IT TAKES A VILLAGE, PEOPLE!

Advocacy, Friends and Family, & LGBT Survivors of Abuse

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by Connie Burk, Selma Al-Aswad Dillsi, Meg Crager

The NW Network of Bi, Trans, Lesbian, and Gay Survivors of Abuse
National LGBT Training & Technical Assistance Initiative

ADVOCACY FRIENDS & FAMILY

THE **OPPORTUNITY**

When they know how, friends & family can reduce a survivor's isolation, help survivors implement safety planning, offer practical aid like a safe place to stay, childcare or a ride to work, and provide needed encouragement and long-term support. Advocates have an important role to play in helping survivors strengthen support networks and decrease the isolation of abuse.

THE **CHALLENGE**

Transphobia and homophobia can create an environment of estrangement and isolation between LGBT people and their families of origin and friends. Traditional support from families of origin, community institutions such as churches or civic groups, and the broad social safety net weave together a system of back-up supports for many straight people that have rarely been available to LGBT people in times of crisis. From being frankly disowned from families and ex-communicated from traditions, to subtle expectations that LGBT people stay silent about their partners and families, isolation can run the gamut. People who batter know that this context of estrangement and isolation from friends and family in general, and from back-up support in specific, can be leveraged to increase their control over their LGBT partners.

BASIC **PRINCIPLES**

- KEEP SURVIVOR SELF-DETERMINATION IN THE FOREFRONT
- SAFETY FOR EVERYONE INVOLVED IS IMPORTANT
- THERE ARE NO "ONE SIZE FITS ALL" ANSWERS. EVALUATE THE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF STRATEGIES IN SPECIFIC SITUATIONS.
- KNOW HOW TO RESPOND TO HOMOPHOBIA & TRANSPHOBIA.

Friends and Family report that they want to help, but they don't know what to do.

& LGBT SURVIVORS OF ABUSE

THE **STRENGTHS**

In the absence of traditional social safety nets, LGBT people created our own traditions of community care and mutual support. One such innovation is the LGBT community ethic of chosen family. Chosen family are people for whom one has accepted reciprocating responsibilities and obligations as if related by birth or marriage. In a study released in 2010, LGBT people report having more close friends than the general population, are more likely to get emotional support from those friends, more often live with friends, are twice as likely to have discussed their end-of-life preferences with close friends, and are four times as likely to depend on a friend as caregiver. Nearly two-thirds say they consider their friends "chosen family." (study by the American Society on Aging released by SAGE. 2010)

Community organizations, like Parents & Friends of Lesbians & Gays (P-FLAG), have been working for decades to provide information and support for friends and family who want to be strong allies to LGBT people. More and more families, faith traditions, friend groups, and communities are finding ways to stay connected or reconnect with their LGBT loved ones.

The task is simply to use your core advocacy tools to help survivors build their support networks.

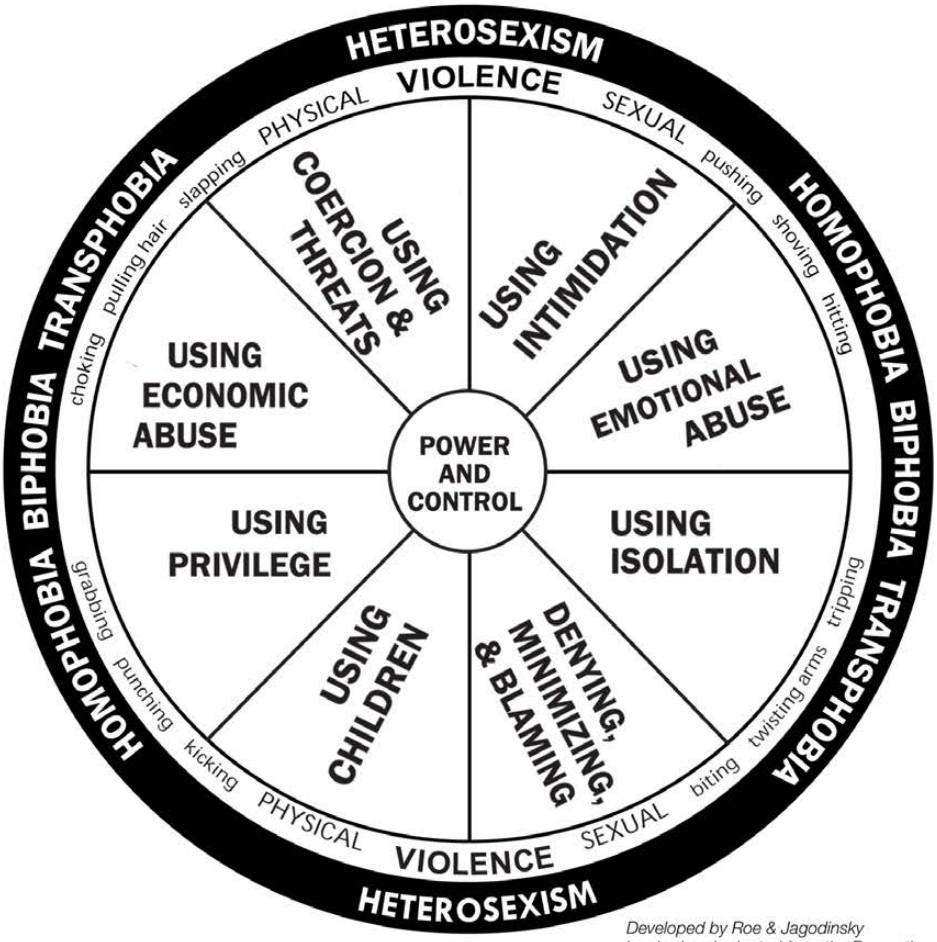
ADVOCATES CAN HELP FRIENDS & FAMILY UNDERSTAND THE TACTICS OF ABUSE AND IDENTIFY WAYS TO HELP.

