a specific way to support people who experience anxiety in group settings.

Guiding Questions for Developing Group Agreements

To help guide participants in developing their group agreements, you can ask questions that encourage self-reflection and group dialogue. These questions can help identify what will foster participation and communication while addressing any potential barriers. Some helpful questions include:

- What would help you to participate most fully in this group?
- What would make it possible for you to share vulnerable thoughts and feelings?
- What would prevent you from expressing yourself?
- What do you think fosters communication?
- What do you think shuts down communication?

As facilitators, we decided that the following agreements are non-negotiable, though each group can come up with additional agreements and expectations.

- Confidentiality
- Respect
- Speak from your own experience, no advice-giving
- No drugs or alcohol allowed on site or attending group under the influence.

Reviewing and Revisiting Group Norms

While it's essential to establish group norms during the first session, it's equally important to maintain an ongoing discussion about these norms, especially in an open group where participants may come and go over time. In an open group setting, you may have new members joining periodically, and some members may leave or transition out, which means the group's dynamics can shift. Revisiting group norms at the start of each session ensures that everyone is on the same page and that the group remains grounded in its collective agreements.

When group rules are violated, we encourage open dialogue about the impact of the violation on other members and the use of restorative practices. We believe in holding folks accountable for their behavior and giving them a chance to grow and change. There are some behaviors for which a participant should be removed from a group:

- Using physical violence or threatening physical violence
- Repeatedly showing up under the influence or using substances on site
- Breaking confidentiality
- Repeat violations of group norms

Restorative Principles

The queer community is often small and insular. Folks who have done harm to each other in the past might end up in the Rest and Resistance group together. We have seen situations where abusers have engaged in a smear campaign against a survivor, and their allegations were believed by peers, which contributed immensely to the harm they experienced. They may be hesitant to participate in an LGBTQIA2S+ group out of a valid fear of others in the group having pre-conceived notions and being disinclined to believe them. In such instances, we offer restorative options while respecting their decisions regarding their participation.

Restorative justice is an approach to managing harm and conflict that is rooted in indigenous cultures. While restorative has been adapted as an approach to criminal justice reform in contemporary times, its principles are inseparable from native spiritual, healing, and peacemaking practices that can be applied to a variety of contexts. Restorative justice acknowledges that harm happens in community and has a ripple effect beyond those directly impacted.

Restorative justice does not mean forgiveness or restoring relationships to where they were before harm happened. It asks what justice and accountability mean to the person or people impacted, and how the community can support both the parties through manifesting that. It is a flexible process that can take place through indirect contact, like letters, or even an in-person conference. Restorative principles or embodiment of the values of restorative justice are essential to a

support group for LGBTQIA2S+ survivors of intimate partner violence because community is vital to healing, but community can also be a source of pain and fear in the aftermath of an abusive relationship.

Maintaining connections with restorative justice practitioners who have knowledge and experience with the queer community and with intimate partner violence could be helpful so a neutral third party can help facilitators and clients navigate difficult situations when necessary.

We have included resources in the index about restorative justice.



Circle Practice



Advocates of Routt County and Queer Futures were both introduced to Circle Practice by a two-spirit person named Grandmother Strong Oak (they/them). Grandmother Strong Oak is American Indian of Maliseet and Mi'kmaq descent. Grandmother Strong Oak can be reached through their organization [Visioning BEAR Circle Intertribal Coalition](#), which offers training opportunities for native communities and non-native communities alike in Circle Practice and restorative justice. We are grateful and privileged to have had their guidance and instruction on how to facilitate groups using this sacred practice and encourage facilitators to seek training on this tradition, ideally from an indigenous perspective, if possible, before using it. We have included information in the appendix of this document that was shared with us by Grandmother Strong Oak (with their permission) to provide guidance for those who may not be able to access training.



Circle Practice is used for a variety of purposes in indigenous cultures. It is impossible to replicate it completely outside of that context, but it is possible to integrate its principles and practices into non-native spaces such as the Rest and Resistance support group. It is not necessary to always use circle practice in support groups. Sometimes the group organically finds a rhythm of communication that includes everyone. However, it is common that one or two people consistently dominate

the conversation or one or two people don't get a chance to speak because they are uncomfortable interjecting or even unable to interject when there is a lack of structure. Circle Practice can make the group more accessible because it provides predictability for interpreters and/or those who need to read lips to follow the conversation.

