

STONEWALL HOUSING ADVICE INFORMATION PACK

HOUSING INFORMATION FOR LESBIANS AND GAY MEN

**Stonewall Housing exists
to address the housing needs
of lesbians and gay men**



STONEWALL
HOUSING

INTRODUCTION

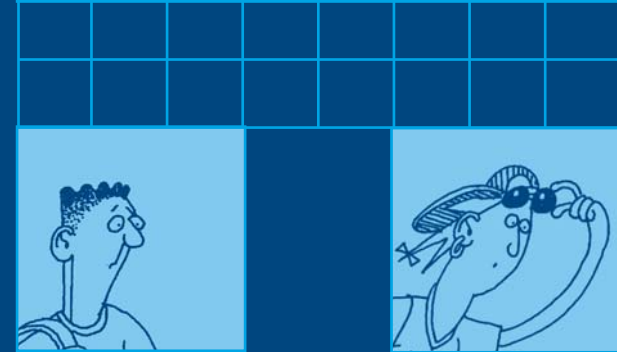
Many people will face housing problems at one time or another. Perhaps you're having problems with a landlord, or wondering where to find a room to rent. Maybe you have nowhere safe to stay or are facing eviction. You could need some support so that you can learn to live independently or perhaps you're experiencing harassment. You could want to buy your own place or maybe you've been thrown out by your family.

Lesbians and gay men can face any of these problems but may be reluctant to seek advice from traditional services for fear of discrimination or misunderstanding. Although attitudes to lesbians and gay men may be changing, the levels of discrimination and prejudice faced by individual lesbians and gay men are still high. Lesbians and gay men face discrimination in terms of being harassed and subject to violence and abuse, of losing housing through revealing their sexuality to families, friends, landlords and neighbours. We live in a legal environment, which is attempting to redress the inequalities that exist between same sex relationships and heterosexuals. Hopefully, through the law, issues such as rights of succession to tenancies and the ability to apply for housing as a couple or family will be addressed.

Stonewall Housing offers free, confidential advice on any housing issue. To use the service you need to identify as a lesbian or gay man, but your housing problem does not need to be related to your sexuality. You will receive a professional, high quality service provided by lesbians and gay men who will have an understanding of the issues you face.

Whatever housing problems you have you can talk them over in confidence at Stonewall Housing.

This information pack is designed as a guide to your housing options.



HOUSING OPTIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH SUPPORT NEEDS

If you have problems in your life over and above housing issues you may feel that you would benefit from some support in your home. The type of difficulties may include disability, drug/alcohol use, mental health problems, depression or experience of abuse. There may be other issues that are not on this list but that make it hard for you to cope. There are different levels of support on offer that range from low support (for people who need minimal help with things like benefits or finding work) to high support (for people who need round-the-clock care).

If you are not sure whether you would benefit from supported housing, call Stonewall Housing on **020 7359 5767** (voice) / **020 7359 8188** (minicom) and we will talk to you about your situation.

Hostels and Supported Housing Projects

There are many types of hostels and shared housing projects offering different levels of support. Some hostels will accept self-referrals but others will require you to be referred by an agency. Many hostels have entry criteria such as age and sex and may be aimed at people with certain problems. The following are types of projects and a brief description of what they offer. If you are interested in accessing this type of accommodation, please call Stonewall Housing on **020 7359 5767** (voice) / **020 7359 8188** (minicom) and we will put you in touch with them. Some projects have vacancies that are specifically targeted at lesbians and gay men and, although some offer lesbian and gay only houses, many projects will be mixed.

HOUSING OPTIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH SUPPORT NEEDS

Low Support: These projects are for people who are capable of living independently since the support they offer is limited to basic information and advice. These hostels are usually large and in single buildings.

Medium Support: These projects offer practical and personal support and help you to learn to live independently. They should help you to find alternative accommodation once your stay there is over. There will be some staff to support you but they are unlikely to be there 24 hours per day.

Supportive: These projects are for people with severe or multiple problems who are not capable of living independently. Most have 24 hour staffing.

Foyers: These projects provide accommodation and a training and employment programme for young people.

Ex-offenders: Some projects target ex-offenders (although they may refuse to house people convicted of certain crimes).

Alcohol/ Drugs: These projects target people with drug or alcohol problems. Some will require you to have stopped drinking or using drugs before you apply, others will take you through a detox programme. "Wet" hostels are for people who want to continue drinking.

Mental Health: Depending on the severity of your mental health problems these projects offer various levels of support and may offer a limited or an indefinite stay.

Leaving Care: Young people leaving care may be referred to one of these projects by social services.

Single Parents: Sometimes called "Mother and Baby Units", these projects are for women who are pregnant, or have young children.

