



RELATIONSHIP BILL OF RIGHTS

YOU HAVE RIGHTS IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP, and you get to determine what those rights are. It's worth spending some time defining what those are for you, no matter where you are in life. They help you set boundaries and should be respected by both partners in a healthy relationship.

As you consider crafting your own relationship bill of rights, we offer the following for inspiration. These were collected from loveisrespect.org and the Texas Council on Family Violence.

I HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

- Change my mind at anytime
- Privacy, both online and off, including my phone and accounts
- Feel safe and respected
- Decide who I want to date or not date
- Say yes, no, or maybe to a relationship
- Say no at any time (to sex, to drugs or alcohol, to a relationship), even if I've said yes before
- Hang out with my friends and family and do things I enjoy, without my partner getting jealous or controlling
- End a relationship that isn't right or healthy for me, without guilt or fear
- Live free from violence and abuse
- Get help if I'm being abused
- Love who I love
- Right to be fully myself

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THE FRIENDSHIP CENTER IS THE ONLY DVSA AGENCY IN LEWIS AND CLARK, JEFFERSON, & BROADWATER COUNTIES.



Our mission is to be a safe haven for those affected by domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking and to empower our community to flourish in relationships free from violence.

WE PROTECT NO ONE BY STAYING SILENT

A letter from our Executive Director,

Gina Boesdorfer (she/her)

APRIL IS SEXUAL assault awareness month, dedicated to building awareness around an experience that is, unfortunately, not uncommon.

It wouldn't matter if this impacted 1 in 50 or 1 in 100 people. For that person, the experience can mean everything, and it can be life or death as that trauma follows them through the rest of their life.

As it happens, more than half of women have experienced sexual violence involving physical contact during her lifetime and almost one in three men have, according to the CDC.

Sexual violence is a huge issue facing our Montana communities. I know that statistics can be dry, but data drives the work we do at The Friendship Center and behind every statistic are human beings that have faced these experiences, and there are friends and family who have born witness to the pain and trauma.

In 2019, there were 624 reported rapes in Montana, resulting in a state rate of 58.4 per 100,000 residents, higher than the U.S. rate of 42.6 per 100,000¹ (more recent national data is not available due to a transition to a new reporting system).

Even more alarming is that the rate of sexual assaults reported in our service area is elevated relative to the entire state of Montana. Additionally, one in ten high school students in our service area reports being raped, and 13% report being forced to do sexual things they did not want to do in the last 12 months. The rate of reported sexual assault in the context of dating is almost twice as high in our service area compared to all high school students in Montana (8.1% versus 4.8%). In all, approximately three out of every 20 high school students in our service area report experiencing some form of sexual assault or coercion in the past 12 months.²

In my mind, this would leave everyone in our community clamoring for the education and awareness to address an environment that not only contributes to the violence but often endorses it. The big question is whether it is going to be taboo to talk about or whether this is something we are willing to explore and address. We know the path is winding, but it starts with acknowledging that it is a problem worthy of our attention. We absolutely think it is.

The Friendship Center presented to more than 1,100 people in more than 35 presentations last year, including 629 middle school, high school, and college students. We also provided 7 trainings to 119 professionals. Our hope is that the demand for this kind of programming in our community grows and grows until it is no longer needed.

Fear can so often prevent us from doing the thing we need to do most. Interpersonal violence thrives in the shadows and feeds on that fear. We are protecting no one by staying silent. If you would like to host a gathering to help us address these issues, please reach out to us.

Gina



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¹ Missoula's Sexual Violence Prevention Community Needs Assessment in December 2020

² Source: YouthRisk Behavior Survey, 2021



NEW FEDERAL LAW BENEFITS VICTIMS OF DV

By Dan Sullivan, CFP, he/him
Sullivan Financial Group

AS OF JANUARY FIRST, a change to the IRS code allows victims of domestic abuse to access up to \$10,000 from their retirement plans without incurring a 10% early withdrawal penalty, if they are under the age of 59 1/2. This includes 401k, 403(b), 457 plans, and Individual Retirement Plans. Very importantly, the administrators of the plan are not required to gather “proof” of abuse so it can be processed swiftly and humanely.