What tactics did the person who abused you use related to your bisexual+ identity? (i.e. using harmful stereotypes to accuse you of cheating)

The very basics of Circle Practice are:

- The group chooses or creates a talking stick or object, which includes symbolism that is meaningful and sacred to the group. For example, the talking stick might have a purple ribbon for domestic violence awareness or a rainbow for LGBTQIA2S+ pride.
- Whoever has the talking stick is speaking. Other members of the group listen actively and non-judgmentally to whomever is speaking. The facilitator encourages participants to listen to understand, not to respond.
- Group participants always can pass. They are given an opportunity to share without being talked over or rushed while they consider what they might say. Until the person passes, we give them space to decide whether they want to share, and we allow for silence.
- There is no cross talk. Participants speak from their own personal experiences, responding to ideas shared by other group members, but not responding directly to other members or giving them advice.
- The facilitator guides the group through a series of open-ended questions around a specific topic, so they should come to the group with questions prepared.



How to lead circle practice:

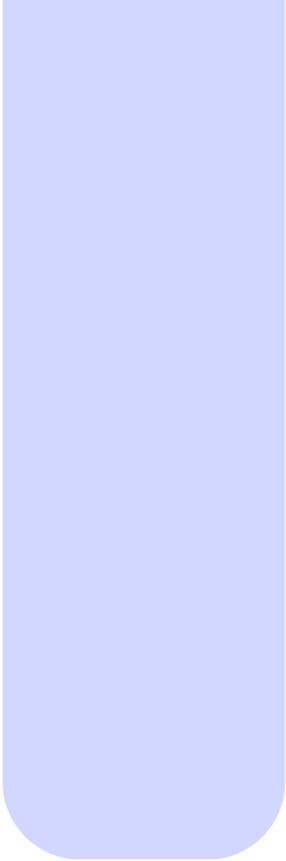
- At the beginning of each group, the facilitator reminds every one of the group norms, offers an opportunity to add more norms or ask clarifying questions about norms. The facilitator reminds the group of the principles of Circle Practice.
- The facilitator asks a question. Sometimes if people are being shy and giving shallow answers to questions, the facilitator may choose to answer the question for themselves first to model and invite vulnerability from others.
- The facilitator hands the object to the person next to them. The object is passed around until everyone has had the opportunity to speak.
- When the object comes back to the facilitator, they can choose to pose a new question or continue passing the object around the circle if the discussion is rich and participants have more to say.
- Questions should start off with a lighter tone, spiral into deeper more vulnerable questions, and then spiral back out to close the group.

We have included additional materials about Circle Practice in the index.

Encouraging Repeat Participation

One of the benefits of a “closed” group is that participants build rapport with each other. We chose to implement an open group, but as we found ways to get people to come back again, the regular attendees naturally built rapport with each other. As regular attendees build rapport with each other, they get more comfortable, which puts new members at ease.

The most effective way we found to encourage participants to return to the group each week was



providing a meal, texting everyone who has been screened in the morning of group to ask if they are coming and taking their order. Texting people in the morning reminds them that group is happening that day. Knowing dinner will be provided relieves them of the chore of cooking for themselves after work, which removes a barrier for them to participate. Getting takeout once a week for free is a treat! Ordering food creates a level of commitment to attending. We made childcare available on-site and offered meals for children as well.

We include unstructured time for participants to get to know each other while eating their meal together before we start the planned discussion. This makes people feel more relaxed and comfortable sharing once we initiate conversation about serious topics.



Sessions

Below we provide a framework that both builds on itself for a closed group *and* is accessible for new members to join on an ongoing basis for an open group. This guide should be flexible so group members can decide what they want to talk about. Current events can have a huge impact on LGBTQ+ people. It's important to be flexible so folks can talk about things as they come up. Any of these sessions can be broken up into multiple sessions in the event a conversation takes longer than anticipated.

Session 1: Group Norms

Goals: Acquaint participants with each other, set group agreements, strategize around how participants will navigate difficult conversations in a group.

Materials: Handout on common trauma responses and grounding techniques, journals (we ordered special Rest and Resistance journals for each person).

- Introductions- name, pronouns, icebreaker (there is a list of icebreakers in the appendix)
- Eat dinner and enjoy unstructured time together
- Intro to Circle Practice
- Community Guidelines
 - ◆ Facilitators explain their non-negotiables
 - ◆ What would help you to participate most fully in this group?
 - ◆ What would make it possible for you to share vulnerable thoughts and feelings?
 - ◆ What would prevent you from expressing yourself?