Community Care

If you find it difficult to live independently and need help with things like cooking or cleaning but would like to continue to live in your home, the local authority has a duty to assess your situation and arrange to provide the services you need. Community care can include home helps, assistance with travel, and adaptations to your home, which could enable you to continue to live there.

If you are severely disabled you may be eligible for a grant from the Independent Living Fund. If you are seeking adaptations to your home, which are deemed “necessary and appropriate” you may also be eligible for a “Disabled Facilities Grant”, although, depending on your income, you may have to pay a contribution towards the cost of the work.

HOME HELP

**ASSISTANCE
WITH TRAVEL**

**ADAPTATIONS TO
YOUR HOME**



HOUSING OPTIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH SUPPORT NEEDS

If you find it difficult to live independently, the local authority has a duty to assess your situation and arrange to provide the services you need.



Residential Care

If you find it difficult to live independently, the local authority has a duty to assess your situation and arrange to provide the services you need. If you need intensive support and it would not be appropriate for you to continue to live at home, you may be offered a place in a residential home (with support from staff on site) or a nursing home (with 24-hour care from nurses).

You are allowed to choose your “preferred accommodation” which the local authority must provide subject to availability (and assuming you satisfy other various conditions). You are free to choose a very expensive home but you will have to pay any cost above the rate that the council is willing to pay. Your local authority may not provide the accommodation itself but may arrange for another private or voluntary organisation to do so.

HOUSING OPTIONS FOR PEOPLE WITHOUT SUPPORT NEEDS

"General Needs" is a term used for accommodation that does not offer the tenant structured support or assistance but does offer housing management. Other options for people without support needs require the tenant to manage the property themselves. If you feel that you are able to live independently you may wish to consider one of the following options:

Home Ownership

Buying a flat on the open market may work out to be cheaper than renting privately and offers you greater security (providing you can meet the financial commitments it brings). It can also be seen as an investment since the value of the property may increase. It gives you a lot more control over your housing since you do not have a landlord.

On the other hand, you are likely to need a large deposit to buy a property (usually at least 5% of the sale price) and you will also need to pay solicitor's fees, land registry searches and surveys or valuations. You will be responsible for all your bills, repairs and maintenance and if you buy a leasehold property you will have to pay another charge which is commonly referred to as "ground rent". The value of the property may decrease and can leave you with the problem of "negative equity" where the value of the property is less than the amount you owe on the mortgage.

In the past it has been difficult for gay men to get a mortgage due to the perception that they were at a greater risk of contracting HIV. Mortgage companies are now restricted in the questions they ask and should not use a positive HIV test as a reason to deny someone a mortgage. Some companies specialise in issuing mortgages to people with HIV. If you are HIV-positive and want to apply for a mortgage, or if you have had problems with lenders, you should call Stonewall Housing on **020 7359 5767** (voice) / **020 7359 8188** (minicom) or call the Terrence Higgins Trust Lighthouse on **0845 1221 2000**.

HOUSING OPTIONS FOR PEOPLE WITHOUT SUPPORT NEEDS

Buying a freehold effectively means that you own the property forever and no other person or organisation has a higher interest in it. Buying a leasehold means that you own the property for a set number of years, after which it becomes the property of the freeholder once again. A “long lease” could last from 21 years to several hundred years.

If you are considering buying with another person, or moving in with an owner-occupier, or if you are an owner-occupier and intend to move someone else into your house, you are strongly advised to consult a housing adviser or solicitor before proceeding because your actions could affect your housing rights.

**consult a housing adviser
or solicitor before
proceeding**

You can find a home to buy by consulting an estate agent, looking in newspapers or on the Internet. You can also buy a property through an auction although you will have to make substantial arrangements in advance (ie. secure a mortgage, have a survey etc.).

The right to buy enables secure tenants who meet the qualifying requirements to buy their council property at a discounted rate. The right to buy also applies to tenants of some non-charitable housing associations and some other public sector landlords. There is a two-year qualifying period before a tenant can apply. For more information on qualifying periods and discount rates please contact Stonewall Housing on **020 7359 5767**.



Shared Ownership

Shared Ownership involves buying part of a property and renting the other part. It can work out cheaper than buying a home outright and you can increase the percentage that you own at any time until you own the whole property.

If you are interested in Shared Ownership please contact Stonewall on **020 7359 5767**.

Homebuy

The Homebuy scheme can enable you to buy a house more cheaply. You can choose to buy any house on the market through Homebuy, and the scheme allows you to own the whole of the property but a Registered Social Landlord has a stake in the value of the property. You would initially pay for 75% of the purchase price and the Registered Social Landlord would pay for the other 25% (which you would repay when the property was sold or earlier if you prefer).

The scheme is particularly aimed at council or housing association tenants and those on housing waiting lists.