A word of caution, this law was passed in the last week of 2022 so most employers, retirement plans, and IRA administrators do not have a process implemented yet for this helpful change. Also, the withdrawal does not avoid taxation, just the 10% early withdrawal penalty so consulting a tax professional prior to the withdrawal may be prudent. 🌿



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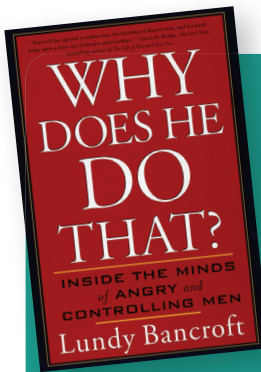
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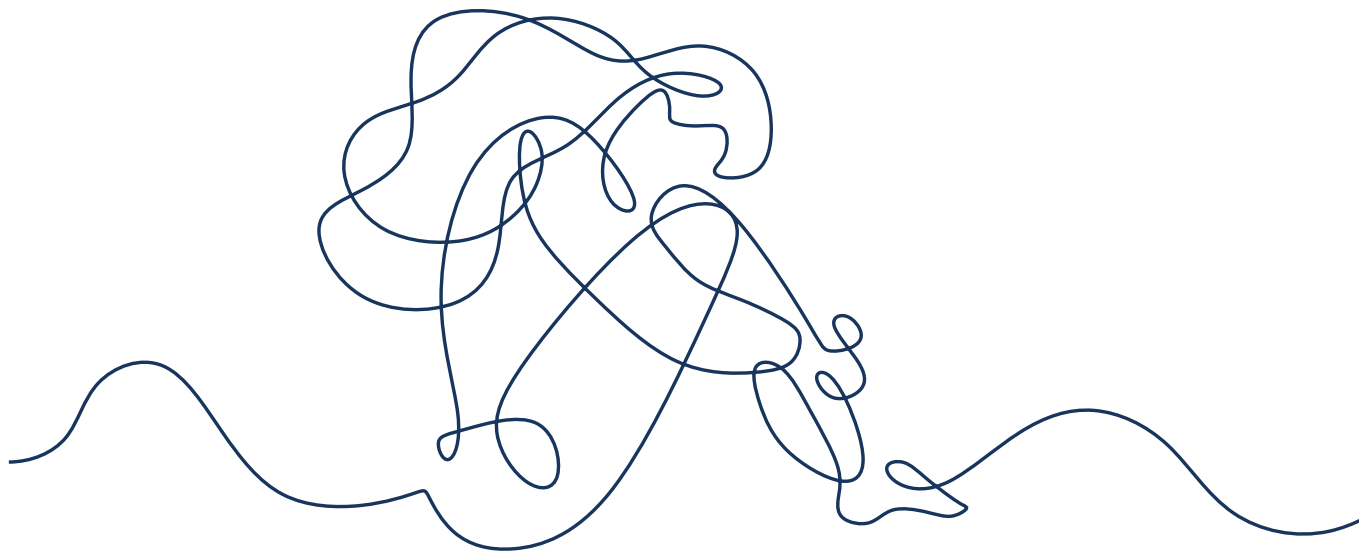


RECOMMENDED READING

WHY DOES HE DO THAT?

Why Does He Do That? has become the go-to book for women who have partners who are angry, controlling, or unfaithful. It answers the 20 questions that women most ask about their partners' behavior.

When you purchase *Why Does He Do That?* from the Montana Book Company, 15% will be donated back to The Friendship Center. The Friendship Center provides this resource to clients escaping domestic violence, to all new crisis line volunteers, and to all new staff. **THANK YOU, MONTANA BOOK COMPANY.**



INTIMATE PARTNER SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The Intersection Between Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

Jaime Gabrielli (she/her)
Direct Service Advocate, The Friendship Center

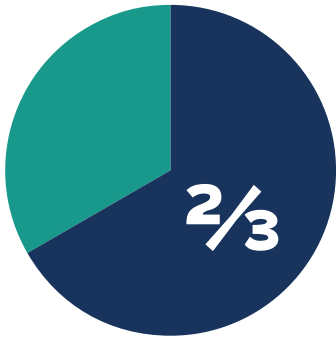
DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL violence thrive in isolation, shame, confusion, and silence. We can take away stigma and shame by speaking up, raising awareness, and educating others. These insidious forms of abuse do not discriminate and, whether we realize it or not, we are all impacted by them in some way. To end domestic and sexual violence, we all need to be part of the solution.

Through my work as an advocate at The Friendship Center, I have learned sexual violence is a hidden yet common and complex aspect of domestic violence. Perpetrators who are physically violent toward their intimate partners are often sexually abusive as well. However, sexual violence is typically not recognized as a tactic used by abusers to gain and maintain power and control in abusive relationships. Often, individuals who are sexually assaulted by a partner don't identify as victims and suffer from self-blame and confusion enforced by societal myths that deny their experience as one of sexual violence.

Intimate partner sexual violence (IPSV) survivors are sometimes advised by church leaders, family, or friends that it is their "duty" to submit to sex with their spouse or partner. Most individuals experiencing IPSV never report what is happening to them because they fear they won't be taken seriously by the police, the legal system, or other service providers. As such, many never get the support, accurate information, and resources they need and deserve.

