

## Addressing Intimate Partner Violence in LGBT2SQ+ Communities Across BC

# Practicing Inclusion to Support LGBT2SQ+ Survivors

The purpose of this resource is to support you in implementing meaningful changes in your practices and organizations that will increase the inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Two-Spirit, and Queer (LGBT2SQ+) people experiencing Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). What is offered here is not a comprehensive list, but rather practical starting points from which to continue to build your inclusion practices.

## Guiding Principles

- LGBT2SQ+ people are experts in making the best decisions for their own lives. You can honour these skills and acknowledge how much time and energy goes into this process by taking on some of the work of creating safety in your practices and organizations.
- Be explicit and specific: Blanket inclusion statements are not enough. Be clear about what you are committed to and transparent about how you are working on that commitment and where you fall short.
- The needs of LGBT2SQ+ survivors are incredibly diverse. We cannot make a one size fits all solution. Rather, we can center the expertise of LGBT2SQ+ survivors and listen and adapt to what they need and want.
- No one will be perfect in their practices. Rather than aspiring to perfection, focus on continually doing better and be accountable when you make mistakes and/or cause harm.

# Practicing Inclusion with Your Clients

## **Communicate with your client about their name(s)**

It is better not to assume that the name on someone's documentation and records is the name they use. Avoid using the language of "preferred name." The name that someone wants you to call them is their name, not a preference. This may be different than their legal name and/or the name they use with other people and organizations. Use their name, even if different from legal identification documents. Ask clients when they want you to use their name or their legal name to ensure you do not "out" someone to other people including to other organizations/institutions they may not be safe enough to disclose to. If you're asking someone's legal name, make sure to explain to them the reason why you need to know that (e.g., insurance billing, health care record keeping, etc.). If you don't need that information, don't ask.

## **Create space for your client to share their pronouns**

It is important that you do not assume someone's pronouns based on their name, documentation, or gender expression. In addition to creating spaces on forms to share pronouns, you can create space for clients to share their pronouns by sharing yours and then asking about theirs. People may use different pronouns in different spaces and the pronouns they want you to use may change over time. Also, be sure not to make assumptions about the pronouns of a client's partners, lovers, friends, and supports. Rather than being selective in who you ask for pronouns, make it a practice to ask everyone for their pronouns (not just those who you perceive to be LGBT2SQ+).

## **Respect diversity of relationship models**

Be careful to not assume that all of your clients engage in monogamy. There are a number of other relationship models such as polyamory, open relationships, relationship anarchy, etc. Rather, create space for clients to describe and define their relationship(s) in their own words. This not only creates safety but also prevents you from missing out on possible support they might have access to such as other partners, lovers, and chosen family.

# Practicing Inclusion in Your Agency

## **Be explicit and specific**

LGBT2SQ+ people do their homework when accessing supports and are experts at keeping themselves as safe as possible given the ways they are targeted. You can support them by being explicit about your commitment to their inclusion and being specific about how you are working towards this commitment. This includes being transparent about barriers that currently exist within your practice/ organization, not just what you are doing right.

Because racism and white supremacy are often embedded in LGBT2SQ+ spaces, many Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, Muslim, and People of Colour (QTBIPOC) assume that a LGBT2SQ+ space that does not explicitly commit to including QTBIPOC people is not safe for them. It is important to also be explicit and specific about how you are working to support and include QTBIPOC clients.

## **Reflect the diversity of the people you want to serve in the diversity of your staff**

Hiring and retaining LGBT2SQ+ staff is an important part of creating an organization that is safe and inclusive. This includes staff that reflects the diversity within LGBT2SQ+ communities including race, class, sexuality, gender, ability, immigration status, etc. Essential to this is to not simply expect LGBT2SQ+ staff to fit themselves into your current Practicing Inclusion to Support LGBT2SQ+ Survivors organization, but considering what changes are needed to ensure LGBT2SQ+ employees are supported, valued, and able to succeed.

## **Expand your staff's competencies and skills**

LGBT2SQ+ people live at many different intersections of race, class, ability, immigration status, etc. This means that increasing staff knowledge and skills in a diversity of anti-oppressive and inclusive practices such as anti-racism, disability justice, immigration rights, trauma-informed practice, etc., will help to increase their capacity to provide accessible, inclusive services to more LGBT2SQ+ people. This includes training all staff to ensure that you are consistent and reliable in all interactions as an organization/agency. (For more information, please refer to EVA BC's Foundations for Supporting LGBT2SQ+ Individuals resource).

### **Update forms and documents**

Filling out forms is often one of the first interactions that new clients have with you/your agency and this tells them a lot about your commitment to and competency in providing inclusive services. Make sure that you have designated space for names versus legal names, non-binary genders, and pronouns. It is often best to not use checkboxes because no one likes checking the “other” box. Center clients’ agency and give space for people to use their own words.

Consider what information is necessary to know for clients to receive services from your organization. Certain questions can trigger experiences of trauma and difficult memories, especially for LGBT2SQ+ clients who have experienced oppression due to aspects of their identities and experiences. If you don’t need to know, it is better not to ask.

### **Offer LGBT2SQ+ specific resources and programs**

If possible, avoid simply trying to fit LGBT2SQ+ clients into current programs and/or resourcing. Instead, consider what needs are specific to LGBT2SQ+ people and what it would mean to make them safe and welcome. This could include creating spaces and resources that center LGBT2SQ+ people, are developed by and with LGBT2SQ+ people and organizations, and are evaluated to assess how well they are meeting the needs of the community. There is a big difference between inviting LGBT2SQ+ people to join cisgender heterosexual focused spaces and considering what is needed for a space to be safe, accessible, and valuable for LGBT2SQ+ people. Be sure to advertise any specific resources and programs/services you might be able to offer both within and outside of LGBT2SQ+ communities.

### **Foster connections with LGBT2SQ+ communities and organizations**

The truth is that you cannot do everything. Inclusion is best created when a diverse group of people and organizations are connected to ensure that clients get access to what they need, regardless of who their first point of contact is. It is important that we know what other supports are available, what their inclusion policies and practices are, and what their limitations are. Building a network that includes the communities you serve also creates the opportunity to give and receive feedback supporting the deepening of your inclusive practices.

# Considerations and Complexities

Inclusive practice isn't one size fits all. We all exist at an intersection of many different identities and experiences. This means different clients will need different considerations. We always need to be simultaneously thinking about these important intersections when we practice inclusion.

What your client needs might change over time. Remain committed to listening and adapting without becoming defensive.

There are few LGBT2SQ+-specific services/resources and support is not always accessible, affordable, or safe. This is the current reality for LGBT2SQ+ survivors and it would be inappropriate to deny this reality.

Clients might not disclose their gender, sexuality and/or other identities and experiences. Disclosing gender, sexuality, and/or experiences of IPV may be too risky for some LGBT2SQ+ people. Increasing your service's inclusivity and accessibility may help clients feel safer, even if they choose not to disclose.

## Deepening Your Practice

- Whose voices and experiences do you center and empower in the process of expanding inclusive practices?
- How can you integrate reviewing and improving your practices into your personal and organizational policies and practices?
- How can you prioritize building connections across differences? What organizations are you connected to that support the many intersections of LGBT2SQ+ people including race, class, immigration status, ability, etc.?