HOUSING OPTIONS FOR PEOPLE WITHOUT SUPPORT NEEDS

Private Rented

Renting a house or flat in the private sector can give you a lot of choice over your type of accommodation. You should consider whether you want to live alone or share with friends, strangers, a partner or a landlord. You will have to make decisions about the type of place you want; how many bedrooms, do you want a garden, do you need to be near public transport, or do you need somewhere to park? Renting privately can be one of the quickest ways to access accommodation.

The cost of renting privately can be high and you may have to pay in-advance a deposit (which is returnable), or a premium (non-returnable). Housing Benefit may not cover the whole rent, so you will have to pay the difference. Since Housing Benefit is paid in arrears some landlords will not accept tenants who are claiming. Your local authority may hold details of those landlords in your area who will accept people on housing benefit.

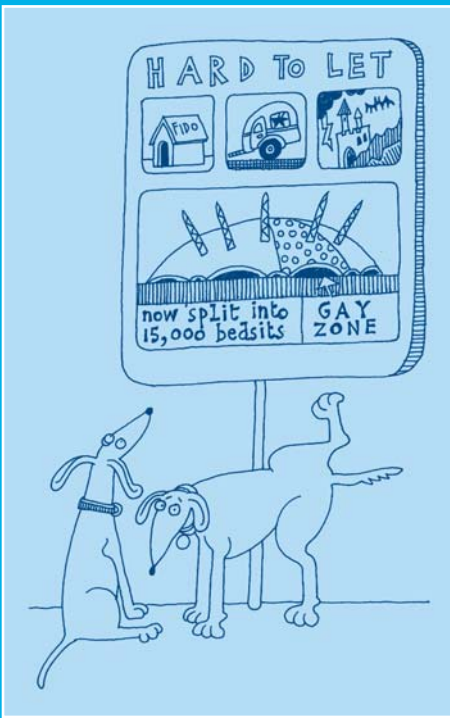
If you would like to rent a property in the private sector but cannot afford a deposit or a months rent in advance, you may want to find out

about “Rent Guarantee Schemes”. These offer your landlord a guarantee against loss, damage and limited arrears. Such schemes may also help your landlord by providing standard tenancy agreements and by helping you to settle in. One of the largest Rent Guarantee Schemes (called Smart Move) is run by Crisis and can be contacted on **0207 426 3866**.

It is illegal for private landlords to discriminate on racial or sexual grounds, but there is no law to stop discrimination against lesbians and gay men.

Finding a room, flat or house to rent can be done in different ways. To rent a room, consider looking in publications like the Pink Paper, Loot or Time Out. For a flat or house you may want to register with an agency, it should be free to register, although they are allowed to charge you if they find somewhere. Some accommodation agencies specialise in finding properties for lesbians and gay men, (try Outlet on **020 7287 4244**).

Some landlords will ask for references from previous landlords, or bank and building societies.



Housing Associations

Housing associations are mainly not-for-profit organisations. They allocate their housing on the basis of housing need but may set additional criteria (e.g. offering housing only to older people). Accommodation from a housing association can be of a higher quality and cheaper than that offered in the private sector.

However, housing associations reserve almost all their properties for local authority referrals. The remaining places are allocated to agencies and only a tiny number are available to the general public. This means that it can be incredibly difficult to find accommodation with a housing association unless you are referred by your local authority or another agency.

Stonewall Housing is a housing association providing temporary, shared, supported housing for lesbians and gay men aged between 16 and 25 only. We are not able to provide accommodation for heterosexual people, people outside that age range, or people with no or high support needs. We are also unable to offer self-contained accommodation. However, we do provide a housing advice service for lesbians and gay men of any age, which you can contact by calling **020 7359 5767** (voice) / **020 7359 8188** (minicom).

HOUSING OPTIONS FOR PEOPLE WITHOUT SUPPORT NEEDS

Local Authority Housing Register



Under the Homelessness Act of 2002 there is no longer a duty on Local Authorities to maintain a housing register. Many still do but others now have a choice based lettings scheme, this enables those who have applied for council housing to bid for properties that become available

In order to apply, the local authority must be satisfied that you qualify (i.e. you are not subject to immigration controls that prohibit you from applying). You should ask the local authority for an application form if you are interested.

Accommodation through either the housing register or the choice based lettings scheme can take years to become available, and in reality, if you have no special needs and no special circumstances, it is very difficult to be housed this way.

Housing Co-operatives

A “co-op” is a housing organisation, which is jointly managed by the people who live in its property, so before you consider applying for housing, you should consider whether you would want to take an active part in running the co-op.

