

Ask the Expert with Liat Wexler FAQ Sheet

Q: Terminology for the LGBTQIA+ community seems to be constantly changing or being updated to be more inclusive- how do we stay current so as not to offend anyone or leave anyone out?

A: The reality is, it is changing rapidly all the time. And really youth are the ones to be watching for this. So, the internet, social media is where I go to keep abreast of all this. And I interact with youth, in person, a lot. Without doing that, I probably would miss a lot of lingo. Language related to LGBTQI communities gets adopted by adults after youth put it in place. There are a number of websites of things that I keep on top of and read regularly to follow along. Tumblr has a large queer and trans community. Hashtags- this is a way a lot of youth are finding each other and finding communities. Grab onto QTPOC queer trans people of color. Put a hashtag and see what there is, then click on the ones that are cross-linked and you will find the people who are blogging. On Facebook, there's a page- Trans Language Primer.

Q: What resources are there for small non-profits to get better informed on this subject? How do you stay up to date on civil rights efforts and how are they used in LGBTQIA+ relationships?

Are there good websites you follow? I would like a list of more recommended resources to learn more about LGBTQIA+ abuse.

A: There are a number of organizations that I have relied on for years. I was originally trained by Network la Red in Massachusetts (TNLR.org). There's one in the Pacific Northwest called the Northwest Network (nwnetwork.org). These two organizations have been working in LGBTQ partner abuse for decades. They have wonderful resources and serve survivors directly. Forge (forge-forward.org) is in the Midwest and work specifically with the trans and non-binary communities. They do a lot of technical assistance. They also have excellent webinars. They put on outstanding educational sessions. The Northwest Network also teaches how to do screening for who is the survivor and who is the abuser. Forge also runs some survivor resources that are distanced. They do an online support group, because the trans community is often dispersed. There's a number of healing projects available. The trans community may not want to reach out in their local communities, because it may seem a little too close for comfort. I also want to point out AVP (the Anti Violence Project) that's located in New York- their website is AVP.org. There's a number of organizations all over the country that are doing this work on LGBTQIA+ abuse and I'll send a list of the ones I'm aware of. Organizations may be serving all partner abuse survivors, but they may have a project specific for queer and trans folks or may be located at an LGBT community or resource center. It's important to know that keeping up to date on this is the same as keeping up to date on any other political movements. I hope people are following along with race and anti-immigration issues, black lives matter, as a way to know what's happening more broadly and be aware of the politics and how they're impacting communities. There's a couple of websites that are doing a great job at highlighting

culture and news in queer, trans and non-binary communities. Teen Vogue is doing a superb job and is excellent writing. They're very social justice oriented. And then there's an online magazine called Them (them.us). They focus specifically on trans, and especially non-binary issues. It's a really helpful tool if this is a community you're not as accustomed to.

Q: Can you please explain the differences between heterosexual relationships and queer relationships as it applies to domestic violence?

A: Being straight means you have visibility in the world at large. You're essentially given a map about how to do relationships, but for queer and trans folks they don't get as much representation and we have to create our own paths and we often aren't being taught by our families, because our families don't often have the same sexual orientation as us. We often are left creating our own families, or social norms, or discovering social norms that are being taught to us by some of our very first partners. That may or may not be an accurate representation of what a healthy relationship is in that community. Queer, trans people and heterosexuals are all intersectional. There are so many norms that are not true across the board. All the same tactics of power and control get used in queer and trans relationships- queer people have kids together, so don't assume that's not a factor. Queer people can get married, so don't assume that's not a factor. But, there are additional layers of oppression and dynamics within the communities or against the communities that get used. There also may not be. You may have a queer person come to you and they only describe power and control tactics that are used in heterosexual relationships. You may never hear of specific tactics that are particular to LGBTQIA+ people. But, very likely, you will hear something.

Q: If someone in the LGBTQIA+ community is experiencing power and control tactics, where can he/she/they go to get help?

A: There's a number of organizations across the country. Hopefully all domestic violence organizations who are serving survivors, should and ought to be serving queer and trans survivors as well. The reauthorization for VAWA in 2013 included specific funding and guidance to support LGBTQIA survivors, so that means shelters should be sheltering queer and trans folks. It's the reality that not all of them are doing that at this point, but they should be. So, you should advocate for that. You can speak up, raise the point that VAWA funding supports this if there's push back. Sheltering may not have figured out how to navigate having lots of people with different genders inside shelters, so they may do something like a hotel voucher. Again, advocating for them to shift their policy in the long run to have a not separate but equal policy. There are programs being run out of LGBT centers. Long Beach has a collaboration between the LGBT center and the domestic violence program that's local and the resources are located at the LGBT center, and similarly in LA. We see that across the country. There are a number of places that have brought that into the LGBT spaces rather than having them go out into the heteronormative and cis normative spaces, because the community may not feel like those resources align very well or that folks will understand them or provide service without judgement.

