

What is Conversion Therapy?

So-called 'conversion therapy', sometimes referred to as 'conversion practices', includes all actions that intend to change, 'cure', or suppress an individual or group of individuals' sexual or romantic orientation and/or gender identity.

Your sexual or romantic orientation and/or gender identity are ultimately your sense of yourself. Within these practices, there is a harmful intention to 'cure', suppress or change a person's identity, and the false belief that it is possible to do so. So-called 'conversion therapy' does not work and, in many cases, causes serious harm, the effects of which can be felt for many years.

It's important to be able to talk about or explore your identity with someone you can trust, but you should never feel forced to try to be someone you're not.

Why do you say "so-called"?

The term "conversion therapy" suggests two things: that it is possible to convert or change someone's orientation or gender identity, and that this is a process carried out through legitimate/supportive therapy. Neither of these things are true, so we say "so-called" before "conversion therapy" to be clear that neither part of the name accurately represents the reality of these practices.

Sources:

Almost **24%** of **935** LGBT+ respondents in a study on sexual violence said that they had experienced sexual violence which they believed was intended to convert or punish their LGBT+ identity. ([Galop A, 2022](#)).

5% of all LGBT+ people responding to a very large self-selecting survey in the UK in 2017 had been 'offered' conversion therapy in the UK with a further 2% having undergone it. ([National LGBT+ Survey, GEO](#)).

5% of **5078** LGBT+ respondents had been subjected to so-called 'conversion therapy' through a family member attempting to change, 'cure' or suppress their sexual orientation or gender identity. ([Galop, 2022](#)).

What does so-called 'conversion therapy' look like?

In the UK, so-called 'conversion therapy' can take many forms, including:

- Being told that who you are is not in line with your the faith, beliefs or community norms that you have been raised within, with someone insisting that they help you to 'change' or 'suppress' who you are.
- Being constantly monitored and/or controlled by people in your life to force you to 'behave appropriately' and prevent you from expressing your identity. This control could be of your finances, access to resources, movements, friendships, relationships, medication or dress/hair/make-up.
- Being repeatedly prayed over, or put through other religious rituals to change your orientation or gender identity.
- Being shamed for your sexual or romantic orientation or gender identity in front of others.
- Being forced to see a medical or therapeutic 'professional', who may or not be qualified, with the intent or goal of 'changing' or 'curing' your sexual or romantic orientation or gender identity.
- Facing, or being threatened with verbal, physical or sexual punishment if you express your sexual or romantic orientation or gender identity.
- Being locked up or denied food and water as punishment for not 'changing' your sexual/romantic orientation or gender identity.



What does so-called 'conversion therapy' look like?

- Being threatened with an upcoming event, trip, or ceremony, during which there's an intention to 'change' or pressure you to change your identity
- Being forced to eat, drink or intake something, or having someone pray over you to 'cure ' or 'change' who you are.
- Being forced into a marriage, or threatened with an intention to force a marriage, to someone who does not fit with your romantic/sexual orientation, as a way of suppressing who you are.
- A threat or attempt to remove you to another country if you do not 'change' your sexual or romantic orientation or gender identity.
- Being threatened that someone will end their life, or yours, if you do not 'change' your sexual or romantic orientation or gender identity.
- Being sent to a location away from your home for the purposes of going through processes to change who you are.

This is not an exhaustive list – the key feature of so-called “conversion therapy” is that the goal is to change a person’s orientation or gender identity.

These kinds of abusive behaviours may come from a family member, faith or community leader, therapist, an intimate partner, or any other person in your life. So-called ‘conversion therapy’ can happen in any public or private space, including institutions or a person’s own home.

So-called ‘conversion therapy’ will not always look like the list above, and you don't have to be sure about what's happening to you (or someone you're concerned about) or tick any of these boxes or in order to contact us.

Can you consent to so-called 'conversion therapy'?

In some cases of so-called 'conversion therapy', you can be made to believe you have asked for, or consented to, what is happening. You may even be told that the only way to live a happy and fulfilled life is to change your sexual or romantic orientation and/or gender identity - but these practices are abusive, and no-one can consent to abuse.

[\(The Human Rights Act, 1998\)](#) [\(Equality Human Rights, 2021\)](#)
[\(United Nations, 2020\)](#) [\(GEO, 2021\)](#)



What might happen if someone goes through so-called 'conversion therapy'?

The evidence is clear that conversion practices do not work and can have lifelong, harmful impacts.

So-called 'conversion therapy' targets a core part of who you are, which can make you feel like you are to blame for what has happened to you. This isn't true. No one should ever be forced to repress or change who they are, and your identity does not need to be cured. We can't choose who we are and we can't consent to abuse.

Some of the potential impacts of so-called 'conversion therapy' are listed on the page below. You might find that these impacts don't fit with your experience, but that doesn't mean you or someone you're concerned about is not going through conversion therapy. You don't have to be sure about what's happening to you, or identify with any of these impacts in order to contact us.

Possible Impacts

Professionals supporting survivors of so-called 'conversion therapy' have noted the following impacts:

Mental: Increased psychological distress, anxiety, depression, flashbacks, self-harm risks, damaged well-being/self-esteem, increased risk of suicide, dysphoria, feelings of guilt or shame, fear of mental health support

Physical: Difficulty sleeping, eating challenges, injuries from sexual violence and/or assault, mobility problems, physical effects of poisoning, or other physical abuse.

Social: Challenges with intimacy, feeling lost about who to talk to, or fear of communicating what has happened to you, feeling like you must hide your identity, avoiding spaces or events that reflect and support your sexual or romantic orientation, or gender identity.

Economic: Missing classes or lectures, losing access to transport, homelessness, loss of employment

Community: Isolation from the community which may reflect and support your sexual or romantic orientation or gender identity, isolation from your community (e.g. familial, cultural, or religious)

[\(Ban Conversion Therapy, 2022\)](#) [\(Galop, 2022\)](#) [\(Stonewall, 2021\)](#) [\(Stonewall, 2020\)](#)



Conversion Therapy Factsheet

Support

If any of this sounds familiar for you or anyone you know, you're not alone. It doesn't matter if it happened a long time ago, if it's happening now, or if you're worried it might happen in the future - we can offer help and support.

Phone: **0800 130 3335**

Email: **CThelp@galop.org.uk**

You can call the helpline, or if you don't want to speak to someone on the phone, you can speak with one of our advisors through our online chat.

Conversations will last up to 40 minutes but that doesn't mean you can't get in touch again on another day.

Opening times:

Monday: 10am – 8:30pm
Tuesday: 10am – 8:30pm
Wednesday: 10am – 8:30pm
Thursday: 10am – 8:30pm
Friday: 10am – 4pm

If you're not ready to speak to a person yet, our chatbot can help you find more information. Available 24/7, 365 days a year: conversiontherapysupport.org.uk

If you're a professional who wants to learn more, there is [training for professionals available](#).