Co-ops often lease properties from Housing Associations or local authorities which may not have been well maintained and are on short leases. The properties may need some work done to them including decorating before they can be lived in. You would be unlikely to secure self-contained accommodation in a co-op and would probably be sharing a house or flat with several other members, who may be from different backgrounds to you. Many people in a co-op enjoy learning the new skills they need to take an active role in the organisation and are pleased to have control over their own housing. The rent should be cheaper than it would be if you were renting privately.

Living in a co-op requires you to give up some of your time to attend meetings and do any other necessary work. Co-op members are required to accept democratic decisions whether they agree or not.

Co-ops will often accept people who are claiming benefits or who are working. The security of tenure (i.e. the type of tenancy agreement you receive) will depend on what accommodation the co-op has available. Sometimes they can only offer very short leases but they would make you aware of this before you move in.

Some co-ops accept self-referrals, but others require you to be referred by the local authority or by an agency. Vacancies can be quickly filled and you may be on a waiting list for a while before you are offered housing. You may be asked to attend meetings and participate in the activities of the co-op whilst waiting to be offered a room.

A list of housing co-ops in the London area is available if you call Stonewall Housing on **020 7359 5767** (voice) / **020 7359 8188** (minicom). In addition your local authority may also keep details of co-ops in their area.



HOUSING OPTIONS FOR PEOPLE WITHOUT SUPPORT NEEDS

HOUSING OPTIONS IN EMERGENCIES

If you find yourself in an emergency situation where you are no longer able to stay in your home, you may be able to stay with friends or family, or you may want to consider one of the options covered in this chapter.

Direct Access Hostels

Direct access hostels provide accommodation that is usually quickly available (on the same day, or within a few days). They usually offer basic facilities only and residents may be accommodated in shared rooms, though many do have single rooms. Becoming a resident in a hostel can enable you to access further support, or other types of temporary accommodation.

Many direct access hostels will be unable to accept people with a history of serious violence or arson.

Before you are accepted by a direct access hostel, you will have to give proof of identification and your income (or evidence that you will receive an income), or proof that you are eligible for benefits.



Some hostels are very supportive to lesbian and gay clients and others are less sympathetic

Many direct access hostels are unable to accept self-referrals and those that do will fill up very quickly. Some vacancies may be reserved for rough sleepers or may have other criteria attached. Some of the residents in a direct access hostel may have high support needs and it could prove difficult for you to live with people who are dealing with many issues.

Some lesbian and gay people find it difficult to be “out” in a hostel, and those who do reveal their sexuality sometimes have problems with the other residents or even with staff. At present there are no direct access hostels that cater exclusively for lesbians and gay men.

Some hostels are very supportive to lesbian and gay clients and others are less sympathetic. Stonewall Housing can help you to approach direct access hostels and can assist you in determining how welcoming they will be.

Your stay in a direct access hostel may be very short, but while you are there, you should receive information and advice on other options, and you may be referred to another organisation that can offer you longer-term accommodation.

Other means of accessing direct access hostels.

Shelter, the national housing campaign for homeless people, operates a 24 hour freephone housing advice **and** emergency referral service for anyone having difficulties with their housing. If there are vacancies available and you fulfil both the vacancy criteria, and have identification and proof of income, they may be able to help. Call Shelter freephone on **0808 800 4444**.

Day Centres offer a range of services during the day including advice (housing, resettlement, benefits), food, showers, laundry and a luggage store for rough sleepers. Sometimes they will have a nurse available and run support groups. Contact Stonewall Housing or Shelter for details.

If you are sleeping rough there are designated outreach workers called CAT teams whose job is to make contact with rough sleepers, and over a period of time to assist them into suitable accommodation. In addition they try and link people with other support services perhaps around substance/alcohol abuse or mental health. They work primarily in the inner London boroughs and priority is given to those who have slept rough for a long time.

HOUSING OPTIONS IN EMERGENCIES



If you feel unsure about approaching any of these agencies, call Stonewall Housing on **020 7359 5767** (voice) or **020 7359 8188** (minicom), and we will help you to apply for a place.

The following direct access hostels accept self-referrals:

Name of Hostel	Phone Number	Criteria
Ennersdale House	020 8318 5521	Male Rough Sleepers.
Bridge Birkenhead St	020 7278 6466	17-60. Female. Offers support.
Bridge Dean Street	020 7437 3703	17-65. Men particularly rough sleepers.
English Churches – Livingston House	020 8963 0545	18-60. Mixed. Rough sleepers, alcohol, drug or mental health problems.
English Churches – Queen Mary's Hostel	020 7976 6338	18-59. Female rough sleepers with mental health problems.
Jo Richards House	020 7639 8008	18-65. Mixed, drug, alcohol or mental health problems.
Home of Peace	020 7624 4107	18-60. Women needing little support.
Missionaries Of Charity	020 7401 8378	Men over 25. Rough sleepers.
Providence Row - Dellow Centre	020 7375 3915	Over 21. Mixed.
Salvation Army –Hopetown	020 7377 6429	18-65. Women who need support.
Salvation Army –Spa Home	020 7237 1107	Men over 35 with no support needs.
St Mungo's – Pagnell St	020 8692 3454	17+. Mixed. Offers support.

