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# Love Is Not Abuse - Here's What You Should Do

by Timothy McLemore, founder of Essential Haus, author, "Love Is Not Abuse"

**L**ove Is Not Abuse. It's a mantra that I will continue to say for myself and one that I hope the LGBTQ+ community hears and embraces. It's also the title of my new book that I wrote after getting out of a physically abusive relationship, because I wanted others to know my story and know that they are not alone, that abuse is not love and that there is a way out.

Being in an abusive relationship felt to me a little like going "back in the closet" because I was hiding it from my friends and family. As a couple, we were even hiding it from our Instagram community by still producing content and posting as if everything was "peaches and roses," but in reality there was a huge dark side to the relationship. Once I hit a breaking point in the relationship, and felt enough was enough, I realized that I shouldn't have stayed in the relationship for as long as I did and I didn't want to be an example to other people that this type of relationship was OK. Sharing my story in this book was therapeutic to my recovery from domestic violence, and I'm also hopeful it will inspire others to become more aware of the issue in the LGBTQ+ community and seek help.

## Domestic Violence Big Problem for LGBTQ+

The statistics certainly show that domestic violence is more frequent and complicated in LGBTQ+ relationships than in heterosexual relationships. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV):

- 45% of victims do not report the violence they experience to police because they believe it will not help them.

- Fewer than 5% of LGBTQ+ domestic violence victims ever seek protective orders from the court.

- 43.8% of lesbian women and 61.1% of bisexual women are raped, the recipient of physical violence, and/or stalked by a partner at some point; this is true of only 35% of heterosexual women.

And while, certainly anyone can be at risk for domestic violence, there are specific groups of LGBTQ+ people who are at the highest risk for intimate partner violence, including Trans, Black, Bisexual and individuals who do not have financial resources.

## Additional Barriers for LGBTQ+

Gender stereotypes are a big problem for the LGBTQ+ community in that there is often a lack of belief when an abuser isn't of the demographic that most assume victims are generally a part of. Someone who is being abused can rightfully be very worried that they won't be believed as the victim in an intimate partner violence situation, especially if they do not fit the physical description of one.

There's also a fear of social impact as LGBTQ+ communities can be small and tight-knit. When someone is experiencing

violence from their partner, they may be afraid of the social impact of reporting it. If they and their partner share a group of friends or are members of the same community, they risk alienating and losing many, if not all, of their closest social relationships. Social fear can cause victims to be quiet about the abuse, putting their personal safety at risk.

## Taking Steps To Leave Abusive Relationships

If you are the person in the abusive relationship, start by simply establishing other friendships outside your abusive relationship. Having friends to talk to will help you hear for yourself how bad the abuse is and this is the starting point for getting out. An abusive partner will try to isolate you and keep you from having other, outside friendships that could influence your perception on the relationship. This, of course, is another major red flag.

Seek out resources. Although it can be hard to find, try to find resources specifically in the LGBTQ+ community. I personally had difficulty finding resources when I was trying to get out of my abusive relationship, which is why I started a nonprofit called Essential Haus where we will provide a safe place and resources for individuals in the LGBTQ+ community who have been affected by domestic violence and homelessness.

Do not hesitate to contact your local authorities and even seek a protective order if the abuse gets out of hand. Many people in abusive relationships hesitate to do this because many times they truly love their partner and do not want to get him or her in trouble, but not having the abuse documented on an official police record will negatively affect your case later when you do

decide to leave. Legally proving abuse can be very difficult without showing official documentation that it happened and that's where local authorities can be very helpful. It's also important for your own safety.

For more tips on leaving abusive relationships and for details on, "Love Is Not Abuse," join the Essential Haus community at Essential Haus Facebook and Essential Haus Instagram pages or connect with Timothy McLemore directly @essentiallytim.

## Biography:

Timothy McLemore is the founder of Essential Haus, a non-profit organization in Miami, Florida, that provides a safe place for individuals in the LGBTQ+ community who have been affected by domestic violence and homelessness. McLemore is a community organizer, social media influencer and creator of "Gays with Stories," a popular Instagram page that shares the positive stories of gay men around the world. His mission is to bring awareness to LGBTQ+ relationship issues, and provide a safe space for anyone living a truth not widely accepted by mainstream society. His dedication to the LGBTQ+ community is inspired by his own struggles of growing up biracial and gay. His vision for future generations is to have a better experience, and that fuels his motivation to inspire self-acceptance and self-expression for all.

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