

BEL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESOURCE GUIDE

You Deserve Safety

A Nationwide Resource Guide for Black Lesbians & Black Queer Women

Domestic violence does not have one look, and it does not only happen in heterosexual relationships.

Abuse can occur in lesbian and queer relationships and may involve physical violence, emotional abuse, sexual violence, financial control, stalking, intimidation, isolation, technology-facilitated abuse, threats involving children or pets, or using someone's sexual orientation, gender expression, race, or community relationships against them.

For Black lesbians and Black queer women, seeking help can carry additional complications: concerns about racism or homophobia within service systems, fear of not being believed, financial dependence, community silence, lack of culturally responsive services, and pressure to keep relationship problems private. These barriers were already identified in BEL's original guide.

You do not have to decide today whether you are going to leave your relationship in order to ask for help.



IF YOU ARE IN IMMEDIATE DANGER

If you believe you are in immediate physical danger, **call 911**.

If speaking aloud could put you at greater risk, consider using text or online chat services when available and safe to do so. BEL's original guide specifically recommends text or chat when making a telephone call is unsafe.

If someone may be monitoring your phone, computer, browser history, email, location, or accounts, consider accessing resources from a device they cannot access.



NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SUPPORT

National Domestic Violence Hotline

Call: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

Text: START to 88788

Website: [National Domestic Violence Hotline](https://www.thehotline.org/)

The National Domestic Violence Hotline provides confidential support, safety-planning assistance, information, and connections to local domestic-violence programs.

This guide identifies the Hotline as a primary national resource offering 24/7 confidential support, safety planning, emotional support, and referrals.

You can contact the Hotline even if:

You aren't sure what you're experiencing is abuse. You aren't ready to leave. You returned to the relationship. Your partner has never physically hit you. You need help developing a safety plan. You simply need someone knowledgeable to talk to.

LGBTQ+ DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SUPPORT

The Network/La Red

Hotline: 1-800-832-1901

Website: [The Network/La Red](#)

The Network/La Red focuses on partner abuse within LGBTQ+, polyamorous, and BDSM communities.

This resource deserves particular attention in a BEL guide because survivors sometimes encounter domestic-violence systems designed primarily around heterosexual relationships.

This guide identifies The Network/La Red as providing LGBTQ-specific, peer-based, culturally informed support and emphasizes an important point: **you do not have to leave your relationship to call.**

LGBTQ+ PEER SUPPORT

LGBT National Help Center

LGBT National Hotline: 1-888-843-4564

Website: [LGBT National Help Center](#)

Provides peer support and resource referrals for LGBTQ+ people.

This is not a substitute for emergency intervention or specialized domestic-violence services, but it can provide another affirming place to talk and locate LGBTQ+ resources.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE SUPPORT

RAINN — National Sexual Assault Hotline

Call: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

Website: [RAINN](https://www.rainn.org)

RAINN provides confidential sexual-assault support and connections to local services.

This guide includes RAINN as a 24/7 resource for confidential sexual-violence support.

Sexual violence can occur within a relationship.

Being someone's girlfriend, wife, spouse, partner, or sexual partner **does not create permanent consent.**

EMOTIONAL CRISIS SUPPORT

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text: 988

Website: [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](https://988lifeline.org)

Domestic violence can contribute to fear, depression, anxiety, trauma, hopelessness, and suicidal thoughts.

This guide appropriately includes 988 as an emotional-crisis resource that can be used alongside domestic-violence support.

988 is not a replacement for a domestic-violence advocate when you specifically need DV safety planning, shelter, or legal-resource navigation.

DATING ABUSE & YOUNG ADULT SUPPORT

Love Is Respect

Call: 1-866-331-9474

Website: [Love Is Respect](https://www.loveisrespect.org)

Love Is Respect focuses on dating relationships, healthy relationships, warning signs, and dating abuse among young people.

It may be particularly useful for teens, college students, and young adults who are trying to determine whether behavior in a relationship is healthy, unhealthy, or abusive.