The following direct access hostels will accept self-referrals from young people:

Name of Hostel	Phone Number	Criteria
London Refuge St Christophers	020 7700 7541	Under 16's.
Centrepoint Shelter	020 7287 9134	16-21.
MASH	020 8543 3677	16-21. From Merton.
Stopover	020 8699 1574	16-21. From Greenwich, Southwark or Lewisham.



Approaching the Local Authority

Each local authority can offer advice and assistance with homelessness and in emergencies someone should be available 24 hours a day. Usually you should approach the local authority through the Homeless Persons' Unit where a housing officer will take details of your situation and assess whether they have a duty to offer you accommodation.

The local authority has a statutory duty to investigate your case and before they help you they will assess the following:

HOUSING OPTIONS IN EMERGENCIES

Approaching the Local Authority

- 1 Whether you are eligible for assistance.** You may not be eligible if you are subject to immigration controls (unless the Secretary of State's regulations say otherwise).
- 2 Whether you are unintentionally homeless.** If you have contributed to your homelessness (through something you did or failed to do), you may be considered "intentionally homeless" and the council may not assist you. You can apply if you are threatened with homelessness (within 28 days) or if there is nowhere reasonable for you to live (e.g. because you are under threat of domestic violence in your home).
- 3 Whether you are in priority need.** You could be in priority need because of your age, because you have dependent children, because you are pregnant, because you are disabled or because you are vulnerable" for another reason. "Vulnerability" can include people who are fleeing domestic violence, or who have mental or physical health problems.
- 4 Whether you have a local connection.** This means that you live, work or have family in the borough. You usually have to have lived in the borough for six out of the last twelve months, or three out of the last five years. The authority can interpret this requirement quite loosely and in cases of people fleeing violence, may ignore it altogether.



If the authority cannot assess the criteria (opposite) without further investigation, they should offer you accommodation while they investigate your case. Emergency housing is likely to consist of a hostel or bed and breakfast accommodation and may be a considerable distance outside your local area.

If you satisfy the criteria (opposite) the authority will also have to be satisfied that no suitable alternative accommodation is available to you. You will be offered temporary accommodation which may be a hostel, B&B, or self-contained. There is no time limit to how long you may be in this form of housing for and it may also be outside of your local area.

If you would like to discuss your eligibility for help from the local authority before you approach them, call Stonewall Housing on **020 7359 5767** (voice) / **020 7359 8188** (minicom).

Women's Refuges

Refuges are safe houses for women

Refuges are safe houses for women fleeing domestic violence or abuse. Their addresses are secret so you can go there without fear of being found by your abuser. If there is a vacancy, you can move in on the same day. There is specialist provision for some ethnic groups and several refuges have facilities that are accessible to people with disabilities (although they are usually unable to accept women with high support needs).

Refuges are usually happy to accept lesbians but you should be aware that most of the women there will be fleeing male abusers.

Most local authorities contain at least one refuge, but you are not encouraged to approach the one in your local area (since it would be easy for the abuser to locate a woman who continues her usual routine). Some refuges will not accept you unless you cut all ties with any area known to the abuser.

You can stay at a refuge until you are offered appropriate rehousing which can take several months or sometimes longer.

Women on benefits will be welcome in a refuge. Women who are working will have to pay rent, which can be very expensive but you may be able to claim some benefits to help with the costs.

Refuge vacancies become available daily, but are filled very quickly. If you are very flexible about the area you would consider living in, you may be able to find a refuge place on the same day. If you are not able to consider a very wide area, you may have to wait weeks or even months before a vacancy becomes available. Refuges do not usually operate waiting lists, so you will have to contact them regularly to find out about vacancies. For more information, or to request a place in a women's refuge, call Refuge on **0870 5995 443** (24 hours) or Women's Aid on **0845 7023 468**.

There is no refuge provision for men fleeing abuse but there is a hostel in London for gay men fleeing violence. Vacancies at this hostel are limited and you have to be referred via an agency like Stonewall Housing on **020 7359 5767** (voice) / **020 7359 8188** (minicom).

fleeing domestic violence or abuse

HOUSING OPTIONS IN EMERGENCIES

PROBLEMS THAT OCCUR AT HOME

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence can happen to anyone (gay or straight) and includes physical, mental, emotional and sexual abuse, threats and humiliation as well as other controlling behaviour. Experiencing domestic violence can damage your self-confidence and some victims are led to believe that they are causing the violence. In reality, violent or abusive behaviour is not acceptable and you will not be able to stop the abuse by changing your behaviour.