In fact, friends & family can help reduce the harm of every tactic of abuse—from the common tactics included on the "Power & Control Wheel" to tactics that go beyond the wheel. Disrupting isolating behaviors is the most obvious benefit, but friends & family can also help survivors evaluate the efficacy of threats, interrupt minimizing/denying/blaming statements made by abusers, provide a sounding board to correct put downs or mind games used in emotionally abusive tactics, help survivors come out planfully at work or with family, support survivors' sobriety, navigate faith communities, job sites or challenging institutions, all the while championing survivors' choices. To get there, survivors and their friends & family may need basic **domestic violence education**, orientation to the fundamentals of **safety & support planning**, information about LGBT and **community resources** and referrals, strategies for **setting boundaries** and asking for or offering help, assistance **repairing relationships** compromised by homophobia or the toll of coping with abuse, and motivation and help to move from private concerns to actually **starting the conversation.**

ADVOCATES KNOW HOW TO DO THIS ALREADY.
YOU'VE **GOT THIS!**

DV EDUCATION

LGBTQ POWER & CONTROL WHEEL



Developed by Roe & Jagodinsky
Inspired and adapted from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project
206 West Fourth Street Duluth, MN 55806

more resources for DV EDUCATION at nwnetwork.org

IT TAKES A VILLAGE PEOPLE

ADVOCACY, FRIENDS AND FAMILY, & LGBT SURVIVORS OF ABUSE

BEYOND THE WHEEL

SELECTED TACTICS OF ABUSE

ISOLATION AND COMING OUT— The isolation many LGBT people face as a result of transphobia/homophobia is useful to a batterer trying to isolate their partner. Because of these phobias in our communities, when people are first coming out, they may be more vulnerable to abuse. They may lose friends and family when they come out, &/or may be alienated from their cultural, ethnic, religious, familial community and institutions. Isolation can also happen when a person remains closeted, cut off from access to LGBT community resources, potentially lying about their relationships and orientation, and vulnerable to threats of outing. Both **threatening to "out" a person** (which can mean losing children, excommunication, job loss etc) or **insisting that a person remain closeted** (which can mean isolation, lack of community connection etc) can be used as tools of control.

USING VULNERABILITIES—a person who batters using their own vulnerabilities to obligate or coerce a partner into staying, caring for them, and/or prioritizing *their* needs. While the vulnerability may be very real and significant, when a batterer uses those vulnerabilities to control, survivors are exploited (resources, time, attention) & survivors' attempts to negotiate boundaries or prioritize self are undermined.

USING CHILDREN—custody issues, many LGBT people are not allowed to be the legal parent of their children, safety planning for the long-haul when one's batterer is a co-parent with custody. Jurisdictional issues within and among states are particularly difficult to address.

USING SMALL COMMUNITIES—Using friends to monitor survivor & gather info, to ostracize the survivor, to threaten to ostracize—(Please note: safety planning cannot rely on the survivor never being in community space with the batterer. Our communities are too small for this. We must do **harm reduction** planning or survivors "drop out" of community to avoid batterer.)

LEVERAGING INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE / ISOLATION—law enforcement agencies were used as sources of state violence against LGBT people to control and intimidate, LGBT people have been targeted for violence in mental health institutions, by hate and bias attacks, experience disparity in health & human services, and are vulnerable to extortion. A bias attack or institutional harm against an LGBT person in one location effects people all across the country. LGBT people experience discrimination and institutional oppression based on race, class, national origin, gender, religion etc., as well as gender identity & sexual orientation. These things are used by batterers to increase control.

LACK OF CIVIL LEGAL PROTECTIONS— Discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity remains unchallenged through much of the U.S. Variations in civil legal protections and relationship recognition among jurisdictions in states and between states make critical issues such as custody, dissolution of partnership agreements, property issues and other basic familial civil legal issues incredibly difficult to resolve. This limits LGBT people's mobility and access to support.

ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE—LGBT people have historically been forced to make community in "illegal" and marginalized spaces such as bars. We have a high rate of alcohol and drug use and abuse. People who batter leverage the ongoing consequences of ways that LGBT people's lives have been historically criminalized AS WELL AS the realities of current drug use (and drug criminalization) when setting up/maintaining a system of power & control.

"Beyond the Wheel" Bullet Points developed by Connie Burk ©2005
for The NW Network of Bisexual, Trans, Lesbian and Gay Survivors of Abuse www.nwnetwork.org P.O. Box 20398 Seattle, WA 98102

ADVOCATES!

YOU can use the TOOLS YOU ALREADY HAVE to strengthen SUPPORT networks!

I really want to tell my parents what's going on, but then I'd have to come out to them. That isn't going to happen. —SURVIVOR

I can't ask my sister for help because I dumped my kids on her so many times, she doesn't want to even hear from me. —SURVIVOR

I have tried everything I can to help him and I don't know what to do anymore. —DAD

My friend's new girlfriend freaks me out. She was bragging about a fight she got into last week. I am worried about my friend, but I don't want her girlfriend to come after me. —BFF

I keep telling her she has to leave, but she won't.
—CO-WORKER

BEFORE

ADVOCACY TOOLS

REPAIRING RELATIONSHIPS

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

BOUNDARIES

SAFETY & SUPPORT PLANNING

DV EDUCATION

RESOURCES & COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

AFTER

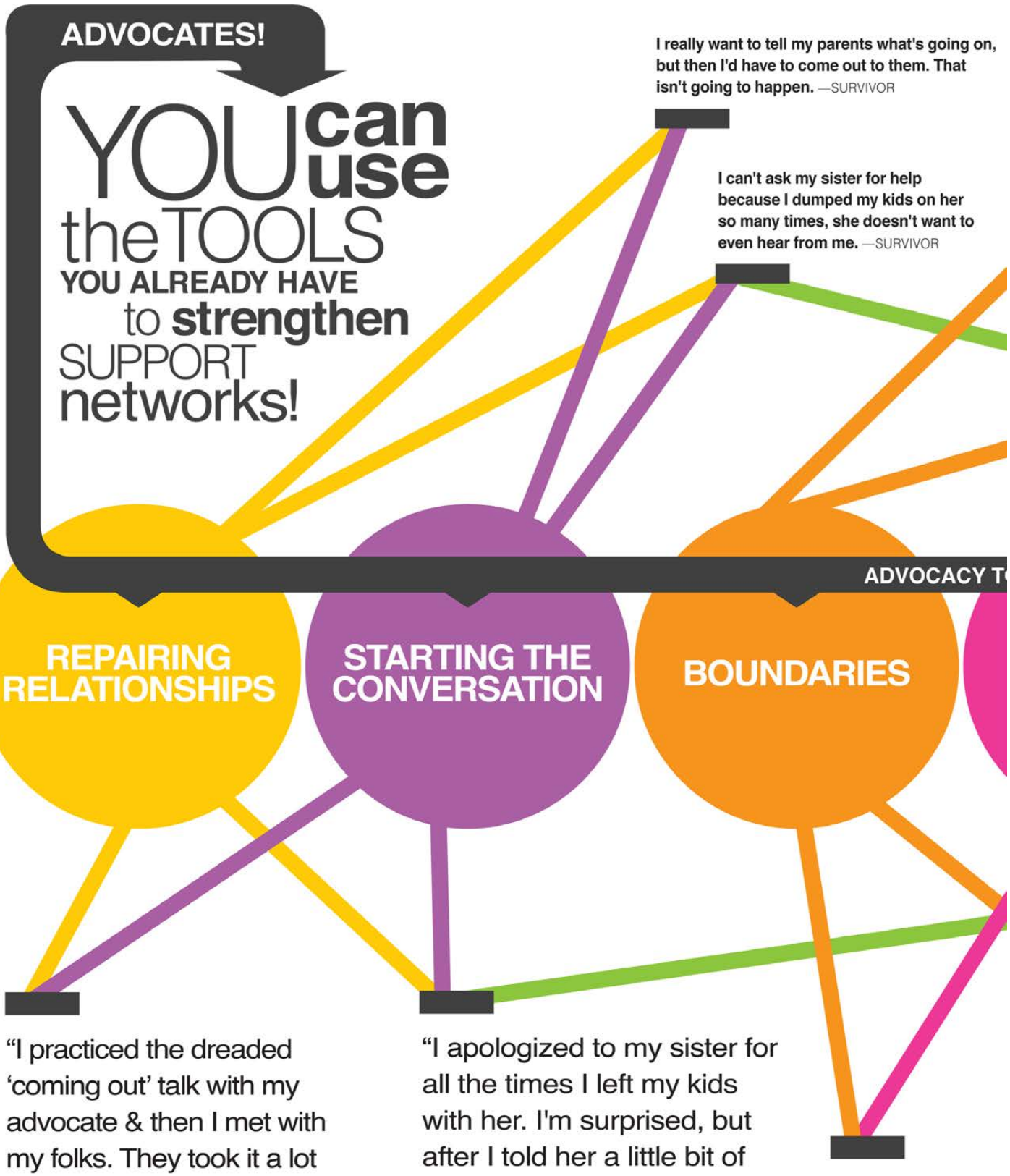
"I practiced the dreaded 'coming out' talk with my advocate & then I met with my folks. They took it a lot better than I thought they would. My next goal? Talk to them about the abuse."
—SURVIVOR