FINDING HELP WHERE YOU LIVE

A national hotline may be your first call, but many survivors eventually need **local assistance**.

That could include:

Emergency shelter • Transitional housing • Legal assistance • Protective-order assistance • Counseling • Financial assistance • Transportation • Food assistance • Childcare • Victim advocacy • Medical care

This guide recommends both the National Domestic Violence Hotline's local-resource search and 211 for locating services such as shelter, legal aid, counseling, and emergency housing.

211

Call: 211

Website: [211](#)

211 can connect callers with community resources available in their area.

Find Local DV Programs

[National Domestic Violence Hotline — Local Resources](#)



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS NOT JUST PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

A relationship does **not** have to involve hitting for abuse to be occurring.

This guide identifies emotional manipulation, financial and social control, threats, intimidation, isolation, outing threats, and gaslighting as forms abuse may take.

Physical Abuse

This can include hitting, punching, kicking, slapping, biting, choking or strangulation, restraining you, blocking a doorway, throwing objects, damaging property, preventing you from leaving, threatening you with a weapon, or physically intimidating you.

Emotional & Psychological Abuse

This can include:

- Constantly insulting or humiliating you.
 - Making you question your memory or perception.
 - Threatening self-harm to prevent you from leaving.
 - Making you responsible for their emotions.
 - Using fear to control your behavior.
 - Punishing you with silence or withdrawal.
 - Constant accusations of cheating.
 - Destroying your confidence over time.
-

FINANCIAL ABUSE

Financial abuse can make leaving extremely difficult.

Examples may include:

- Taking your money.
 - Controlling bank accounts.
 - Demanding access to your paycheck.
 - Preventing you from working.
 - Sabotaging your employment.
 - Opening accounts or creating debt in your name.
 - Taking your debit or credit cards.
 - Monitoring every purchase.
 - Refusing access to household money.
 - Destroying your credit.
 - Forcing you to financially support them.
- A person does not have to be wealthy for financial abuse to occur.



TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED ABUSE

Technology can become another tool of control.

Watch for a partner who:

Demands your passwords.

Constantly checks your phone.

Tracks your location.

Uses shared accounts to monitor purchases.

Logs into your social-media accounts.

Reads your messages without permission.

Places tracking devices on your belongings or vehicle.

Uses smart-home devices to monitor or intimidate you.

Creates fake accounts to watch you.

Threatens to post private photos.

Repeatedly contacts you after you have asked them to stop.

If you suspect monitoring, **do not immediately remove tracking software or change every password without considering safety.** Sudden changes can alert an abusive person that you are preparing to leave.

A domestic-violence advocate can help you think through technology safety.



LGBTQ+-SPECIFIC ABUSE

Abuse in lesbian and queer relationships can involve tactics that aren't always recognized by mainstream domestic-violence messaging.

A partner may:

Threaten to out you to family, coworkers, your employer, church, school, or community.

Tell you nobody will believe a woman could abuse another woman.

Use homophobia against you.

Invalidate your lesbian or queer identity.

Attack your gender expression.

Use your masculine or feminine presentation against you.

Threaten to disclose private information about your identity.

Tell you that seeking help will betray the Black or LGBTQ+ community.

Exploit your fear of discriminatory treatment from police, courts, healthcare providers, or shelters.

Isolate you from LGBTQ+ spaces where you normally receive support.

These behaviors can be part of coercive control.

♥ WHY BLACK LESBIAN SURVIVORS MAY FACE ADDITIONAL BARRIERS

A Black lesbian survivor can be navigating multiple systems simultaneously.

She may be thinking:

Will they believe me?

Will they understand that women can abuse women?

Will racism affect how police respond?

Will I experience homophobia at a shelter?

Will people assume the more masculine-presenting woman is automatically the aggressor?

Will my family support my relationship but dismiss the abuse?

Will seeking help harm another Black woman?

Will my community judge me for talking about this publicly?

These are serious concerns.