If you do not feel able to leave the relationship, you should consider making a safety plan. Keep a packed bag of the things you would need in order to leave at short notice. You should include enough money to travel, some clothes, your passport, birth certificate, benefit books and a list of useful phone numbers. Think of some safe places for you to go (such as a friend's house) and plan how you could get there. Consider speaking to the Community Safety Unit in your local police station (they won't take action against your partner or family unless you want them to). Keep a detailed record of the things that are happening to you, and if you are physically assaulted, visit your

doctor and ask him/her to make a note of the incident. It may be important later that you can prove someone else knew what was happening to you.

If you have to leave your abusive partner, and have nowhere to go, you should be eligible for help from the Homeless Persons Unit, which is part of your Local Authority. You are considered homeless under the law if there is nowhere reasonable for you to stay (it would not be reasonable for you to stay with an abusive partner). Tell them that you want to apply as homeless and that you are in priority need because you are fleeing violence. If they accept your application, they will try to find you somewhere to go on the same day (probably a hostel or Bed and Breakfast). If they feel that there is not enough evidence, they should still give you somewhere to stay while they gather more information.

You could consider approaching a Direct Access Hostel or a Refuge (see the previous chapters covering these options).

If you want to stay in your home, but want your partner to leave, you should seek advice on Occupation Orders. There are two types of

Occupation Order; the first states your rights in your home and the second regulates who can live there. These orders are available to gay men and lesbians but in a much more restricted way than to heterosexual couples. If you would like to discuss Occupation Orders you can call Stonewall Housing on **020 7359 5767** (voice) / **020 7359 8188** (minicom).

Gay men and lesbians can secure “non-molestation orders” which are injunctions that can be worded to prohibit the abuser from assaulting or harassing the victim. You should seek advice about these orders from your police station or from a Solicitor who specialises in family law.

Abuse and violence in the home are criminal offences. If you can, report the abuse to the police who can arrest the perpetrator even if they have not seen the incident take place. The police also have powers under the “Protection From Harassment Act 1997” to charge the abuser after two incidents.

If you want to discuss the options available to you, call Stonewall Housing on **020 7359 5767**(voice) / **020 7359 8188** (minicom). The service is free and confidential, you don't have to tell us your name, and we would never reveal any details to your partner.



Harassment

Harassment could include violence, threats, name-calling, graffiti, letters and other forms of intimidating behaviour and, depending on what occurs, this could be a civil or criminal offence. You may be harassed because of your sexuality, your race, your gender, your disability or any other reason.

If you are being harassed you should keep a “Diary of Incidents” which can be laid out like this (see next page):

**Abuse and violence in the home are
criminal offences**

PROBLEMS THAT OCCUR AT HOME

DIARY OF INCIDENTS (EXAMPLE)

Date and Time	Who was involved?	What happened?	Who witnessed it?	Reported to	Crime Reference
3rd April 2000 1.25pm	Self and Mr Smith	Mr. Smith shouted "Faggot"	Ms Jones	Police and landlord	ABC123

It is advisable to report the harassment to anyone with a higher interest in your home (e.g. your landlord, the council or the freeholder). If your harasser is a neighbour and you know who his/her landlord is, report the harassment to them too. Seek support from other agencies such as Stonewall Housing on **020 7359 5767** (voice) / **020 7359 8188** (minicom) / GALOP (Lesbian, gay and bi-sexual anti-violence project) **020 7704 2040** (helpline voice) or **0207 704 3111** (minicom).

If you are a local authority or housing association tenant, you can ask for a priority transfer rather than waiting until the perpetrator is moved, or is stopped from harassing you.

If you have to leave your home due to severe harassment, and have nowhere to go, you may be eligible for help from the Homeless Persons Unit, which is part of your local authority. You are considered homeless under the law if there is nowhere reasonable for you to stay (it is not reasonable for you to stay in a place where you are under

threat). Tell them that you want to apply as homeless and that you are in priority need because you are fleeing severe harassment. If they accept your application, they will try to find you somewhere to go on the same day (probably a hostel or Bed and Breakfast). If they feel there is not enough evidence, they should still give you somewhere to stay while they gather more information.

You could consider approaching a Direct Access Hostel (see *Housing Options in Emergencies Section*).

Disrepair

Disrepair is not easily defined, but if you feel that your home is not in good repair you should first look at your Tenancy Agreement. This should set out what responsibilities you and the landlord have under the tenancy. If the agreement does not give details on certain areas, some terms can be implied into the tenancy.



Under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, the landlord is responsible for keeping the structure, the exterior and the installations (gas, electricity, water etc) in good repair, and s/he cannot usually transfer this responsibility to the tenant. The landlord is also responsible for reasonable “wear and tear”.