"I apologized to my sister for all the times I left my kids with her. I'm surprised, but after I told her a little bit of what's been going on for me, she said she would watch them whenever I have to work late." —SURVIVOR

"I can drive him to his AA meeting and I can take time to listen, but I know that I can't do everything for him." —DAD

"I understand that leaving an abusive relationship is hard. My friend will leave if and when it feels right to her. Meanwhile, I'm here to listen." —CO-WORKER

"It turns out my friend is worried too. We agreed she won't tell her girlfriend my address or phone number so that I can be a safe person for her to stay with. She's talked with a DV advocate and she and I worked on a safety plan together." —BFF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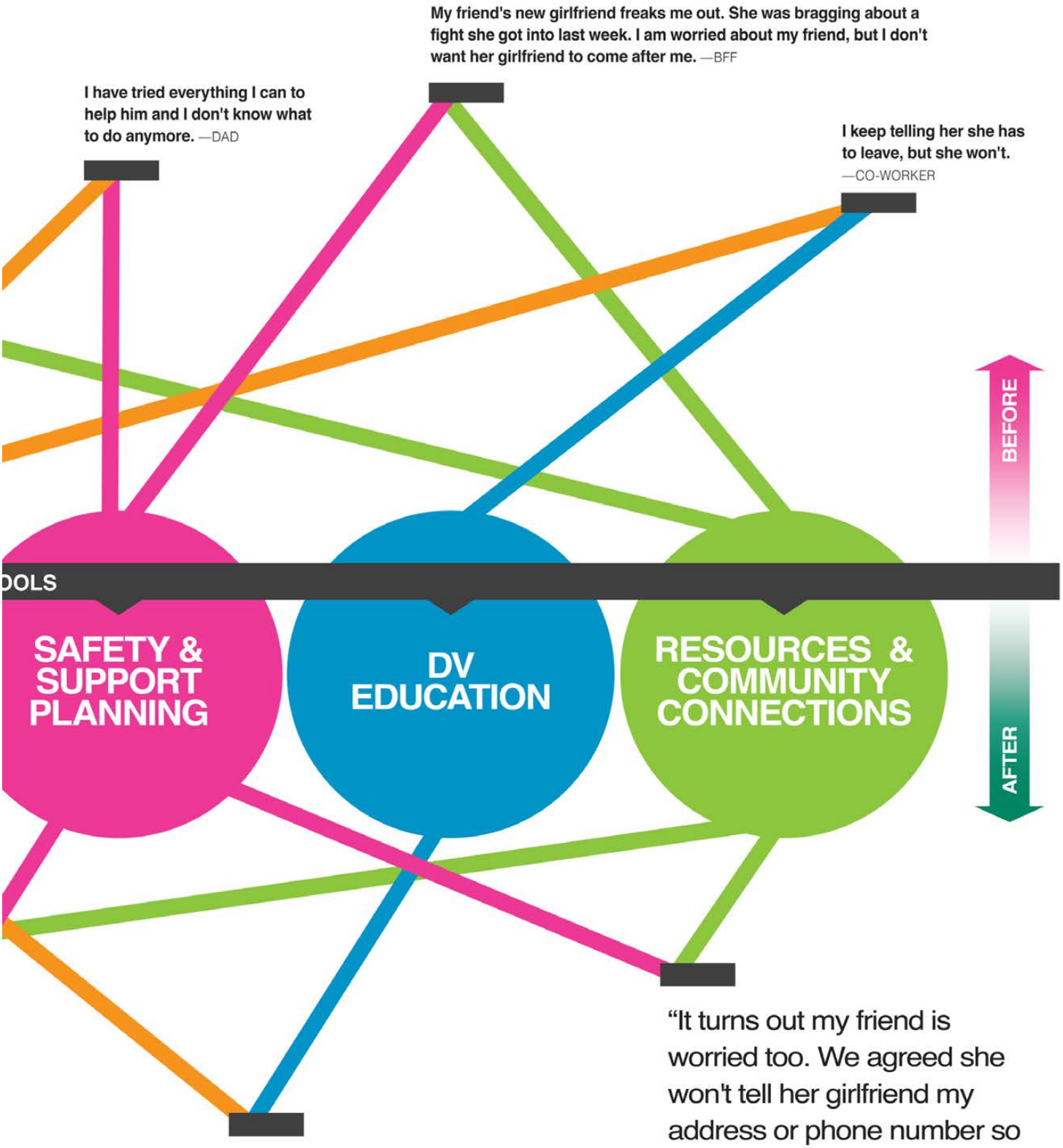

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RESOURCE & COMMUNITY CONNECTION

A JUMPING OFF PLACE FOR

IDENTIFYING LGBT AND ALLY RESOURCES

that may help LGBT survivors connect to community and/or help friends and family increase their support to an LGBT loved one.

