



STOP Conversion (Therapy) Practices

The What, Why, Where, Who, and How
of Conversion Practices in Canada



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www.stopconversionpractices.ca

A Knowledge Centre created by and with survivors of conversion practices, for all who are working to support survivors and end these harmful practices in Canada

The Community-Based Research Centre
in partnership with No Conversion Canada (2023)

What are Conversion Practices?

We refer to conversion “therapy” as conversion practices—as they are not considered a reputable form of therapy.

Conversion practices are formal and organized practices, treatments, or services that attempt to change a person’s sexual orientation to heterosexual, gender identity to cisgender, and gender expression to match their assigned sex at birth. They are based on the assumption that being heterosexual is the only normal way to express sexuality, and that a person’s gender identity matches their assigned sex at birth.

Conversion practices can also be considered as part of a broader set of sexual orientation and gender identity or expression **change efforts**. These include subtle or blatant practices, messages, or pressures to change, deny, suppress, or lead a person to doubt their sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression.



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What is NOT a Conversion Practice?

Conversion practices do **not** include a practice, treatment, or service that: explores or develops a person’s integrated personal identity, such as helping someone with their gender transition, **and** does not assume one sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression is preferred over another.

Conversion practices also do not include casual, impromptu conversations. However, if the conversation is part of a formal intervention, such as a counselling session, then it may be a conversion practice if it is based on an assumption that being heterosexual or cisgender is preferred or superior to a non-heterosexual sexual orientation or non-cisgender identity or expression.

How Conversion Practices Impact People

Conversion practices can deeply affect one's sense of self and promote a harmful or traumatic self-image among queer, trans, and Two-Spirit people. Young people are most vulnerable.

Long-term impacts can include shame, depression, anxiety, social phobias, substance use disorders, suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, post-traumatic stress disorder, sexual and relationship problems, low self-worth, fear of rejection or abandonment, and more.

How to Identify Conversion Practices

As opinions and laws change and opposition to conversion practice grows, conversion practitioners have rebranded themselves and may continue to find new ways of describing what they do.

When trying to assess whether a practice, treatment, or service amounts to a conversion practice, it is important to focus on the objectives of the activity under consideration rather than how a practitioner describes it.

Who Experiences Conversion Practices in Canada

Despite recent changes in Canada, conversion practices are likely still taking place in a variety of settings, including healthcare and social services, and in religious communities.

Data from CBRC's Sex Now survey estimates the number of gay, bisexual, trans men, and Two-Spirit and non-binary (GBT2Q) people who have experienced conversion practices. This data does not include sexual minority women.

10%

of GBT2Q
people overall

20%

of non-binary and
trans respondents

11-22%

of racial/ethnic
minorities

15%

of immigrants

13%

of those aged 15-19

Where People Experience Conversion Practices

Conversion practices have been reported in a range of settings and contexts, including:

- Religious-based e.g., counselling, programs labeled sexual addictions or discipleship, exorcisms, bible study, camps, or are silently internalized in religious settings.
- Healthcare-based e.g., medical and mental health practitioners, therapists/counselors, social services, child protection workers.



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Why People Engage in Conversion Practices

There are a variety of internal motivations and external factors that lead people as youth and adults to enter into conversion practices without explicit coercion. They can make conversion practices feel like a necessity in order to keep relationships with family and communities, or keep a job or housing.

Learn More at www.stopconversionpractices.ca

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