They also do not make abuse acceptable.

You are allowed to seek safety without becoming responsible for protecting the reputation of your partner, your family, or your community.

RELATIONSHIP WARNING SIGNS

This guide identifies controlling communication, monitoring phones/social media, identity dismissal, creating fear around self-expression, and manipulation as warning signs.

Additional warning signs can include a partner who:

Needs to know where you are constantly.

Becomes angry when you spend time with friends.

Controls what you wear.

Controls your transportation.

Regularly checks your location.

Makes you afraid to disagree.

Threatens to hurt themselves if you leave.

Destroys your belongings.

Hurts or threatens pets.

Controls access to medication.

Sabotages birth control or reproductive decisions.

Pressures or forces sexual activity.

Threatens your family.

Prevents you from sleeping.

Repeatedly apologizes after abuse and then repeats the behavior.

Makes you feel as though you must constantly change your behavior to avoid setting them off.

One behavior alone does not necessarily define an entire relationship. **Look for patterns of power, fear, coercion, and control.**

CREATE A SAFETY PLAN

You do **not** have to leave your relationship before developing a safety plan. That principle is explicitly included in BEL's original guide.

A safety plan is personalized. What is safe for one survivor may be dangerous for another.

People

Identify one or two trustworthy people who know what is happening.

Create a **code word** that means:

Call me.

Come get me.

Call for emergency assistance.

Decide what that code word means **before you need it**.

Important Documents

If safely possible, consider keeping copies of:

Driver's license or identification

Birth certificate

Social Security card

Passport

Health insurance information

Bank information

Lease or mortgage information

Vehicle documents

Medication information

Protective orders or court paperwork

Children's important documents

Pet vaccination or ownership records

Keep copies somewhere your partner cannot easily access if doing so is safe.

EMERGENCY BAG

If appropriate for your situation, an emergency bag might contain:

Identification

Medication

Keys

Phone charger

Small amount of cash

Debit/credit card

Several changes of clothing

Essential toiletries

Copies of important documents

Emergency contact information

Necessary medical equipment

Items needed for children

Essential pet supplies

Store it somewhere safe **only if doing so will not increase your danger.**

FINANCIAL SAFETY PLANNING

If financially possible and safe, consider:

Knowing what accounts exist in your name.

Keeping copies of financial records.

Reviewing your credit report.

Understanding which bills are jointly held.

Maintaining access to some money.

Knowing your bank's contact information.

Changing account access only when doing so is safe.

Opening an individual account if appropriate.

Financial planning should be individualized. Suddenly moving money or closing accounts can sometimes escalate danger or create legal complications, particularly when assets are jointly owned.



DIGITAL SAFETY CHECK

Consider reviewing:

Email accounts

Cloud accounts

Shared phone plans

Location sharing

Social-media logins

Banking applications

Saved passwords

Bluetooth trackers

Shared calendars

Family-location applications

Smart watches

Vehicle applications

Smart-home devices

Photo sharing

Again, **do not make sudden digital changes if those changes could alert the abusive person and increase your risk.**



MEDICAL CARE AFTER VIOLENCE

Seek medical attention when needed, even if you don't see obvious injuries.

If you have been strangled or choked, lost consciousness, have difficulty breathing or swallowing, experience confusion, severe headache, neck pain, voice changes, weakness, vision changes, or other concerning symptoms, seek urgent medical evaluation.

If sexual assault occurred, a medical facility or sexual-assault program can explain options for medical care and evidence collection.

You can also contact RAINN for help identifying an appropriate local program.



LEGAL HELP

Depending on your circumstances and state, legal assistance may be available regarding:

Protective orders

Housing

Divorce

Custody

Immigration

Workplace protections

Crime-victim rights

Financial matters

Documentation

Do not assume that what someone tells you online about protective orders or custody applies in your state.

WomensLaw

Website: [WomensLaw.org](https://www.womenslaw.org)

WomensLaw provides state-by-state legal information related to domestic violence, restraining orders, custody, and related issues.