- ◆ What do you think fosters communication?
- ◆ What do you think shuts down communication?
- Discussion
 - ◆ Common trauma responses handout
 - Facilitators describe common trauma responses
 - Do any of these resonate with you?
 - How do you think these trauma responses could look for you during and after participating in this group?
 - ◆ Grounding and calming technique handout
 - Facilitators introduce grounding and calming techniques
 - Have you ever used any of these techniques? Did they work?
 - Are there any that you want to try?
 - Are there techniques that help you stay grounded that aren't on this handout?
- Wrap-up
 - ◆ What are you hoping to get out of this group? What are you looking forward to?
- Journal prompt
 - ◆ What conversational topics might be especially difficult for you in a support group? What topics do you think might trigger a trauma response from you?
 - ◆ What has been helpful for you in the past, if anything, in coping with trauma response in the moment?

Session 2: Trauma and the Brain

Goals: Understand, normalize, and destigmatize the impact of trauma on our brains and behavior. Develop emotional safety plans.

Materials: Handout on 'habits and reflexes, emotional safety plan template, journals

Note: Advocates of Routt County and Queer Futures have learned that the “fight, flight, freeze, or fawn” framework is outdated, lacks a foundation in science, and does not take into account how identity and socialization can impact our responses to trauma. We encourage facilitators to familiarize themselves with the “habits and reflexes” framework as described by [Jim Hopper](#). ‘Reflexes’ accounts for the physiological response of our bodies when we are in danger. ‘Habits’ acknowledges that we all have identities that impact how we are socialized to respond when we are in danger. The index includes videos and reading materials about the “habits and reflexes” alternative to understanding trauma and the brain.

- Introductions, names, pronouns, icebreaker
 - ◆ *Note: we share names and pronouns every time because they can sometimes change, and this is a safe space for folks to try on new ones.
- Eat dinner, share unstructured time together
- Reminder of circle practice
- Group agreements
 - ◆ Offer the option to add or change agreements and ask questions
- Discussion
 - ◆ Emotional Safety Plan
 - Invite people to share what they wrote for last week’s journal prompt. If they didn’t complete the journal prompt, invite them to share what conversations they are worried about having in group and what strategies they can use to stay present through them.
 - Did you learn any new strategies for coping with trauma last week that you would like to try?
 - ◆ Habits and reflexes handout
 - Have you heard of ‘fight, flight, or freeze’ before? What do you think of the ‘habits and reflexes’ framework as

an alternative to fight, flight, or freeze? Does it resonate with you?

- How do you think your identity as an LGBTQIA2S+ person, or any other identity you hold, may have impacted your response to abuse?

- ◆ Wrap-up

- How does it feel to hear about other peoples' stories and trauma responses?
- What will you do after the group to take care of yourself?

→ Journal prompt

- ◆ Fill out emotional safety plan template

Session 3: Power and Control

Goals: Understand power and control and the unique dynamics of abusive LGBTQIA2S+ relationships.

Materials: Handouts with LGBTQIA2S+ power and control wheels

→ Intros, pronouns, icebreaker

→ Eat dinner, unstructured time

→ Reminder of circle practice and group agreements

→ Discussion

- ◆ Invite people to share what they wrote for their journal prompt.
 - Talk about what emotional safety means to group participants
- ◆ LGBTQ+ power and control wheel handout
 - Facilitators give an overview of the power and control wheel

- Have you seen this before? What was/is it like to see it for the first time?
- Is there anything on here that surprises you or you want to know more about?
- Have you experienced any of these abuse tactics? If so, how did they impact your life?
- Is there anything missing from this power and control wheel?
- ◆ Wrap-up
 - What are some small or big ways in which you still have control of your life while in or recovering from an abusive relationship? (Ex. the temperature of your shower, what you listen to alone in the car, etc.)
- Journal prompt
 - ◆ Brain Dump: review the power and control wheel and write whatever comes to mind for 10 minutes without lifting the pen or trying to make sense.

Session 4: Mythbusting

Goal: Debunk myths about intimate partner violence and the motivations behind abusive behavior

Materials: Slips of paper with different myths about intimate partner violence in LGBTQ+ relationships

- Intros, pronouns, icebreaker
- Eat dinner, unstructured time
- Reminder of circle practice, group agreements
- Discussion
 - ◆ Share impressions from our 'brain dump' journal prompt or something that stuck with us from the last group.

