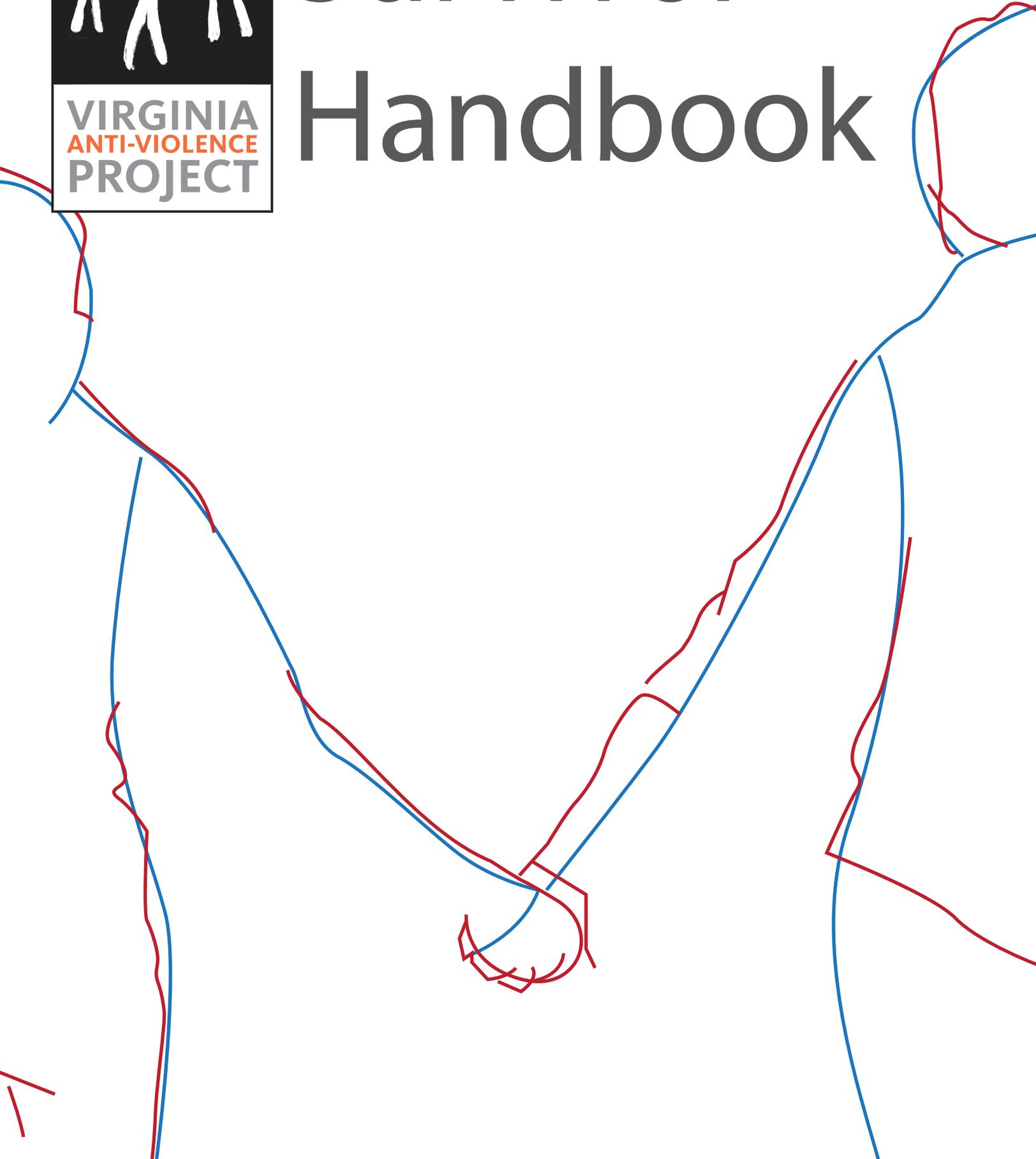




Survivor Handbook



Introduction

Sometimes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people experience violence in their lives and often have limited resources available for support. We can be hurt by strangers or by people who we love. We might not understand what is happening

This booklet was created by the Virginia Anti-Violence Project and is designed to help LGBTQ people who are experiencing/have experienced violence in their lives and/or their support people to better understand what is happening and how it impacts LGBTQ people. This booklet also offers resources and options that may be helpful to you or someone you love.