Q: It may be difficult for people to realize they are being abused, especially if they have been in a relationship for a while. How can we educate people in the LGBTQIA+ community to know the signs if they are being financially or emotionally abused?

A: In the same way we do advocacy with everybody. Sit down with someone and have a conversation, asking them about their relationship and what they notice is working or not working for them. If this is a friend, the approach often is if we try to tell someone that their partner is abusive, they often get very defensive and they will cut off the people who are bad mouthing their partner and it increases isolation. We want to avoid bad mouthing a partner, while still being honest and being clear that what's happening looks/feels/sounds unhealthy. The approach I often take is to just ask them, "what are the things that are going on in your relationship that you like or don't like?". As a professional or as a friend, I use motivational interviewing as a strategy to get them to articulate what's going on, without me necessarily naming it or pointing it out and that tends to work better. It takes a while; a lot of people stay in abusive or unhealthy relationships for a really long time. My understanding is that folks who are LGBTQIA+ stay in abusive relationships longer, and my guess is it's related to lack of resources and awareness in the community and assuming that abuse is something straight people deal with, and not queer and trans folks.

Q: Are there questions/ways to help draw out that part of the story in terms of their abuse? (maybe mention ID/theft in interview)

A: You take your cues from whatever the person says, so if they are talking about financial dynamics or if they mention that they lack money then ask follow up questions. You can say something like, "it sounds like right now your financial situation is difficult, is any of that related to your relationship? How does your partner handle money or how do you make decisions together about money?". Often, those are questions I would ask. Whatever aspect of the power and control wheel I'm talking about, I might say, "how do you make decisions about that in your relationship or how do you talk about that in your relationship,?" and get my cues from that and then keep reflecting what I hear. If they say, "yeah my partner always seem to have money but is always asking me to pay for things and it's really frustrating," I might say, "it's probably really hard for you for your partner to constantly ask you to pay when they have more money" and just reflect that back so that they can hear what they just said. Oftentimes people don't hear their own words and it doesn't sit in the same way. So, the reflection strategy with motivational interviewing is the most important one, even more than asking the questions.

Q: How can we do better outreach to the LGBTQIA+ communities?

A: It involves a whole number of changes to the way we do our work. When you're out doing prevention education, make sure that your curricula has really started from the ground level up by including trans and queer people when you develop it. That's not just adapting it after the fact, but really rewriting it and looking at heteronormativity and cisnormativity throughout the curricula to make sure you're addressing and removing it. It may be you're writing scenarios that are very gender neutral or writing scenarios that are explicitly gay or very intentionally queer in some way. All materials should say something about queer and trans folks on them.

Most of the time if someone who is heterosexual picks up a piece of paper and it happens to mention queer or trans stuff on it they gloss right over it, it doesn't register unless they care a lot about that. But for queer and trans people, when they see that it will resonate and it matters a lot. Even when you have a definition of what partner abuse is, make sure that the language is gender neutral and it sounds inclusive or like something a queer person might say. I say, "At Center for Community Solutions we work with people of all genders and sexual orientations regardless of immigration status". I say that in the same way I say that all our services are free and confidential, and it doesn't matter who I'm talking to because if there's someone in the room for whom that resonates, they will hear it and it will connect with them and they will actually come to us. It's important to build relationships with queer and trans people in your community; that may mean activists or leaders of organizations in your community, but it could just be individuals who have a large social network or who are influencers. Building relationships happens over a long period of time and it's a lot of work. You can't just say, "can you come to this meeting? I'd like to meet up with a bunch of people and get your input". A lot of times folks are weary because they're constantly asked to do this for a variety of white, cis, heteronormative organizations and they're tired of doing that over and over without getting anything in return. A lot of relationship building means standing in solidarity with those organizations and individuals; show up to their events, make sure you're buying tickets to their fundraisers, make sure that when they're holding rallies you're there and you're blogging and talking about it and that your centering their voices and needs. It's going to take years, but eventually people begin to trust you as a partner in that alliance with the community and in solidarity. It also takes a lot of individual relationship building. Not just showing up for those organizations, but having coffee with people, having real conversations, and being willing to have important long term conversations with people. Outreach is really about community building. Be physically out in the community, engaging with people.

Q: What are some strategies to be more culturally humble in our advocacy?