- ◆ Place slips of paper with myths in the center of the group and explain the activity: each person will take a turn picking up a slip of paper and reading a “myth” out loud if they are comfortable doing so. Anyone can pass for any reason without judgment. After each myth is read, we will reflect on the following questions about them.
 - Is this something you believe to be true? If not, have you ever believed it to be true in the past?
 - If you used to believe this myth and you no longer do, what changed your perspective?
 - When it is the advocate’s turn to speak, share facts and information explaining why this is a myth while not being careful not to shut down the views and experiences of the participants who’ve shared.
 - ◆ Does it feel empowering to have a deeper understanding of domestic violence? Why or why not.
- Journal Prompt: What have you learned since you started attending the Rest and Resistance Support group?

Session 5: Healthy Relationships

Goal: Introduce the qualities of a healthy relationship, become more confident in our ability to identify red flags and green flags.

Materials: [Equality Wheel handouts](#)

- Names, pronouns, icebreaker
- Eat dinner, unstructured time
- Circle practice and group agreements
- Discussion:
 - ◆ Share what you wrote in their journal last time or share something they’ve learned from this group.

- ◆ When you hear the words healthy relationship, what are some things that come to mind for you?
 - ◆ Equality wheel
 - Facilitator gives an overview of the equality wheel.
 - What are some of the things you look for in a partner? What are the 'green flags' that attract you to a relationship?
 - What are some of your 'hard no's' or 'red flags'?
 - Facilitator talks about love bombing.
 - Were there green flags that drew you into an abusive relationship?
 - Were there early warning signs in hindsight?
 - ◆ Wrap-up
 - What makes you feel comfortable and safe in relationships and friendships?
- Journal Prompt: What are some positive affirmations you could tell yourself to remind you that you deserve a healthy relationship?

Session 6: Core Beliefs

Goal: Explore core beliefs around what we deserve in a relationship, how we deserve to be treated in general, and learn some tools to improve self-esteem.

Materials: Art supplies, examples of affirmations

- Names, pronouns, icebreaker
- Eat dinner, unstructured time
- Circle practice and group norms
- Discussion:
 - ◆ Discuss journal prompt from last week. Participants help each other come up with positive affirmations for themselves.

- Art activity: Use the affirmations we came up with to make a piece of art that folks can display somewhere where they will see it often. While we are creating affirmation art, we can go through these discussion questions:
- ◆ Do you think past experiences have shaped your beliefs about your worthiness in relationships?
 - ◆ What messages about love and relationships did you receive growing up? How do they influence your beliefs today?
 - ◆ How do you define what you deserve in a relationship? Are there specific qualities or behaviors you consider essential?
 - ◆ What behaviors do you think are unacceptable in a relationship? How do you communicate these boundaries?
 - ◆ Are there specific activities or hobbies that help you feel more confident and worthy? How do they impact your relationships?
 - ◆ What role do support systems (friends, family, therapists) play in helping you understand your worth?
- Journal Prompt: Try saying your affirmations to yourself in the mirror. Write about how that feels.

Session 7: Boundaries

Goal: Learn about boundaries, how to establish them, and how to hold them.

Materials: None

- Names, pronouns, icebreaker
- Dinner and unstructured time
- Circle practice and group agreements
- Discussion
 - ◆ What do you know about boundaries? What is your experience with boundaries?

- ◆ What are some techniques you use to set boundaries with others?
- ◆ Facilitator talks about how boundaries are about informing our own behavior, not controlling the behavior of others. Talk about how abusers sometimes use “therapy speak” and terms like “boundaries” to justify their controlling behavior. Ask them to identify whether or not the following statements are healthy boundaries and discuss why or why not:
 - “You have to stop talking to other men because that is my boundary.”
 - No. This is a demand, not a boundary.
 - “If you continue to raise your voice, I will have to hang up the phone.”
 - Yes: You are describing clearly what behavior is harmful, and rather than demand the person do what you want, you are committing to take action yourself if the harmful behavior continues.
 - Boundary: “It was nice to meet you, but I’m not interested in a relationship.” *Get up and leave*
 - Yes: If you are uncomfortable on a date, in a conversation, or even in a job interview, you can just leave. You don’t even necessarily have to explain yourself. If you are uncomfortable or feel unsafe, you can just leave.
- How has your experience with abuse impacted your ability to set and hold boundaries?
- It is a red flag for someone to get upset when you set and hold boundaries. How does it feel to set a boundary when you know it might upset someone?
- What is a boundary you can commit to maintaining right now, and how do you plan to do it?
- Journal prompt: What are some hard no’s in relationships? What are things you cannot accept from partners and/or friends?

