

## IN THE DREAM HOUSE | *resources for queer survivors*

**Domestic violence is** a repetitive pattern of actions and behaviors used to maintain power over an intimate partner. It can be hard to recognize, and rather than looking to prescriptive gender tropes or checking off a list of red flags, one may ask: Whose life has become smaller? Whose demands have grown? Whose sense of self has fallen away, and whose desires, grievances, and anger animate the relationship as a whole?

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**Abuse can include** many different forms of violence, and people who are abusing generally use the most effective tools at their disposal. For queer people who are abusive, these tools might include misogyny, homophobia and transphobia, and racism, regardless of their own experiences of marginalization. They can also include distortions of social justice language, queer politics, and sex positivity.

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**Surviving is complicated.** Someone who is being abused may have “unhealthy” responses: they might yell back; they might physically defend themselves; they might lie to defuse a blowout or to have some control over when and where their partner escalates. This does not mean that they are abusive or equally responsible. In queer relationships, accusations of mutual abuse are often used to flatten the uneven dynamics or to imply a survivor is not trustworthy. But abuse is a

chronic *pattern* of one person’s control over another: “mutual abuse” is an oxymoron.

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**Abuse can make it difficult for survivors to trust the things they see and feel.** When survivors express their own anger or hurt, they can be punished with cruelty, then be given sweetness again when they yield. Survivors may feel increasingly powerless while their sense of responsibility for their partner’s every emotional want—no matter how trivial—is made to expand.

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**We can all choose** to treat our partners with love, dignity, and respect, even when we feel upset. People abuse because they learn to, have the opportunity to, and, most importantly, because they choose to. We are all taught violence; we all have power which we can wield over others. We all have the capacity to choose how to use it. People who abuse their partners are no exception. They can and do practice generosity and restraint with others, and, at different moments, with their partners as well. It may be true that an abusive partner has their own trauma, but while this offers context, it is never justification. Not all people who survive violence become violent themselves. Many survivors put enormous effort into ending cycles of abuse.

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**You deserve kindness.** No relationship is perfect, but love and intimacy can still be *consistently* caring and respectful.

Hyejin Shim, for *In the Dream House* book tour, 2019-2020

Relationships should not be a realm of unpredictability, fear, and dread. It’s okay to be anxious, but you shouldn’t have to fear violence (verbal, emotional, physical, etc.). You shouldn’t have to feel like your partner wants to break you down, or that they want to cause you harm.

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**Surviving abuse requires compassion and support.** If you’re worried about a loved one, maintain your connection and remind them that you care. Be open to listening. Explore ways you can help that they would find helpful. Do not repeat the controlling dynamics of abuse by putting them down for staying or demanding that they leave on *your* terms and timeline. Survivors know the nuances and risks of their situations best. Prioritize self-determination as they seek safety and healing.

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There may be more people who want to support you than you realize. Connect with supportive loved ones and organizations.

[The Northwest Network](https://www.nwnetwork.org)

nwnetwork.org ▲ 206-568-7777

[National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs](https://www.nationalcoalitionofanti-violence.org)

avp.org ▲ 212-714-1141

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

thehotline.org ▲ 800-799-7233