A: Culturally humble is a really great term because it implies that we can never really be experts. We can learn but if it's not our community or own culture, how can we ever possibly be an expert in it? I think the first thing is to avoid making anything assumptions about who's coming to your door. Don't assume you know a client's gender based on their appearance or on their voice if they're calling over the phone. Don't make assumptions about whether or not they have identity documents that match their gender and their name. For trans people, this is a constant issue. So, make sure that your forms and everything else that you have allows people to indicate their true gender and the name that is actually their name. If you must know their legal information, have that be a second and separate category. We want to avoid assuming we know who the abuser is. A lot of times people assume that the bigger, stronger, more masculine presenting person is the abuser and that's not true. We know that in queer and straight dynamics. We can't make these assumptions and that's why I emphasis learning the skill of screening and applying that to every single person who comes to the door, because you don't know and if you're immediate reaction is when a man comes to your door to assume he may be the abuser, that's extremely off putting to an individual who comes for help and

folks can tell. Use neutral language in both written and verbal communication, like talking about someone's partner or not gendering people, and using pronouns until you know what pronouns they like.

Q: When interacting with adults and children what is the best way to determine gender and pronouns? And at what age is it appropriate to ask?

A: The easiest thing to ask is, "how would you like me to refer to you?" or "what's your name?". I also recommend sharing your pronouns first, because by doing that someone who is trans will know it's safe to disclose. We don't always know by looking at someone, who is trans. In fact, I'm not sure what being trans looks like necessarily. A lot of people don't assume that I'm trans, through no fault of my own. We want to avoid making those kinds of assumptions, so asking and sharing first. I say, "hi, my name is Liat. My pronouns are they/them/theirs". For a cis person who doesn't know anything about pronouns, they may look at you kind of weird and that's okay. They're probably going to move on and never think about it again, or they may ask a question and that's okay, simply say, "I say that because not everybody uses he or she and I don't want to assume, so I share mine first". If they want a deeper conversation, great, even though that's not necessarily what they're there for. For a trans person or non-binary person, that's going to matter a lot. I will say that not all trans people like being asked what their pronouns are. For some people who are binary, they feel like I look like a man/I look like a woman, you should know. Again, you can say "I recognize that there are people who aren't men and women and I just want to create a space where those people also feel safe". So, just making it as neutral and welcoming as possible. With children, I would say developmentally it varies, but with teenagers you can definitely ask pronouns. With middle schoolers, some get it and some don't. Often with a younger child you can say, "how do you feel? Do you feel like a boy, a girl, or something else?" and sometimes kids can articulate that. Talking about things in terms of gender as opposed to pronouns makes more sense for kids.

Q: Are you aware of any housing/shelters in the Los Angeles area for 25+ year old LGBTQIA+ victims? I'm only aware of 25 and under.

A: I am not as familiar with resources in LA, but reach out to the LA LGBT Center (Terra Slavin has presented at NSAC and other conferences on LGBT violence). There are probably no shelters for only that adult demographic, but there may be resources that are more welcoming than others.

Q: Can you talk more about gender vs. orientation? How can we better educate people to know the difference to limit sensitivity?

A: Sexual orientation is externally directed- it is who someone is attracted to sexually, romantically, spiritually. Gender is internally directed- it is how an individual's internal and personal sense of self which maps (or not) to socially-constructed categories for people based on behavioral, cultural, and/or psychological traits typically associated with anatomical sex. Woman and man are the two most common, and for cisgender people those genders match the sex assigned at birth. However, gender does not always match the sex assigned at birth and is

not binary. People can be trans men or women, be neither a man nor a woman but some other gender, have gender that is fluid (changes between two or more), have more than one gender at the same time, or not have a gender at all. Cisgender people can be straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, pansexual, etc. Transgender people can also have any of those sexual orientations. One reason people often conflate orientation and gender is because of an old set of guidelines that were developed by Harry Benjamin to determine who was a “true transsexual” which included heteronormative criteria that trans women were attracted to cisgender men. Another reason is because of how “gender boxes” are constructed. The gender box includes at least 4 vectors (sex, gender identity, gender roles and expression, orientation); for example, when someone’s gender expression is non-normative people assume that person has a non-normative orientation. When a person behaves in a sexually non-normative way- a man holding hands with another man- what people react to isn’t actually a picture in their minds of anal sex, it’s the fact that these men are violating gender norms by acting like a woman. Homophobia is rooted in misogyny and gender policing. If you ask someone how they know they are a woman/man- they may say because of breasts/penis, able to bear children/menstruate, straight attraction, feminine/masculine expression, etc. response: If xyz happened, would you still be a woman/man? Be sure to remove transgender from a list of sexual orientations on any intake/demographics you may have. Also, trans is not a gender, it is the way someone arrives at their gender. Best practice on forms is to ask for Gender: _____ and have people write in their own answer. It is the job of the organization to code that answer into categories if necessary.