Session 8: Human Trafficking

Goal: Learn about human trafficking and debunk myths and misconceptions around it.

Materials: Equipment to screen videos

- Names, pronouns, ice breaker
- Dinner and unstructured time
- Circle practice and group agreements
- Discussion
 - ◆ Review journal prompt from last session
 - ◆ What comes to mind when you hear human trafficking?
 - ◆ When we hear about human trafficking, who are we talking about? What identities? What experiences? What words or phrases come to mind?
 - ◆ Define human trafficking: Human trafficking involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act - payment is not relevant.
 - ◆ Watch this video and discuss:
<https://thelifestory.org/housing>
 - ◆ Talk about what makes people vulnerable to human trafficking? Discuss intersectionality and intersections with DV.
 - Intersectionality looks at "interlocking" systems of oppression and how these play out in individual's lives based on their various identities.
 - Similar tactics with DV are used and some traffickers may pose as a partner.
 - ◆ Place slips of paper with myths in the center of the group and explain the activity: each person will take a turn picking up a slip of paper and reading a "myth" out loud if they are comfortable doing so. Anyone can pass for any reason

without judgment. After each myth is read, we will reflect on the following questions about them.

- Is this something you believe to be true? If not, have you ever believed it to be true in the past?
 - If you used to believe this myth and you no longer do, what changed your perspective?
 - When it is the advocate's turn to speak, share facts and information explaining why this is a myth while not shutting down the views of the participants who shared.
- ◆ Watch this video and discuss: [Unseen: The Boy Victims of the Sex Trade](#)
- Journal prompt: How can we keep each other safe from human trafficking as a community?

Session 9: Resistance

Goal: Learn about intimate partner violence as a social issue, identify collective action the group can take together to embody the “resistance” element

Materials: Handout with statistics about DV in the LGBTQIA2S+ community

- Names, pronouns, icebreaker
- Eat dinner and unstructured time
- Circle practice and group norms
- Discussion
 - ◆ Discuss journal prompt and talk about how we can work together to keep our community safe from domestic violence and human trafficking.
 - ◆ Share statistics handout

- How does it feel to see these statistics?
- Why do you think the numbers are so high for transgender and bisexual+ people?
- What would the world look like if domestic violence didn't exist?
- What would it take to create a world in which domestic violence doesn't exist?
- ◆ Action
 - We invite this group to consider an action we can take collectively if they'd like to toward creating a world in which domestic violence doesn't exist.
 - Some examples: Planning or attending a protest or awareness event, learning about legislation affecting victims and talking to representatives about them, leading a workshop for LGBTQIA2S+ youth about healthy vs. unhealthy relationships, speaking at a training for police or medical professionals, creating more affirmations art to hang in the local DV shelter, cleaning or organizing the local DV shelter, etc.
 - Process the fact that survival is resistance in itself, and they do not owe the world anything.

Ending or Continuing Group

After the program we'd established was finished, we asked the group what they wanted to do next. The group decided to continue meeting and using that time to work together on their collective action project and rotate conversation topics. You could also take a break from the group and commit some time to recruiting new participants.

Index

Restorative Justice and Circle Practice:

- [Visioning BEAR Circle Intertribal Coalition](#)
- [MI'KMAW SPIRITUALITY- TALKING CIRCLES](#)
- [Guidelines for Talking, Healing, and Sharing Circles and Principles of Consultation](#)
- [Talking Stick](#)

[Icebreakers](#)

[Handout on common trauma responses](#)

[Handout on grounding and calming techniques](#)

[Handout on 'habits and reflexes'](#)

[Information for facilitators on 'habits and reflexes'](#)

[Emotional safety planning template](#)

[LGBTQ+ power and control wheel](#)

[Myths about intimate partner violence in lgbtq+ relationships](#)

[Equality wheel](#)

[Example affirmations](#)

[Myths about human trafficking](#)

[Statistics](#)

This project was supported by Grant Number 90EV0535-01-01 from the Office of Family Violence Prevention and Services within the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.