Approximately two-thirds of sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the victim; recent studies estimate 1 in 10 women have been raped by an intimate partner. Despite its prevalence, there is a widespread lack of awareness and understanding of IPSV, even compared to other forms of domestic abuse and sexual assault.

IPSV happens in all types of intimate relationships regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. Most survivors are female, and most perpetrators are male; however *anyone can be a victim of sexual assault.*



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The context of marriage or romantic relationships does not infer consent — a fact reflected by Montana’s rape and sexual assault laws. Even in long-term relationships, each person has the right to refuse sexual activity and can revoke consent at any time. No matter how the relationship is defined, it is never okay to engage in sexual activity with someone without their informed and explicit consent. It’s important to understand and recognize that survivors of IPSV have the same rights as every other survivor of rape and sexual assault.

“No matter how the relationship is defined, it is never okay to engage in sexual activity with someone without their informed and explicit consent.”

Sexual assault is never about sex, even within a romantic relationship or marriage. IPSV is usually perpetrated as part of an overall pattern of coercive control and occurs in conjunction with other abusive tactics. Domestic violence begins with an imbalance of power that escalates to emotional, psychological, financial, physical, and/or sexual abuse. **Most women who are physically assaulted by an intimate partner have been sexually assaulted by the same partner.** Sexual violence in relationships is used to reinforce the abuser’s power and control over their partner. This type of abuse is rarely isolated but also occurs in relationships not characterized by other physi-

cal violence, which sometimes makes it even more confusing and difficult to identify.

Many people assume IPSV does not cause as serious of an impact as sexual assault perpetrated by a stranger. However, research indicates that the resulting trauma can be longer-lasting and more severe. IPSV victims commonly deal with additional consequences and concerns including sharing a home and children with their abuser and being continuously violated by someone they care about.

Women who are disabled, pregnant, or attempting to leave their abusers are at the greatest risk for IPSV. While not all sexual assaults result in injury, IPSV survivors face a higher risk of physical harm and ongoing health issues because they are more likely to experience multiple sexual assaults. Likewise, IPSV is associated with serious gynecological conditions, sexually transmitted infections, chronic pain, severe headaches, increased rates of cervical cancer associated with HPV, and maladaptive coping strategies (i.e., drug/ alcohol use and smoking). Victims also endure psychological consequences including depression, suicide, PTSD, anxiety, fear, self-blame, low self-esteem, and guilt. It is also crucial to note that when a woman is raped by her partner, she is at **higher risk of homicide** than domestic violence victims who have not experienced sexual violence in their relationship.

If you or someone you know is struggling with IPSV, our advocates are here to help. The Friendship Center’s services are free, confidential, and available 24/7.

<https://ncadv.org/STATISTICS>



TFC is a safe haven for **EVERYONE**

TO OUR LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY, WE ARE HERE FOR YOU

By Kim Patterson, she/her
Development Director, The Friendship Center

UNFORTUNATELY, THERE ARE high rates of violence, trauma, and suicide within the LGBTQ+ community (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and the limitless sexual orientations and gender identities), and that prevalence is often inextricably linked with domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking (DVSA).

At The Friendship Center, all of our programs are available to the LGBTQ+ community, and we are committed to providing services in a caring and informed manner that respects our clients' varied life experiences.

LGBTQ+ people are four times more likely to experience violence in their life than their straight counterparts according to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center. And LGBTQ+ youth are at higher risk of teen dating violence than other youth.

Sexual violence and intimate partner violence are rooted in power and control. This is magnified by the systems of oppression that those in the LGBTQ+ community face throughout their lives. Abusers even use homo- and transphobia as a further means to exert power and control in relationships. Additionally, limited access to housing and job instability as a result of bias and discrimination leave those in the LGBTQ+ community more vulnerable to other forms of violence by limiting their choices and making them more likely to rely on unsafe situations. According to the Polaris Project, 40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ+. Being homeless is often linked with experienc-

ing higher rates of violence. Many people are exploited and forced into sex work as a way to survive while navigating these bigger systems and barriers.

How issues impacting the LGBTQ+ community are discussed and the othering that often occurs in those discussions also exacerbate the risk of experiencing DVSA. According to the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP): "acts of hate violence, such as harassment, stalking, vandalism, and physical and sexual assault, are often supported by more socially sanctioned expressions of transphobia, biphobia, and homophobia and are intended to send a message to LGBTQ communities."

Depending on school culture, schools can also be hostile spaces for LGBTQ+ youth.

That said, teachers also often serve as safe spaces and a place for LGBTQ+ youth to find support when they lack it from their friends or family. When LGBTQ+ youth experience denial or minimization of the abuse, normalization of it, or contribution to it, it can become even more difficult to escape the violence and heal from it. These youth are at higher risk of suicide as compared to their peers, and teen dating violence exacerbates that risk.