PFLAG CHAPTER? **PFLAG.ORG** Parents & Friends of Lesbians & Gays	**Where/When it meets?**	
	Contact info:	
LGBQ/T Affinity AA/NA/AL-ANON? **AA.org**	**Where/When it meets?**	
	Contact info:	
GLSEN Chapter? **glsen.org** Gay & Lesbian Student & Educator Network	**Where/When it meets?**	
	Contact info:	
Affirming Congregation & Faith Communities	**1)**	**3)**
	2)	**4)**
LGBTQ Community/ Resource Center		
Annual Pride Festival or Parade		

ADVOCACY, FRIENDS AND FAMILY, & LGBT SURVIVORS OF ABUSE

WHEN LOCAL ISN'T AVAILABLE,

THINK CLOSEST!

RESOURCE & COMMUNITY CONNECTION

LGBTQ MEDIA	free newspapers, magazines, local blogs, etc..
CULTURAL ARTS GROUPS	check free newspaper ads for choirs, film festivals, performances, etc.
SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES OR GROUPS	HIV/AIDS, mental health, childcare collectives, specific cultural/ethnic
BARS OR SOCIAL SCENE	in your area? statewide?
GROUPS WORKING TO EXPAND RIGHTS & PROTECTIONS	in your area? statewide?
EMPLOYEE AFFINITY GROUPS	at nearby businesses or organizations
BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS OR DIRECTORIES	Gay Yellow Pages? Pink Pages?

SAFETY & SUPPORT PLANNING

QUICK START **TIPS** FOR ADVOCATES

WORKING WITH LGBT SURVIVORS

TO STRENGTHEN SUPPORT NETWORKS

- Invite survivors to think about who can help, and what helpers need to know.
- Integrate "support planning" into your routine safety planning.
- Role play with survivors to practice talking with friends and family about experiences, needs and boundaries.
- Explore opportunities for survivors to repair relationships, ask for help, or share their experience of domestic violence with family/friends.
- Offer to meet with survivors and their family & friends to discuss safety planning.
- Remember that any outreach to friends & family must be specifically directed by the survivor.

WORKING WITH FAMILY & FRIENDS

TO DECREASE ISOLATION

- Develop a set of guiding questions for talking with concerned family & friends.
- Compile an LGBT resource book for advocates to use. Include your local PFLAG, LGBT recovery centers, Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous, affirming LGBT congregations and other supportive resources.
- Compile educational information about domestic violence and the tactics of LGBT batterers.
- Welcome calls and inquiries from friends, chosen family and families of origin.
- Listen carefully and be prepared to respond to questions and concerns.
- Affirm confidentiality (never disclose information about a survivor/program participant to anyone —including friends & family—without a specific signed release of information.)
- Keep in mind the self-determination & safety of the survivor.
- Provide information, referrals, ideas about safety planning, and answer questions about domestic violence.
- Refer friends & family who are struggling with homophobia to supportive resources such as PFLAG.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE PEOPLE

ADVOCACY, FRIENDS AND FAMILY, & LGBT SURVIVORS OF ABUSE

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

QUICK START **TIPS** FOR FRIENDS & FAMILY

WHETHER
REACHING OUT
FOR HELP
OR **CHECKING IN ON A FRIEND**
STARTING THE CONVERSATION
IS WITHIN REACH

- Do it now! You don't have to wait until your concerns are confirmed to reach out.
- Be open and genuine. Don't "make a case", just start with a question or two.
- Give the conversation your full attention, if only for a couple minutes.
- Check back in. Repeat! We all feel differently about our relationships at different times, so more than one opportunity to say what we need or how we can help is good.
- Keep it real. You don't have to fix anything, have all the answers or have a perfect relationship to get the conversation going.

NOTE ON **COMING OUT**

For many LGBTQ people, coming out is a huge barrier to accessing friends & family for support. Even when our gender identity or sexual orientation is an open secret, moving from "known but unspoken" to "we can talk about this" can be a huge leap for LGBTQ people & for our support systems. Like any long journey, coming out starts with the first step Some encouragements to keep in mind:

- Coming out isn't an event, it's a process. If you first don't succeed, try, try again!
- The only sure-fire antidote to the threat of outing is coming out on your own terms.
- Don't wait to find the perfect person to tell, just think of the best person given the choices you have right now.
- Prepare to deal with a variety of responses—including awesome ones.
- You can do it!