The tenant has to maintain the property in a “tenant-like manner” which could include doing some minor repairs.

If the landlord is not meeting his/her obligations, you can take action against them but you should be aware that unless you are an assured, regulated or secure tenant the landlord might choose to evict you. You should also note that in some circumstances, the landlord is only liable to do the repair once the tenant has given notice that there is a problem. Make sure that all communication is in writing and ask your landlord to respond in writing.

If the landlord has failed to carry out repairs in a reasonable time, then the tenant can consider the following;

- 1) Withholding rent or offsetting rent against the disrepair. **This is not always an advisable course of action and there is a strict procedure to follow. Your landlord may issue court proceedings against you if you follow this course of action.** Before you even consider this, you should seek advice from Stonewall Housing on **020 7359 5767** (voice) / **020 7359 8188** (minicom), or speak to a Solicitor.
- 2) Approaching the County Court with the aim of suing for breach of the tenancy, or obtaining an injunction to force the landlord to conduct the repairs, or seeking damages with the help of a Solicitor.
- 3) If the disrepair is such that you believe your home is uninhabitable, you may want to seek advice from the environmental health department of your local authority.

Council tenants have further rights, one of which is the ‘Right to Repair scheme’ under the Tenant’s Charter, which can allow the tenant to repair the property themselves. Check your tenancy agreement if you are unsure whether you have this right.

Private tenants can apply to the County Court for a manager to be appointed to take over the collection of rent and the responsibility for repairs. This is only available in certain circumstances and you should seek advice from Stonewall Housing on **020 7359 5767** (voice) / **020 7359 8188** (minicom) before proceeding.

If you are moving and are offered a furnished home, there is an implied term in your tenancy that the place is fit to live in. If it is unfit you are entitled to leave immediately and not be liable for rent. It should be noted that this only applies to people moving into furnished property.

PROBLEMS THAT OCCUR AT HOME



Reasons that it could be deemed unfit include infestations, sewerage or drainage problems, lack of safety and an unfit water supply.

If you believe that your home is in disrepair, you should keep detailed records, including copies of any letters to, or from, your landlord and photographs of the problem.

Overcrowding

There are two ways of assessing whether a property is overcrowded. One is based on the number of rooms, and the other is based on the size of the rooms. There are several exceptions to the rules, so if you feel that your home is overcrowded, you should seek advice from Stonewall Housing on **020 7359 5767** (voice) / **020 7359 8188** (minicom).

Eviction

If you are being evicted from your home, you should seek advice because, unless your landlord has followed a strict procedure, the eviction may not be legal. Eviction before your tenancy has expired is likely to be unlawful. Even if your contract has ended, a court order is still required before you can be made to leave (some tenancies are excluded from this rule). Evicting someone illegally is a criminal and civil offence.

It is very important that you seek advice as soon as you are threatened with eviction rather than waiting until you have to leave.

SEEKING ADVICE

Stonewall Housing offers free and confidential housing advice, information, referrals and advocacy for lesbians and gay men. You can contact us in two ways; call the Advice Line or drop-in to an Advice Surgery (contact details are given overleaf). We will take details about your case and talk to you about what assistance we may be able to offer. We may need you to show us copies of relevant papers, such as your tenancy agreement or deeds, and any correspondence you have received about your situation.

We may be able to help you in one of three ways;

1) By giving you general **ADVICE AND INFORMATION** on your rights and responsibilities in your current housing. We can explain your options to you and ensure that you understand how to proceed.

2) If you have nowhere to live, or would like to access a more suitable home, we may be able to **REFER** you to an agency that provides appropriate accommodation. We will arrange an appointment for you to meet us and we will help you to complete the relevant paperwork. We will make it clear to you about the type of agency we are referring you to and the sort of accommodation they may be able to offer.

3) If you are having problems in your home (such as harassment, eviction or disrepair), we can **ADVOCATE** on your behalf. We can write letters with you or on your behalf, contact relevant agencies and assist you with any formal proceedings.

If we are unable to assist you, we will **SIGNPOST** you to an agency that can help.

All the advisors at Stonewall Housing identify as lesbian or gay and we have a specialist knowledge and understanding of the issues that lesbian and gay people face in gaining access to safe and secure housing. If you prefer to be dealt with by a black worker, or by a woman, let us know and we will arrange this.

You can contact us on the Advice Line
020 7359 5767 (voice) / **020 7359 8188** (minicom).
Monday, Thursday and Friday mornings (10am to 1pm) and on
Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons (2pm to 5pm).

You can also drop-in (without an appointment) at any of the Advice Surgeries listed on the following page.



