

Domestic Violence and the Holidays: What You Should Know

(adapted from *Women Against Crime* article)

<https://womenagainstcrime.com/domestic-violence-and-the-holidays-what-you-should-know/>

Statistically, domestic violence increases over the holidays, for a number of reasons:

- Stress from holiday shopping, finances, and planning can create agitation.
- Abusers are more likely to partake of alcohol or drugs when they don't have to work.
- Simple opportunity: abuser more likely to be home alone with their victims.

It can be easier for friends or family to recognize the warning signs of abuse, such as:

Physical signs:

- Bruises or cuts that are worse than their explanations merit ("I accidentally fell", "I hit my head on a cabinet").
- Wearing inappropriate or unusual clothing to cover up (turtlenecks, sunglasses indoors, long skirts or pants when they usually wear shorter clothing).

Emotional signs:

- Being unusually quiet, withdrawn, or even fearful.
- Anxiety or apprehension, especially when away from the abuser.
- Depression or discussion of suicidal thoughts.
- Development of a drug or alcohol problem.

Changes in activity:

- Being late or canceling at the last minute more often than is usual.
- Avoiding parties or other activities they used to enjoy, especially with friends and family.
- Lack of money or access to resources because partner has control of it.

The abuser's behavior may be the biggest indicator that someone is in danger. Keep an eye out for these red flags, such as:

- Needing to "ask permission" to go out or see or communicate with friends.
- Jealousy, criticism, or accusations of infidelity.
- Constant "checking in" via texts or phone calls.
- Survivor excusing abusive behavior as "moody" or "needy" or as being due to drugs or alcohol.



It's important to remember that violence is never the victim's fault. If you are speaking to a friend or loved one you assume is a survivor of violence, never be accusatory or critical. Instead, emphasize your unconditional support and love, and offer resource numbers for police, DV shelter, and crisis line.

GBSV and Queerness on the Holidays

Though family politics can make anyone trepidatious about the holidays, many LGBTQIA2S+ folks have experienced verbal and physical gender-based violence from their families. Below is a list of suggestions from PFLAG.org for how to be an ally to queer and transgender loved ones over the holiday season.

1. **Listen to your friends.** Seems obvious, right? But listening – without commenting right away – is a big skill to learn. Often, LGBTQ people who are experiencing anxiety about holiday visits just need someone who will listen to how they're feeling, center their LGBTQ+ friends' needs, and not minimize those experiences (e.g., "It can't be that bad, can it?"). Close your mouth, open your ears, and take it all in.
2. **When people are ready to talk, help them focus on the present.** When anyone has a bad experience, it's natural to go back to that time and expect that it will determine what will happen in the future. This can sometimes cause what's called a "self-fulfilling prophecy" – meaning, by trying to avoid something that happened in the past we end up creating the exact situation we're hoping to avoid. But this is not always the case. Sometimes, people change. Situations are different. Try to help your LGBTQ+ friend look at how they can prepare themselves for this experience, and not dwell exclusively in the past.
3. **Remind people to take care of themselves.** Pulling away from friends, not eating well, or even self-medicating are all common responses when people are under stress. Check in to find out how they're doing, ask about what they've been up to, and if you're seeing the signs that someone is not caring for themselves, make some suggestions about how they can. Even better, offer to be part of their self-care plans. ("Want to go to the gym with me?" "How about coming over for a good healthy dinner?").
4. **Be willing to serve as the ally-on-call.** Before your LGBTQ+ loved one heads out for the holidays, remind them that you're there and happy to talk/text/IM if they need you. Letting people know that it's ok to ask for help is important.
5. **Extend an invitation.** Some LGBTQ+ people don't have an option to be with their families of origin, but you can be part of their chosen family. Ask them to join you for holiday celebrations. And when they attend, don't make their personal story (e.g., "Janet is here because her family threw her out.") part of what you share with other guests. They're just a friend who is coming over to share a holiday meal.
6. **Change the way you ask questions.** Rather than asking LGBTQ+ friends if they're going home for the holidays, or spending the holidays with family – which may make them feel forced to explain tough situations – ask open-ended questions like, "So do you have any plans for the holidays?"
7. **Call out anti-queer and anti-trans violence and microaggressions** when you see and hear it at your own family gatherings. Don't let Uncle Bob or cousin Karen get away with making anyone feel small or less-than.

Actions

Listen & Learn

The Tip of the Iceberg explores gender-based violence in communities, the media, and our nation. Episode: "Holiday Movies and Gender-Based Violence" – Join the Iceberg team in unpacking what for some is a staple of the season: holiday movies.

<https://thetipoftheiceberg.podbean.com/e/holiday-movies-and-gender-based-violence/>

Shop with Your Heart as well as Your Wallet



<https://thequiltbag.gay/>

The QUILT BAG is an LGBTQ+ retail shop carrying queer & trans wares in Edmonton, Alberta and online.

The QUILT BAG's Trans Community Fund is available for low income trans, non-binary, and two-spirit people to access gender affirming items from the store at no cost – this includes binders, gaffs, bras, packers, and other items depending on availability.

You can donate to the Trans Community fund on the QUILT BAG website.