NOTES

NATIONAL RESOURCES

LAMBDALEGAL.ORG National LGBT Legal Advocacy, legal info by state

SAFESCHOOLSCOALITION.ORG Tools for Safe, Inclusive School Communities

NWNETWORK.ORG Comprehensive LGBT DV/SA services & provider training

THETREVORPROJECT.ORG LGBT Youth Suicide Prevention

WESTERNSTATESCENTER.ORG Uniting Communities Toolkit: Communities of color increasing LGBT inclusion

SAFETY & SUPPORT PLANNING

A little help from my friends

SUPPORT PLANNING CHECKLIST

SUPPORT NEEDED
SURVIVORS MARK SUPPORTS THEY NEED

SUPPORT AVAILABLE
FRIENDS & FAMILY MARK WHAT THEY CAN OFFER

Details and Conditions	Y/N/M	Support Item	Y/N/M	Details and Conditions
Take care of Fido when I move out of my apartment.	Y	Pet sit	Y	*Up to 3 days/3 nights.*
		Listening		
		Provide place to stay overnight		
		Provide rides		
		Help keep calendar— remind of important dates		
		Provide childcare/watch children		
		Bring meals / coordinate meals		
		Find out information about community resources		
		Help think through "coming out" talk with family members/friends		
		Have regular phone check ins		
		Do fun things together		
		Get connected to domestic violence / sexual assault agency		
		Borrow /loan money		
		Help to budget, figure out finances/ hold money		
		Store belongings / important items / money /paperwork		
		Go along to appointments (medical, court, etc)		

KEY

YES: I am in need of this support / available to give this support
NO: I am not in need of this support /not available to give this support
MAYBE: I may want this support / be able to provide this support under certain conditions

When relationships are tough (and especially when a relationship is abusive), we can need all kinds of help to get by. Still, it can be hard to ask for help AND hard to know how to be helpful. Even when we reach out, getting to specifics can be a challenge. Don't derail support with worry - [*"What if I can't (or don't want to) do what they ask for?"* or *"What if they agree to help me when they don't really want to?"*]. Instead, anyone can use this handy checklist to clearly communicate their needs OR what they are willing/able to do (or not do) to help out.

SAFETY & SUPPORT PLANNING

A little help from my friends

SUPPORT PLANNING CHECKLIST

SUPPORT NEEDED
SURVIVORS MARK SUPPORTS THEY NEED

SUPPORT AVAILABLE
FRIENDS & FAMILY MARK WHAT THEY CAN OFFER

Details and Conditions	Y/N/M	Support Item	Y/N/M	Details and Conditions
Take care of Fido when I move out of my apartment.	Y	Pet sit	Y	*Up to 3 days/3 nights.*
		Run errands with		
		Run errands for		
		Pick children up from school		
		Help talk with other friends about situation/ the abuse		
		Invite family along for outings		
		Spend regular, quality time with one or more children.		
		Don't offer drinks. Plan "sober" nights out.		
		Talk about financial concerns		
		Talk about parenting concerns		
		Check back in regularly. Keep checking back in.		
		Help with household repairs		

KEY

YES: I am in need of this support / available to give this support
NO: I am not in need of this support /not available to give this support
MAYBE: I may want this support / be able to provide this support under certain conditions

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BOUNDARIES

A boundary is a limit, a line of distinction that defines where one thing ends & another thing begins.

BOUNDARY SETTING EXERCISE

Keep in mind - boundaries between people are **dynamic** and **can change** as circumstances change.

Boundaries are important in all relationships: with partners, friends, family members and coworkers. They draw a clear line between everything that is you: your space, your thoughts and feelings, your needs and choices, and someone else. They put a clear message out to others about what you need and expect. The only way other people can know our boundaries is if we state them clearly.

We often think of boundaries as defining what we do not want, and we associate boundaries with the word "no." *No* is an important aspect of boundaries, but boundaries are also about defining what we do want. We can call these "yes" boundaries. "No" boundaries often contain a "yes" boundary behind them. For example, when we look closely at the boundary "I don't like it when you wait two weeks to call me back," what underlies it may be the boundary "I would like to hear from you more frequently" or "I would like to get a call back within a few days after I call you." We need to let people know what we do want, as well as what we don't want.

When we ask someone for help, or offer to help a friend or family member, we are most likely to have a good experience if we make our boundaries very clear.

HOW TO DO IT:

The first step in setting a boundary is to figure out for yourself what you want/need, and whether that is realistic. Once you are clear about that, the next step is thinking through how to express this boundary to another person. Getting started can be hard. Our own feelings, including anxiety about the other person's response, self-doubt, anger and fear can get in the way. Or we may not know how to do it. Or we may have some personal myths about boundaries that get in the way, like: my good friends should always just know what I need.

TRY IT. PRACTICE IT.
& REASSURE YOURSELF THAT YOU CAN DO IT!