Legal Services Corporation

Website: [Find Legal Aid through LSC](#)

Use this resource to locate federally funded civil legal-aid organizations.

DON'T FORGET PET SAFETY

Pets can be used as leverage in abusive relationships.

Consider including pets in your safety plan.

Think about:

Who could temporarily care for your pet?

Where are vaccination records?

Whose name appears on veterinary records?

Do you have a carrier, leash, medication, and food?

Will a shelter accommodate pets or work with a local foster program?

Safe Havens for Pets

[Safe Havens for Pets Directory](#)

This directory can help survivors locate programs that may assist with pets during domestic-violence situations.

IF YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT LEAVING

Leaving can be a particularly dangerous period in an abusive relationship.

That is why **“just leave” is not a safety plan.**

Before leaving, when possible, work with a trained domestic-violence advocate to consider:

Where you will go.

How you will get there.

Whether your partner knows the location.

Transportation.

Children.

Pets.

Medication.

Finances.

Technology.

Employment.

Protective orders.

What belongings you actually need.

Who should know where you are.

How your partner may react.

There is no single safe exit strategy for every survivor.



IF YOU LEAVE AND GO BACK

You can still ask for help.

Returning to an abusive relationship does not mean you have lost the right to support.

Survivors may return because of housing, finances, love, children, fear, threats, immigration concerns, isolation, discrimination, lack of accessible services, pets, employment, or because leaving increased the danger.

A hotline or advocate can continue working with you.



HOW TO SUPPORT SOMEONE EXPERIENCING ABUSE

This guide gives three simple instructions: **listen without judgment, believe them, and offer resources.** It also warns against pressuring someone to leave, blaming them, or trying to “fix” the situation.

Instead of:

“Why don't you just leave?”

Try:

“What would help you feel safer right now?”

Instead of:

“I would never put up with that.”

Try:

“I believe you.”

Instead of taking control:

“Would you like me to help you look at some options?”

The survivor has already experienced someone trying to control her.

Support should not become another form of control.



PERSONAL SAFETY PLAN

Person I trust:

Their phone number:

Our code word:

Safe place I could go:

Backup safe place:

Transportation option:

Domestic-violence program:

Important medications:

Documents I need:

Pet plan:

People who should NOT receive my location:

My safest way to communicate:



KEEP THESE NUMBERS

Emergency: 911

National Domestic Violence Hotline:

1-800-799-7233

Text **START** to **88788**

The Network/La Red:

1-800-832-1901

RAINN National Sexual Assault Hotline:

1-800-656-4673

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:

Call or text **988**

Love Is Respect:

1-866-331-9474

Community Resources:

Call **211**



BEL SUPPORT & COMMUNITY

Black Educated Lesbians (BEL) is committed to creating spaces where Black lesbians and Black queer women can talk about healthy relationships, healing, wellness, and the issues affecting our lives.

BEL's existing domestic-violence work includes community spaces, relationship and healing workshops, resource guides, and peer connection.

BEL is not a domestic-violence shelter, crisis hotline, law-enforcement agency, law firm, or clinical mental-health provider. When someone needs specialized assistance, our role should be to help connect them with trained professionals and appropriate resources rather than attempt to replace those services.



A FINAL WORD FROM BEL

Abuse does not become less serious because both people in the relationship are women.

You do not have to prove that your experience is “bad enough” before asking questions.

You do not have to make an immediate decision about your relationship before speaking with an advocate.

And you should not have to choose between your **Blackness, your lesbian or queer identity, your community, and your safety.**

You deserve relationships where you can be safe, respected, heard, and fully yourself.

Black Educated Lesbians (BEL)

United in Power, Purpose, and Pride.

Educational Disclaimer: This resource guide provides general educational and resource information. It is not legal advice, medical advice, mental-health treatment, or individualized safety planning. Domestic-violence situations can involve significant and rapidly changing safety risks. When possible, consult a trained domestic-violence advocate about your individual circumstances.