Our LGBTQ communities deserve to be free from all forms of violence and abuse. We know we cannot prevent all violence from happening but we can reach out to our communities and offer hope and comfort in this way.

This document was created with funding from the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services Grant #10-B5942DV10.

Intimate Partner Violence in the LGBTQ Community

What is it?

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is any pattern of abusive behaviors used by one individual intended to exert power and control over another individual in the context of an intimate relationship. IPV, also called “domestic violence,” may include physical and sexual violence, emotional abuse, threats and intimidation, violence toward children, friends, family or pets, stealing or limiting the use of the phone, reading texts or e-mail messages without permission, control over economic resources and/or medications, and minimizing or denying the abusive behaviors.

Additionally, survivors who identify as LGBTQ may face:

- Threats of being outed – having a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity, S/M practice, or HIV status disclosed to family, employers, police, religious institutions, the community, or child custody authorities.
- Threats of actions to take children away or have them removed.
- Refusals to practice safe sex.
- Isolation from family, friends, LGBTQ community
- Use of societal fear and hatred of LGBTQ community to reinforce the potential “danger” of reaching out to others.

The potential for IPV exists in any relationship. IPV occurs no more or less often in the LGBTQ community than in the straight, gender-normative community.

How does this impact survivors who are LGBTQ-identified?

People who experience IPV experience stress in many ways. They may experience physical and/or emotional injury and pain. They may have significant changes in sleeping and eating patterns. They may have difficulty with memory, concentration, or problem-solving. Many survivors feel depressed, anxious, lonely, overwhelmed, or exhausted. They may use and/or abuse alcohol or drugs to cope. They may have thoughts of hurting themselves or experience financial problems.

In addition to the above, LGBTQ survivors may face:

- Fewer legal and social service protections and resources.
- Fear of losing children or barriers to the protection of children, because custody/visitation is inaccessible due to the lack of parental standing.
- Feelings of shame over sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Fear of asking for help if it means coming out.

Survivors often exhibit remarkable resiliency in the face of very difficult circumstances and develop creative solutions to seemingly impossible situations.

What can I do now?

Connect to resources that may provide you with support and hope. One option to consider is talking to friends and family who care about you and with whom you could safely confide. Another option is contacting community professionals who have expertise in providing services to the LGBTQ community, including medical and mental health service providers and LGBTQ community centers. You may want to consider creating a safety plan with one or more of the people you find to be supportive. You are the expert on your life and your safety. You may want to consider legal remedies or seeking the services of a community domestic violence program. A part of your considerations may be an assessment of the risks and benefits of those services.

Some LGBTQ-specific hotlines available to you are:

- GLBT National Hotline @ 1-888-843-4565 and www.glnh.org/hotline/
- GLBT National Youth Talkline @ 1-800-246-PRIDE (7743) and www.glnh.org/talkline
- Network la Red @ 617-742-4911 (bilingual, Spanish) and www.thenetworklared.org

The potential for fun, consensual relationships exists for all of us.

Sexual Assault in LGBTQ Communities

What is it?

Sexual assault happens when someone forces or manipulates another person into any kind of unwanted sexual activity without their consent. Sexual assault can look and feel many different ways such as rape or sexual assault, incest, sexual harassment, unwanted sexual contact or touching, showing one's genitals to others without consent, forcing someone to watch or participate in pornography, failing to respect safe words in an SM scene, and/or refusing to practice safer sex. Sexual assault can happen in an intimate relationship, with a dating partner, a hook-up, or an acquaintance. Additionally, LGBTQ people might experience hate violence in the form of sexual assault. Sexual assault happens in the absence of consent. Consent cannot be given if a person is drunk, high, unconscious, or physically or mentally incapacitated.

We all have the right to change our minds at any time about any sexual activity and withdraw consent with the understanding that our decision will be respected.

How does this impact survivors who are LGBTQ?

People who experience sexual assault experience stress in many ways. They may experience physical and/or emotional pain. They may have significant changes in sleeping and eating patterns. They may have difficulty remembering things or concentrating. Many people feel depressed, anxious, lonely, overwhelmed, or exhausted. They may use alcohol or drugs to cope. Self-harm may be a response or coping technique for survivors through cutting, abuse of drugs and alcohol, and suicidal thoughts and/or attempts.