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BOUNDARIES

A boundary is a limit, a line of distinction that defines where one thing ends & another thing begins.

BOUNDARY SETTING EXERCISE

THE CHALLENGE: Think of a specific situation with a friend or family member for which you need to set a boundary. Describe the challenge.

Example: My best friend, Alex, has invited me to talk to him any time, but whenever I start talking about my relationship, he goes into a tirade about my partner.

The challenge is:

WHAT DO YOU WANT / NEED?

Example: I want him to listen to me without criticizing my partner.

I want/ need:

NAME IT: Describe the problem to the person. Use "I" statements, not "you," statements. Avoid criticizing, blaming, or making general statements about the other person's character.

Example: I feel overwhelmed when you ask me how things are going and then when I tell you about my relationship, you go off on my partner.

I feel:

..when:

DIRECT IT: Tell the person what you want/need.

Example: I want you to give me some time and hear me out. Tell me how you feel about my partner another time.

I want/need:

REPEAT IT: Be a broken record. Repeat yourself and give consistent messages.

Example: I want you to listen to me without judging. Please don't criticize my partner every time I tell you that I'm having a hard time.

Repeat the message:

END IT: If the person is not able to accept your boundary, you may need to change the situation.

Example: I don't feel comfortable telling you about what's going on with me right now. We can hang out, but I can't talk about personal things with you.

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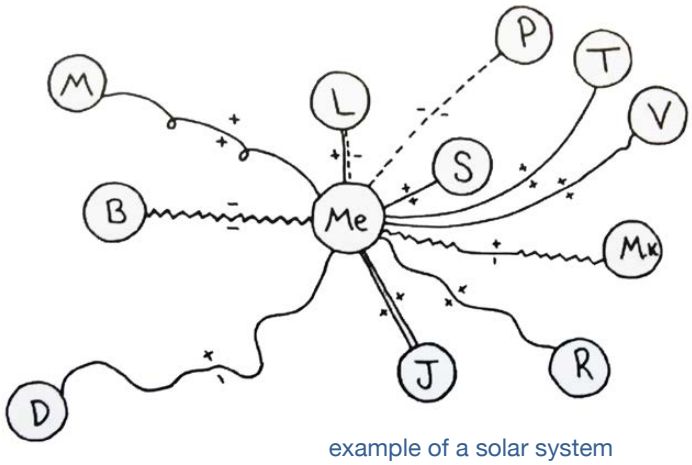
REPAIRING RELATIONSHIPS

Mapping the friends & family SOLAR SYSTEM EXERCISE

The Friends & Family Solar System is an exercise in which you draw out a diagram of your social networks. Much like how the solar system is a network of planets and their relational orbit around a central star, this exercise is a metaphor for how friends and family relate to your life by showing a visual snapshot of your current relationship bonds. It gives you information on who is in your life and how close you feel to those people, as well as an opportunity to express for yourself some of the qualities, strengths, and challenges of your individual relationships. When friendships and family bonds have been strained, the Friends & Family Solar System can point to concrete steps you can take to strengthen relationships and reduce isolation.



example of a solar system

GET STARTED

- Begin by writing your name in the center of the paper—you are the 'star' of the solar system!
- Now identify the various (friends, family, co-workers, dates, children, etc) relationships in your life—these are the planets in orbit around you. Place each person's name in a position and distance that represents the relationship between you and this person.
- Now draw lines to connect you to the different people in your solar system. Draw these lines to represent aspects of the connections you have to these different individuals. For example, if your relationship is off and on, you might draw dotted lines to show both connection and distance. You can choose lines that are thick and bold, jagged, broken, etc.
- The final addition to the Friend & Family Solar System is to represent the energy input and output of each relationship. Ask yourself the question "In this moment, is this relationship giving me energy and support or draining my energy or doing both?" Use plus or minus symbols (+/-), or arrows, on either side of the lines to show which relationships are energy giving, which are energy depleting. Demonstrate this on the solar system.

Remember: the Friends & Family Solar System is a snapshot of your solar system today. It is not an audit of the past year, and it is not an audit of the lifespan of the relationships.

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REPAIRING RELATIONSHIPS

Mapping the friends & family SOLAR SYSTEM EXERCISE

SELF-REFLECTION

- What do you notice about your Friend & Family Solar System?
- Who are you putting the most energy/time/support into? Positive? Negative?
- Who are you getting energy/support from? Positive? Negative?
- What, if any, changes do you wish would happen in your Friend & Family Solar System?
- Are there people who you would like to spend more time with or share more "energy/support"?
- Are there people in your Friends & Family Solar System who you might want to set a boundary with? If so, with who? What boundaries do you want to set?
- Are there people in your Friends & Family Solar System who might be setting boundaries with you? If so, who? What boundaries are they setting?

STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS

CONCRETE STEPS

- Take a minute to write some thoughts or add to your solar system. Think about a commitment you might want to make. Add people with whom you would like to connect.
- Identify one or two people who you would like to strengthen your connection with. What do you think is a barrier to a strong connection right now? (Simply making time? Understanding your experience of abuse? Apologizing for a past hurt or miscommunication?) What is one step you can take to strengthen that connection? (Take donuts and coffee over Sunday morning? Share a resource about LGBT Domestic Violence? Write a note acknowledging the past hurt?)
- Write down one to three things that you do not want from someone in your solar system. (Advice about your finances, comments on your clothing, invitations to go out partying) These are the "no" boundaries that you want to make or are making with that person. Have you expressed this boundary clearly? Do they understand your expectation?
- Write down one to three "yes" boundaries-things you do want from someone in your solar system. (Advice about your finances, comments on your clothing, invitations to go out partying)
- Be careful not to use mixed yes/no boundaries: "I do want you to not forget to call me." Instead try: I want you to call me to check in once a week.) Have you expressed this request clearly? Do they understand your hope?

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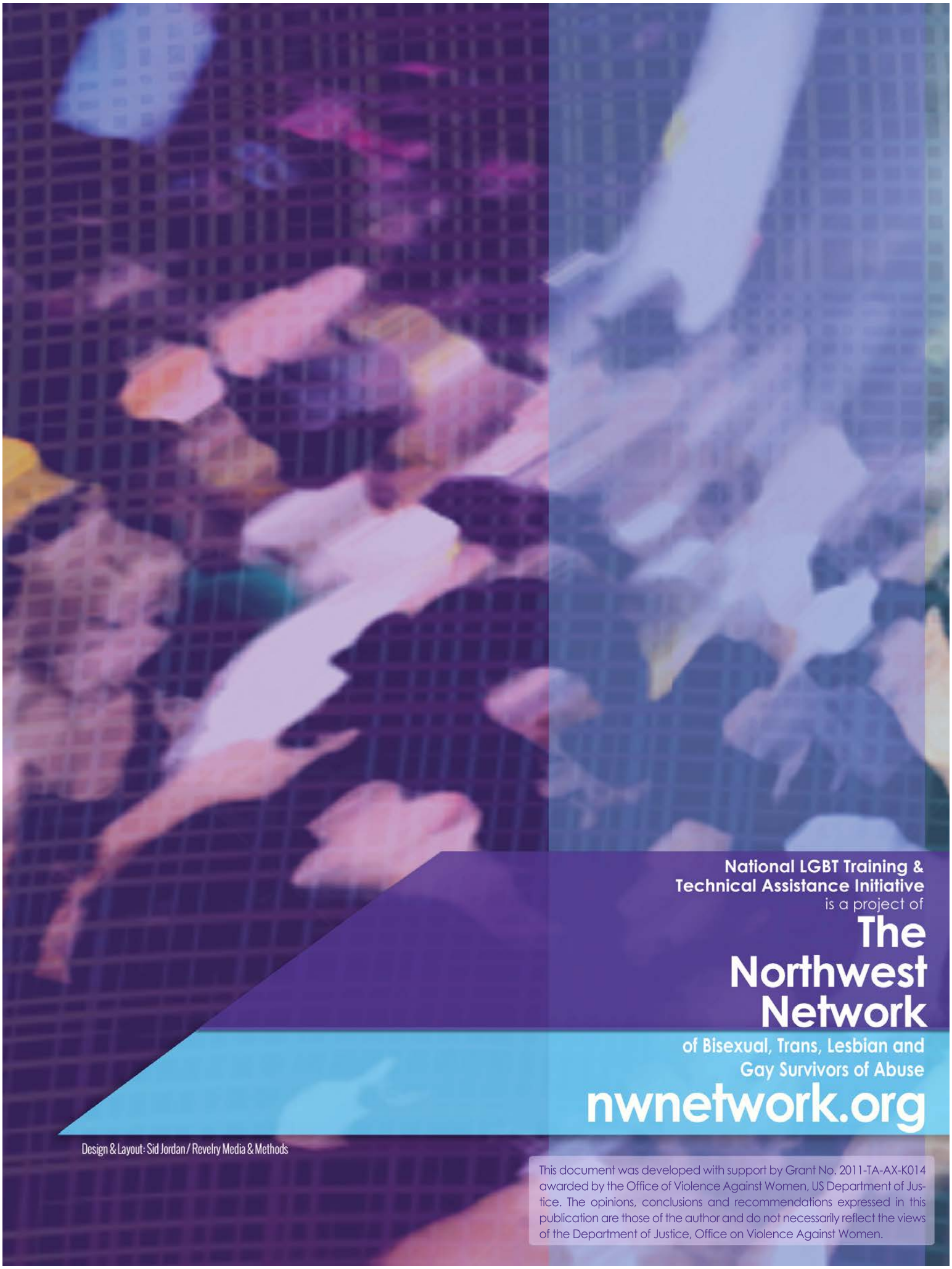

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