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**COTTAGING AND CRUISING:
YOUR SAFETY, YOUR RIGHTS
AND THE LAW**

**HOMOPHOBIA
TRANSPHOBIA
ABUSE**

TELL US ABOUT IT

**020 7704 2040
www.galop.org.uk**

making life
safe, just and fair
for LGBT people

This booklet tells you about the law and how it applies to cottaging and cruising. It gives suggestions on keeping safe and what to do if you are a victim of a crime whilst cottaging or cruising. It also gives some suggestions on what to do if you experience problems with the police or others whilst cottaging or cruising.

Produced with support
from Pink Triangle Trust



Cruising grounds are open spaces where men look for consensual sex with other men, such as parks or lay-bys; these places are also known as public sex environments (PSE's).

Cottaging is looking for or having sex in a public toilet and include any toilet accessible to the public such as shopping centres or transport locations.

Cruising and the law

There is no law specifically prohibiting cruising. Sex in public places is not illegal as long as other members of the public cannot see you are having sex, and are unlikely to come across you having sex. For example if you are having sex late at night in a secluded area of a heath or common.

What should you be careful of?

Be as discreet as possible to avoid attracting attention. For example, use secluded areas, but not anywhere that might be overlooked from a road or path, particularly during daylight hours.

If you engage in sexual behaviour that may cause offence to others, or you are discovered having sex in a public place where you could be seen, you risk being arrested or prosecuted for a sexual offence. Be responsible! Inappropriate or anti-social behaviour is likely to result

in complaints and unwanted attention. Consider other members of the public and dispose of sex litter appropriately.

Cottaging and the law

It is against the law to have sex in a public toilet and you risk being arrested for cottaging regardless of whether you are being discreet or not. For example, having sex in a cubicle behind closed doors is still a sexual offence. If you still go cottaging you need to be very careful, as police or others can regularly

patrol toilets, particularly in train stations, shopping centres and parks. Look out for warnings posted on websites such as Squirt. You should also be careful cruising in other venues used by the public, such as gyms, swimming pools and saunas; if you are discovered or a complaint is made you could be banned from the venue or even arrested.

Action by the police

Police guidelines on cruising grounds advise that the police should only respond to complaints from the public and not mount proactive operations to stop men cruising. However, the police may patrol cruising grounds if for example, there are reports of attacks or there have been complaints about inappropriate sexual activity during the day time. The police **do not** have the right to stop or search you just for being in a cruising ground unless they suspect you have committed or are just

about to commit a crime. Regardless of your behaviour, no one is entitled to be homophobic to you or treat you badly. If you think you or someone else has been unfairly treated by the police or others contact Galop.

What if you're arrested?

If you're found cottaging or having sex in a public place where you could be seen by others, you risk being arrested. If you are arrested always ask to speak to a duty solicitor at the police station before being interviewed or accepting a caution. A caution or conviction will result in you having a criminal record for a sexual offence which will be disclosed if you require a criminal record check for your job. For more information on cottaging, cruising and the law, contact Galop.

Your safety

Some cruising grounds are safer than others and you should look out for warnings posted on sites such as Squirt. Avoid cruising if you're drunk or have used drugs - you'll be less likely to make safe decisions. Keep valuables like mobile phones out of sight or leave them at home. Get to know the layout of the cruising ground, such as exits or dead-ends. You are safer in areas where others are cruising, so avoid becoming isolated. If you feel unsafe or someone is behaving oddly, move away or leave

the area. If you are attacked, get help by attracting the attention of others. Try to get away or shout for help. Be clear about what sex you're comfortable doing and stay within your boundaries. You have the right to say 'no' to sex or 'no' during sexual activity. Others also have the right to say 'no' to you. See Galop's campaign Do What You Both Want

www.dowhatyoubothwant.com

Reporting an incident

If you or someone else is attacked it's important to tell someone about what has happened so you can get help and alert others to the danger. If you don't want to speak directly to the police you can contact Galop; we can give you advice in complete confidence. Galop can give you advice and support. We can report the incident to the police on your behalf and you can remain anonymous if you prefer.

Useful Contacts

Galop:

Advice and support on hate crime,
sexual assault, cruising and the law:
020 7704 2040 Information and online
reporting www.galop.org.uk

Terrence Higgins Trust:

Advice and support on sexual health:
0808 802 1221
www.tht.org.uk

Met Police: Emergency 999; Non-emergency 101 www.met.police.uk

Always dial 999 if it is an emergency and you think you are in immediate danger.

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