



Supporting Survivors of Conversion Practices

Guidelines for practitioners and service providers of queer, trans, and Two-Spirit people, for family and friends of survivors, and anyone wanting to support survivors.



Image via Unsplash by [Jason Leung](#)

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)

It takes courage and the assurance of safety for a survivor of conversion practices or change efforts to reach out for help or to share their story.

When a survivor reaches out to someone, they may be unsure of the validity of their own experience, hesitant to identify as a survivor (comparing their experience with others), struggling with shame, filled with rage, overcome with grief, paralyzed by fear, or suicidal.

They may also have an understandably strong distrust of religious leaders and communities, healthcare practitioners including mental health professionals, social workers, child protection workers, or therapeutic practitioners — because that's where they were harmed or traumatized.

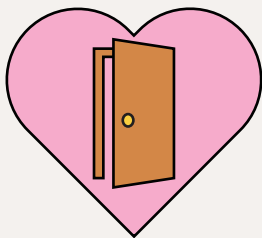
It is critical that we respect and acknowledge the experiences of anyone who says they have been harmed or traumatized by conversion practices, and that they may not have had access to safe spaces for them to be who they are and express their emotions. Never underestimate the impact your words and actions can have on the course of a survivor's healing journey.

Here are some general guidelines on how to support someone who shares their personal experiences with you.



Listen

Show support by being a safe place and a good listener. Assure them that they are not alone, and that you care about them and are here to listen or help in any way you can. Respect when they want to engage, and when they don't.



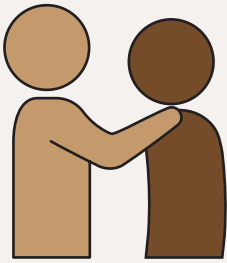
Believe

It takes a lot of courage for a survivor to share their story. They may feel ashamed, be afraid they won't be believed, or worried that they will be blamed or judged. Acknowledge the impact the experience has had on them. Show empathy with statements like, "This must be really painful for you" and "I'm so glad you are sharing this with me".



Validate their emotions

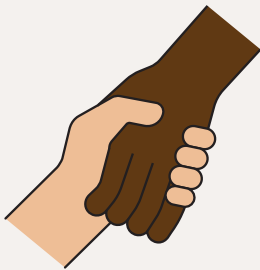
It's common for survivors to have conflicting feelings—love and fear, guilt and anger, hope and sadness. Let them know that these feelings are normal. Don't make it about you and your anger at whoever traumatized a survivor. Let them own their emotions in their chosen way and time.



Assure them it's not their fault

Survivors can all too easily blame themselves or be made to feel stupid for having engaged in conversion practices. Remind them often that they are not to blame. Don't ask them why they participated in it. Instead take the time on your own to learn about **why and how** people are coerced or forced to participate in conversion practices.

<https://stopconversionpractices.ca/all-about-conversion-practices/why-who/>



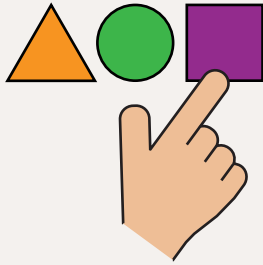
Don't switch to a 'Fix-It' or 'Saviour' mode

Your job is to support the survivor. Leave the work of how to deal with the trauma and begin the healing process to someone who understands the harm of conversion practices and is trained in trauma recovery.



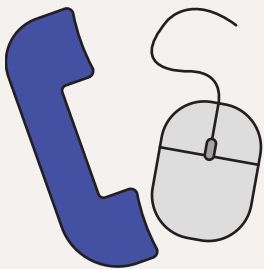
Ask them what they need

Conversion practices take control away from a person and do not provide them with options. Don't assume you know what they need. Instead, give the survivor control and empower them by asking if they want to be connected to other supports or resources. This is especially important if you are in a relationship with a survivor of conversion practices.



Respect their choices

Be patient. Support and respect their decisions, even when you don't agree.



When they're ready, offer to help them find supports

When the survivor asks for specific forms of help and information, reach out and ask for support from **networks and organizations** who can understand the survivors' situation and yours.

<https://stopconversionpractices.ca/all-about-conversion-practices/supports-resources/>

Read more about the who, what, why, where, and how of conversion practices and access a variety of supports and resources at www.stopconversionpractices.ca