In addition to the above, LGBTQ survivors may face:

- Coercion to trade sex for housing, food, or other basic necessities among LGBTQ youth who are experiencing homelessness. Feelings of shame or questioning their own sexual orientation or gender identity after an assault.
- Fear of asking for help if it means coming out.
- Fear of seeking medical treatment from a provider who may be inexperienced with the medical issues of transgender people.
- Experiencing an assault after connecting with a potential partner on a dating or hook-up site.
- Flashbacks and feeling like the assault is happening again.

Healing is possible. We all respond differently to sexual assault and the healing process is different for everyone.

What can I do now?

If you are injured or suspect you may have been exposed to a sexually transmitted disease or that you may be pregnant, please consider seeking care from a medical provider. You can ask a friend or advocate to go with you for support. Some medical providers have medications they can offer to greatly reduce your chances of getting HIV or getting pregnant if taken within 72 hours of the incident. You are NOT required to talk to law enforcement in order to receive medical support or meet with a Forensic Nurse Examiner. However, you may want to consider doing so if you are interested in pursuing legal action. You may also want to consider seeking support from friends and family who care about you and with whom you could safely confide. Take care of yourself: try to eat well; plan activities that you enjoy and that reduce stress for you. Consider reaching out to community professionals who have expertise in providing services to the LGBTQ community, including medical and mental health service providers and LGBTQ community centers. You can call the National Sexual Assault Hotline operated 24/7 by the Rape, Abuse, Incest, National Network (RAINN) 1-800-656-HOPE (1-800-656-4673). You can also use RAINN's online hotline at www.rainn.org.

Every one of us has the right to have our bodies respected and to define the ways in which we want to enjoy our sexuality.

Hate-Motivated Violence/Harassment in the LGBTQ Community

What is it?

Any act committed against a person or a person's property because of another person's bias towards or hatred of that person's **actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity/expression**. Hate-motivated violence and harassment exists across a spectrum of severity and can include verbal assaults, sexual assault, stalking, inappropriate use of social media, pickup crimes, vandalism, beatings, and murder.

How does this impact survivors who are LGBTQ-identified?

Many LGBTQ people who experience hate violence/harassment are unable or unwilling to report their experiences. We may feel like law enforcement agencies won't take us seriously and social service organizations won't understand how to help.

Some survivors begin to question their identities and feel like they may need to hide certain parts of themselves to stay safe. Some may feel responsible for what happened. Many survivors report feeling that they were "too gay looking" or "shouldn't have worn those clothes" or "should never have gone to that event." Survivors may believe they did something wrong, or that there is something wrong with them for being lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual, or queer. It is the person who has committed the act of violence or harassment who has the problem.

It might be helpful to talk with someone who understands hate violence to help process the experience. Survivors often question their expectations about safety and justice and some experience post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms. Every experience is unique, but **being targeted for who we are is never our fault**.

Some common physical reactions for survivors are headaches, stomachaches, difficulty sleeping, lack of energy, sexual difficulties, and/or a change in appetite. It is also normal to have emotional responses, including anger, denial, anxiety, depression, loneliness, fear, nightmares, flashbacks, self-blame, irritability, and difficulty with concentration. Some LGBTQ survivors might also attempt to change their appearance in an attempt to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity. Self-harm may be a response or coping technique for survivors through cutting, abuse of drugs and alcohol, and suicidal thoughts and/or attempts.

What can I do now?

If you are injured, please consider seeking care from a medical provider. You can ask a friend or advocate to go with you for support. You may want to document the incident by writing down what happened, taking pictures of injuries or property destruction, and saving texts or voicemails; this information can be vital if you decide to pursue legal action. Some survivors are empowered by anonymously sharing their story about any kind of street harassment on <http://www.ihollaback.org/share-story/> (this can be done via text as well).

You can report hate-motivated violence/harassment to local law enforcement agencies, but there is no requirement that you do so. Do what is most comfortable for you. Even if you have friends and family to support you, it might be helpful to call someone who has experience working with LGBTQ survivors of hate violence/harassment. New York City Anti-Violence Project, an LGBTQ-focused organization, offers a 24-hour bilingual hotline at 212.714.1141. These are people who care, and who will listen to you when you need them.

***We have the right to be who we are....
hate-motivated violence is never our fault.***