

# Conversion Therapy: Fact Over Fiction

## What is It?

Conversion Therapy is an umbrella term for a wide range of dangerous and discredited<sup>1</sup> practices that attempt to change the sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression (SOGIE) of LGBTQ+ people. Conversion therapies assume science, religion, & society want LGBTQ+ people to change who they are. They are grounded in the idea that LGBTQ+ identities are the result of mental illness and can be “cured.” Practitioners try to make LGBTQ+ people conform to a cis-heterosexist, biblical gender, and sexual binary.

## Also Known As

- Reparative Therapy
- Sexual Orientation or Gender Change Efforts
- Sexual or Gender Reorientation Efforts
- Eliminate or Decrease Unwanted Same-Sex Attraction (SSA)
- Ex-gay Ministry
- Promoting Healthy Sexuality
- Sexuality Counseling
- Healing Sexual Brokenness
- Sexual Attraction Fluidity Exploration in Therapy (SAFE-T)

Alternative terms are often used by groups<sup>2</sup> that promote conversion therapy to that imply living as an LGBTQ+ person is dangerous and damaging. The terms also showcase how proponents of conversion therapy often attribute LGBTQ+ identity to sexual abuse and how they use distorted perspectives of religious living to convince LGBTQ people they are unnatural.

## The Dangers of Conversion Therapy

Fifteen major health associations have expressed concern about the dangers of conversion therapy or called for the practice to be banned.

A study released by the Trevor Project<sup>3</sup> in 2022 found that “conversion therapy and its associated harms cost the U.S. an estimated \$9.23 billion.”

**By reinforcing prejudice, conversion therapy puts LGB<sup>4</sup> people at risk.**

**75%** more likely to plan suicide

**88%** more likely to attempt suicide resulting no or minor injury

**92%** more likely to have lifelong suicidal ideation

Gender change efforts have similar effects among transgender people.<sup>5</sup>

- Effects of exposure are no different secular professionals and religious advisers.
- Exposure to gender identity change efforts is associated with mental distress among trans people.
- Gender change efforts are reported more by economically disadvantaged trans people.

## Affirmation is the Answer

By demonstrating that there is nothing inherently wrong with LGBTQ+ identity, positive affirmation helps reduce social stigma and combat pressures to conform with hetero- and cis-sexist norms. Affirmation helps cultivate an environment where LGBTQ+ people not only feel acceptance but thrive.

- Access to at least 1 LGBTQ-affirming space reduces the odds of reporting a suicide attempt by 35% among LGBTQ+ youth.
- Family support is associated with decreased risk of poor mental and physical health outcomes among LGBTQ+ people.
- Gender-affirming medical care is associated with reduced risk of suicide among trans and GNC people.

# Worst-Practices: Perpetuating Myths Through Pseudoscience

The United Nations Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGIE) warns conversion therapy “may amount to torture.”<sup>6</sup> As medical science excoriates conversion therapy,

proponents have reformed their messaging to focus on personal “healing,” with some admitting they cannot change a person’s SOGIE. Some worst-practices and how they cause harm are listed below:

Practices Today	How it Works	How it Harms
Aversive Conditioning	Associates LGBTQ+ identities and the desire and feelings that come with those identities with pain, discomfort, and disgust – sometimes by inflicting physical pain.	Inflicts physical and emotional pain, which causes trauma and severe mental health effects, such as depression, PTSD, and suicidality.
Psychoanalysis Techniques	Attempts to change LGBTQ+ individuals’ identities by blaming familial relationships and sexual trauma, and reducing sexuality and gender into a sex disorder.	Inflicts psychological distress through shame and amplifies effects of social discrimination.
Corrective Marriage Counseling	Pairs LGBTQ+ people with a partner who reinforces gender and sexual binary. Compelling involuntary intercourse is also a tactic of this practice.	Sexual abuse can occur in these pairings. Sets unrealistic relationship expectations that can harm all parties when they fail.
Gender Exploratory Therapy <sup>7</sup>	Purports to explore the causes of gender dysphoria but largely assumes trans identity is a mental illness.	Perpetuated by a group of anti-trans therapists who lead a network of policy organizations opposed to LGBTQ+ rights.



## References

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- 2 [glaad.org/conversiontherapy](https://glaad.org/conversiontherapy)
- 3 [www.thetrevorproject.org/blog/new-study-finds-conversion-therapy-and-its-associated-harms-cost-the-u-s-an-estimated-9-23-billion-annually](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/blog/new-study-finds-conversion-therapy-and-its-associated-harms-cost-the-u-s-an-estimated-9-23-billion-annually)
- 4 [williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/press/lgb-suicide-ct-press-release](https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/press/lgb-suicide-ct-press-release)
- 5 [jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/article-abstract/2749479](https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/article-abstract/2749479)
- 6 [www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/u-n-calls-global-end-conversion-therapy-says-it-may-n1230851](https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/u-n-calls-global-end-conversion-therapy-says-it-may-n1230851)
- 7 [healthliberationnow.com/avoid-anti-trans-conversion-therapists](https://healthliberationnow.com/avoid-anti-trans-conversion-therapists)