WONDERING WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR THE PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE?:

- Believe them if they tell you they have experienced violence and/or abuse
- Listen
- Validate their feelings



To those in the LGBTQ community, we want you to know that we see you and you belong here. As an organization seeking to dismantle the systems of oppression and the culture of abuse that contribute to violence in our community, we have seen the significant harm you have experienced individually and collectively. The Friendship Center is a place where all people can seek support and resources if they have experienced domestic violence (at the hands of family or partners), sexual violence, or stalking.

- Use the name or pronouns preferred by each individual. If you don't know, ask. These should not be assumed based on appearance.
- Be aware and sensitive to concerns around confidentiality and outing of someone's gender and/or sexual identity.
- Promote respect and healthy relationships
- Don't ask for details

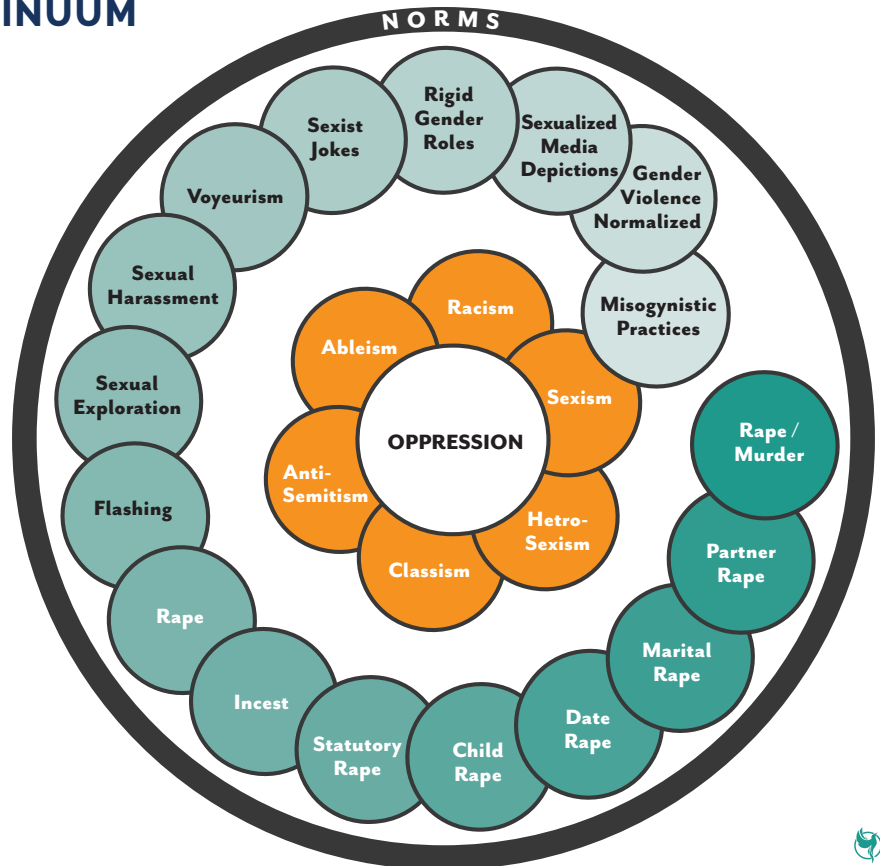
For more information and to learn more about these issues or to receive community-specific support, these sites can provide more resources.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| thetrevorproject.org | loveisrespect.org |
| transvisiblemontana.wordpress.com | lgbthotline.org |
| avp.org (The Antiviolence Project) | forge-forward.org |

SEXUAL VIOLENCE CONTINUUM

Sexual violence is not just rooted in misogyny and a culture of abuse. It is born from all forms of oppression and the normalization of violence. In Lydia Guy's Sexual Violence Continuum, we can see how understanding this interconnectedness is important in dismantling the attitudes and norms that allow it to happen.

Adapted from graphic by Lydia Guy — WCSAP 2006



Please welcome our newest team member, **TERRI STOTTS!**

Joining The Friendship Center team this winter as our Residential Advocate, Terri (she/her) brings a background as an elementary paraprofessional and case manager at AWARE. Originally from Nevada, Terri has been in Helena since 2015. With three sons, a grandchild on the way, an energetic Newfoundland, and a gaggle of chickens, Terri stays plenty busy. In her spare time, she takes lots of walks and enjoys crafting.

As our residential advocate, she works closely with our shelter residents, providing case management and supportive services, as well as those in our new transitional housing program recently implemented as the result of funding we received from the Department of Housing and Urban Development.



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