



SAFV's mission is to provide empowerment-based safety and advocacy services for victims/survivors of domestic and sexual violence while promoting a community of nonviolence and respect. Having a gender-inclusive shelter program is just another step towards achieving that. Here are some common questions answered about this change:

Is gender-inclusive sheltering a big change? Haven't you always served all survivors of abuse?

Prior to gender-inclusive sheltering, SAFV served all survivors of domestic or sexual abuse, regardless of gender. We always checked in with any person requesting services (shelter, legal help, counseling, etc.) and determined what we could offer that person at that time. If a person did identify as male and needed residential services, staff worked to find alternative options to our shelter program. Our move to gender-inclusive sheltering means that we have the option to shelter anyone- identifying as female, male, or gender non-conforming- in our facility.

Why are you making this change now?

We are making this change for multiple reasons:

1. Gender-inclusivity in shelters has been a federal mandate for 10 years.
 - It has taken time for SAFV to be prepared to successfully become gender-inclusive. This includes altering our screening process to apply to LGBTQ+ relationships, training staff, briefing clients, and updating policy. As time goes on, more and more shelters across the nation and in Alaska will follow suit, if they have not already.
2. There is increased need within the queer and transgender community.
 - Offering sex-specific services means we are forcing participants to identify as a particular gender. For those who identify as gender-fluid or gender non-conforming, we are perpetuating a system that says you must identify as man or woman, and services are based on that identification. We promote freedom from violence; requiring someone to present in a way that makes them uncomfortable in order to access services is much like the oppression we are committed to fighting against.
3. While the vast majority of victims of domestic and sexual violence are non-male identifying, men can also be victims and they deserve a safe space to heal, which is what we want for everyone who seeks our services.
 - SAFV is a feminist organization and feminist principles fundamentally emphasize equality, safety, and justice for all, regardless of gender. Domestic and sexual violence can affect individuals of any gender. Expanding services to be gender-inclusive does not detract from advocacy and support for women; rather, it extends services to all individuals who need them.

Will abusers try to gain access to their victims by pretending to need shelter?

Safety and empowerment for survivors are SAFV's top priorities. We created a screening procedure that has minimized the opportunity for abusers to manipulate the process. We have worked with victims and survivors of violence for many years, and are tuned into red flags of abuse. However, we do know that abuse happens on a spectrum and can be very complicated



and messy. We will always do our best to prevent emergencies before they happen, and provide services that help mitigate future violence. We have experience screening women in same sex relationships for shelter services. Our procedures are designed to identify and serve the abused partner, and make referrals to other services if the offending partner requests.

How does staff work to prevent violent individuals from entering shelter?

SAFV staff are trained on a variety of emergency interventions, with continuing education and an annual, mandated refresher training. We utilize a combination of common-sense precautions and technology to safeguard our building and residents. We can alert security/law enforcement with the touch of a button. Additionally, staff spend a large portion of their day facilitating things such as problem-solving and de-escalating conflict to maintain a safe space for all. Lastly, perpetrators can be any gender, so limiting genders that can enter shelter does not limit all violent individuals from trying to enter shelter.

What if women feel triggered or threatened by people who identify as male in shelter? Or women who expect a woman-only safe space?

While it is true anyone who has been abused can be re-traumatized by a wide variety of triggering events, research and experience has shown triggers are typically provoked by behaviors, smells, sounds, media, and specific scenes,¹ and not based on gender expression or identity. Such potentially triggering behaviors include threats, bullying, manipulation, blame-shifting and coercion. Part of our job as advocates is to help survivors understand and contextualize their trauma, and work toward healing. Survivors of abuse interact with men in many situations, including our current shelter environment where men are working. Our commitment is to meet survivors where they are at without judgment, and facilitate working through any trauma that limits their ability to live full, empowered lives.

Will men and women share the same bedrooms?

Safety is our number one priority; all residents will share rooms with individuals they feel safe with. Shelter participants have always been open to re-configuring our shelter rooms based on special needs, size of family, and compatibility. Shelter residents all recognize the need for safety and stability for themselves, their families, and others who require our services.

I have other questions. Who can I contact?

Please email us at services@safv.org and we will get back to you as soon as possible.

Thank you to AWARE, Inc., in Juneau for their help in producing this document.

¹ Source: <https://www.vvaa.org.au/ptsd.htm>