

# LGBTQ+ Support Group Facilitator's Guide

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## Introduction

Maine's sexual assault support centers and allied organizations have come together to build the capacity of Maine's sexual assault support centers to better serve LGBTQ+ survivors of sexual violence. One key gap in service delivery is the lack of support groups for LGBTQ+ and specifically, gender non-conforming victims of sexual violence.

This toolkit is designed to give Maine's sexual assault support centers and allied organizations the tools to deliver affirming and healing support groups.

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## Format

Group format will be dependent on the type of group, grant funding guidelines, staffing availability and community needs, but all groups will need to determine:

- What type of group (outreach, traditional, experiential, online)
- How often and for how long the group runs (weekly for 10 weeks, twice a week for 4 weeks, etc.)
- Length of session (60 minutes, 90 minutes or more)
- Open group, closed group, or hybrid
- Location
- Age of participants
- Gender of participants

## Facilitation

Support groups for survivors of sexual violence are rooted in peer support and skills for healing. Groups are not designed to be a replacement for therapy and therefore, the role of the facilitator is to be prepared to hold space for education, discussion, and discovery.

Facilitators do not participate in the group process, but are available:

- To make group the safest space possible for all members
- To ensure that one member is not dominating the group
- To provide information
- To provide containment and implement grounding skills if necessary



Maine's sexual assault support centers: Supporting people of  
all gender identities and sexual orientations.

[mecasa.org](http://mecasa.org)

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Groups should all be co-facilitated by a sexual assault advocate and an LGBTQ+ advocate:

- The sexual assault advocate must have completed 40 hour sexual assault advocacy training, support group facilitator training and receive supervision from staff at their sexual assault support center.
- The LGBTQ+ advocate must work or volunteer with a local community LGBTQ+ serving agency and have access to supervision.
- The participating sexual assault support center must have received the Safe Space for Sexual Assault Support Centers training.
- At least one of the two facilitators must identify as LGBTQ+.

Between the two facilitators it should be determined who has the following responsibilities:

- Location coordination
- Content and outline creation
- Reaching out to participants to confirm attendance and share:
  - First names of facilitators
  - Total number of individuals in the group
  - Start and end time of group
  - Brief information regarding expectations of the first group session
    - Brief mandatory paperwork
    - Group guidelines
    - Introductions, activity and prompts for getting to know the other group members
- Building location
- Parking information
- Building entrance information

## Participant Requirements

Participants must:

- Identify as a survivor of sexual violence and as part of the LGBTQ+ community
- Successfully engage in a screening interview
- Commit to and help uphold group agreements
- Agree to maintain confidentiality
- Must not pose a threat or danger to other group members
- Have access to additional supports

## Screening

Sexual assault support centers conduct casual screening interviews in an effort to determine if an individual is appropriate for group, to ensure (to the best of our ability) safety for all participants, and to meet Quality Assurance Standards.

One group facilitator conducts the screening interview. It may be beneficial for the potential group participant to meet the co-facilitator, however; it is not recommended that both facilitators conduct the screening interview. This may feel intimidating and excessive to the potential group participant.

The screening interview is a casual process and the screening interview form is to be used as a guide. All points need to be addressed at some point during the interview, but not necessarily in the order they are listed.

If the interviewer writes down answers to the questions during the interview, it is strongly encouraged they explain what they are writing, for what purpose, and where the information will be kept. If, during the screening interview, information is presented that the facilitator knows will prevent the individual from participating in a group, it is strongly advised that the facilitator address the situation in the moment and let the individual know at that time.

Because the LGBTQ+ communities in Maine are small, screening needs to emphasize confidentiality, but also learn from the potential participants about those within the community who would not be safe participants in the group.

If a potential participant is identified as a person another potential participant would not be comfortable with in group, the co-facilitators need to discuss together how to address this concern. It is possible that the person identified as concerning may not be appropriate to be in this round of support groups. If someone is not allowed to participate in a support group, the facilitators should consult with a sexual assault support center supervisor and make a plan for other support services.

## Sample Group Outline

Welcome

Preliminary check-in and announcements

Activity/Exercise

- Group development

- Trauma awareness and skill building

- Healing

Break

Activity-based discussion

Closing

## Sample Group Agreements

Group agreements are designed to keep all participants feeling safe enough to explore new topics, ideas, and tools for healing. The whole group is responsible for upholding the group agreements:

- Confidentiality
  - Not sharing group members information with others
  - Also no names or identifying characteristics when telling stories in group.
- Honor all identities, no gender policing
- No judgment
- Here to learn and support one another
- Respond with a question, experience or affirmation, no telling someone what to do
- Cell phones off
- Call or text someone if you can't make it
- Sobriety for group

## Possible Group Content

- Group agreements and what do you want to get out of the group? (Group 1)
- Trauma and the brain (neurobiology of trauma)
- Identifying trauma triggers
- Re-regulation skills & self-care
  - Trauma First Aide
  - Bean bags
  - Tape exercise for desensitizing
  - EMDR principles/TFA resourcing
  - Meditation exercises
  - Trauma sensitive/informed yoga
  - Coping skills on a continuum
- Intentional self-care
- Body positivity
- Self with others
  - Consent
  - Communication
  - Owning the language we used to describe ourselves
  - What you want/need in a relationship
- Community
  - Self and community
  - Community expectations (generational, similarities/differences)
  - Trans identity used against people
  - Building community around shared identity
  - Identifying and communicating own experience within the stereotypes
- Overall healing and growth, self-empowerment, continued resources, referrals, engagement

## Outreach

Filling a support group has always been a challenge and we recommend basic media outreach, but in addition, really utilize your community partners by attending staff meetings, going to events and reaching out to local LGBTQ affirming clinicians. This kit includes a sample flyer, sample press release and link to the MECASA Safe Space media campaign.

## Evaluation

The sexual assault support center advocate will ensure all participants fill out the AQUES survey and will share the content with their co-facilitator.

## Other Resources for Support Group Content

[Trans Sexual Violence Survivors: A Self-Help Guide to Healing and Understanding](#) - FORGE

[Let's Talk About It: A Transgender Survivor's Guide to Accessing Therapy](#) - FORGE

[Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Trans Power and Control Wheel](#) - NCDSV