SEEKING ADVICE

Monday 2pm to 3.30pm at
LONDON FRIEND
86 Caledonian Rd
London N1

Wednesday 5.30pm to 7pm at
CLASH
11 Warwick Street
London W1

Thursday 2pm to 3.30pm at the
ST GILES TRUST DAY CENTRE
64-68 Camberwell Church Street
London SE5

*If you prefer to contact another agency,
the following might be useful:*

ADVISORY SERVICE FOR SQUATTERS
020 7359 8814
For squatters.

FRIENDS, FAMILIES AND TRAVELLERS
01273 234 777
For the traveller community both
traditional and new.

FRONTLINE HOUSING ADVICE
020 7501 9573
For black and ethnic minority communities.

ALBERT KENNEDY TRUST
For young LGB youth who are homeless
or living in a hostile environment.
020 7831 6562 London
0161 228 3308 Manchester

SHELTERLINE (24 HOUR)
0808 800 4444 (Freephone)
Anyone who is homeless or with
housing problems.

**SHELTER NORTH WEST
HOUSING AID CENTRE**
0161 834 4809
For anyone in Greater Manchester,
Merseyside, Cheshire or High Peak.

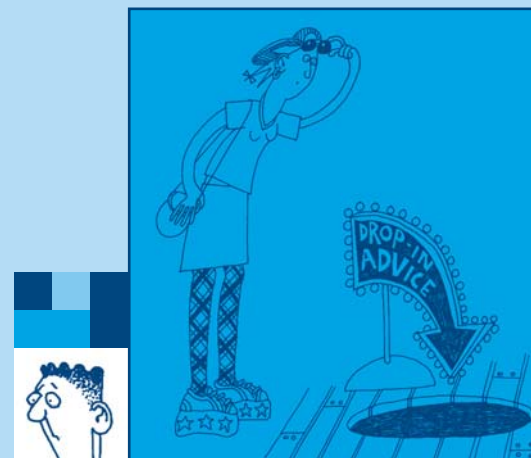
**TERRENCE HIGGINS TRUST
LIGHTHOUSE**
0845 1221 2000

Monday: Friday 10am - 10pm
Weekends: 12 - 6pm
Anyone with HIV and housing or
welfare benefits issues.

WOMEN'S LINK
020 7248 1200
For women.



ADVICE CENTRES



If you are seeking housing advice and information specifically for lesbians and gay men outside of London you could also contact your local lesbian and gay helpline or switchboard who may have information about specific local projects and housing opportunities.

Before you seek housing advice you should think about the problems you are having and the solution you would like. You are likely to be asked about your housing history and so you should therefore make a list of the places you have lived in over the last five years. You may also be asked for proof of identification, for your National Insurance number and for proof of income.

PLEASE DON'T HESITATE TO SEEK ADVICE IF YOU NEED IT

ABOUT STONEWALL HOUSING

STONEWALL HOUSING ACCESS PROVISIONS

Hearing impaired clients:

A minicom is available during office hours on **020 7359 8188**. All staff are confident in using BT's Tynetalk service. Alternatively we can be faxed on **020 7359 9419** or e-mailed at info@Stonewallhousing.org. We can arrange a signer on request.

Wheelchair users:

Two of the three sites at which we conduct surgeries are accessible to wheelchair users (London Friend and the St Giles Trust Day Centre). CLASH is not wheelchair accessible.

Clients with limited mobility:

We can arrange to see clients in their own home or at another suitable venue on request. We welcome clients accompanied by a personal assistant and can conduct interviews with or without the personal assistant being present.

Clients who cannot speak English:

We will endeavour to arrange an interpreter on request.

Other Access Issues:

If you want to discuss access to our services including any needs not addressed here, please contact the Advice Services Manager on:

Voice: 020 7359 6242
Fax: 020 7359 9419
Minicom: 020 7359 8188
E-mail: info@stonewallhousing.org

FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT STONEWALL HOUSING

Stonewall Housing was set up in 1983 when there was no recognition of the housing needs for lesbians and gay men and no provision of specialist housing. Stonewall Housing has grown and now provides a housing advice, referral and advocacy service for lesbians and gay men of all ages via a helpline and drop-in services as well as temporary, shared, supported housing for 41 lesbians and gay men aged between 16 and 25.

Stonewall Housing is funded by statutory and charitable bodies including Association of London Government and the City Parochial Foundation.

Stonewall Housing is a member of Advice UK and The Telephone Helplines Association.



Stonewall Housing Association
2a Leroy Business Centre
436 Essex Road
London N1 3QP

Office Telephone Number 020 7359 6242

Advice Line 020 7359 5767

Fax 020 7359 9419

Minicom 020 7359 8188

Email info@stonewallhousing.org

Stonewall Housing Association is a Charitable Housing Association registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965, number 24277R.

Community
Legal Service



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