

Myths About Conversion Therapy

Dispelling the most common so-called 'conversion therapy' myths

So-called 'conversion therapy', sometimes known as conversion practices, can be difficult to identify when there are so many myths and stereotypes about what it is. Sometimes, these myths and stereotypes can affect a person's ability to see their experience as so-called 'conversion therapy', and can also limit a professional's ability to provide much needed support to a victim or survivor.

MYTH

So-called 'conversion therapy' works because gender identity and/or sexual or romantic orientation is a choice, or has a cause that can be 'cured'.



TRUTH

So-called 'conversion therapy' does not work. Our identity is a core part of who we are, and not something which 'happens' to us, or is the result of an external factor. We do not choose who we are and no person's sexual or romantic and/or gender identity needs to be 'cured'.



MYTH

So-called 'conversion therapy' is something that used to happen in the United Kingdom, and has very little relevance now.

TRUTH

So-called 'conversion therapy' is a **current** issue in the UK. Between April and September 2021, Galop's LGBT+ Young People's Advocacy Service recorded that 24% of current service users were currently experiencing, or had previously experienced, conversion practices. ([Galop, 2022](#)) ([Galop, 2022](#)) ([Gov UK, 2021](#)).

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MYTH

Victims of so-called 'conversion therapy' who don't seek help, don't need help.



TRUTH

So-called 'conversion therapy' in the UK has been happening for a long time, but support and information for victims and survivors has been limited. This makes it incredibly difficult for them to recognise their experience as so-called 'conversion therapy' and even harder to feel entitled and able to seek help. There are additional barriers related to identity which victims and survivors from marginalised groups face when seeking support after being subjected to abuse. ([Safe Lives, 2017](#)). ([Respect, 2019](#)). ([Galop, 2022](#)). ([Galop B, 2019](#)) However, it's important to remember that there is support available to victims and survivors. You don't have to go through this alone – we're here to help.



MYTH

So-called 'conversion therapy' only happens to young people.

TRUTH

Young people can and do experience attempts to convert their gender identity and/or sexual or romantic orientation, but people of any age can go through so-called 'conversion therapy'. This kind of abuse often happens when someone's identity is 'outed' or when they come out, and this can occur at any point in a person's life. ([Ban Conversion Therapy, 2022](#)). ([Galop A, 2022](#)). ([Stonewall, 2020](#)).

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MYTH

So-called 'conversion therapy' is only a problem in the USA, and mainly takes place in secret camps, or as one-off events or ceremonies.

TRUTH

American films and TV shows often depict so-called 'conversion therapy' as something which takes place in camps. While some people in the UK may be sent away to undergo so-called 'conversion therapy', there are many other, more common ways that attempts are made to 'convert' or 'cure' people in the UK.

So-called 'conversion therapy' is any behaviour with the pre-determined intention to change your sexual/romantic orientation or gender identity, and evidence shows conclusively that it happens in the UK today. (Galop A, 2022) (Ban Conversion Therapy, 2022) (Government Equalities Office, 2021) (Gov UK, 2021)



MYTH

You can't be part of a faith community and the LGBT+ community

TRUTH

You can be LGBT+ and be religious; these two parts of someone's identity can and do coexist for many people. Your sexual or romantic orientation and/or gender identity, should never determine your relationship with your faith, and your faith should never determine your sexual or romantic orientation and/or gender identity.

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MYTH

So-called 'conversion therapy' only happens to people who openly share their sexual or romantic orientation and/or gender identity publicly

TRUTH

So-called 'conversion therapy' can happen regardless of whether someone is open about their sexual or romantic orientation and/or gender identity - and in some cases can be based on wrong assumptions about someone's identity, whether openly expressed or not. In every instance of so-called 'conversion therapy', 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. Conversion therapy is an impossible task. It does not work. We can't choose who we are and we can't consent to abuse.

MYTH

Perpetrators of so-called 'conversion therapy' only come from specific groups.

TRUTH

Perpetrators of so-called 'conversion therapy' come from all racial and ethnic backgrounds, and all religions (including those with no religion) and it happens across the UK. (Galop A, 2022) (Gov UK, 2021) Sometimes so-called 'conversion therapy' is linked to religion, culture, values or belief of a specific community, but not always. Anyone who tries to change, cure, or punish a person's gender identity and/or sexual/romantic orientation is engaging in so-called 'conversion therapy'.



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MYTH

If someone wanted to avoid so-called 'conversion therapy', they could just leave.

TRUTH

The myth that people can easily leave an abusive situation blames victims and survivors for their experience of so-called 'conversion therapy' rather than recognising their need for support. Fleeing abuse is never as simple as walking out the door.

There are distinct barriers which can affect a victim's ability not just to leave, but to survive leaving. In some instances, a community can play such a big role in someone's life that it can be incredibly difficult to imagine leaving.

Many people also face financial barriers to leaving, for instance, if they have to rely on someone else for access to housing, education or funds in order to meet their daily needs. A further barrier exists for people under the age of 18, who cannot access Universal Credit, and may need the support of additional services to live outside the family home. (Government Equalities Office, 2021) (Home Office, 2022)

Some victims and survivors may feel responsible for what has happened/is happening to them because they were made to believe that so called 'conversion therapy' was/is their only option, or they were coerced into agreeing to it. This self-blame can make victims and survivors feel less entitled to safety and support, but it's not their fault, and they are never responsible for another person's abusive behaviours.



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MYTH

*You can consent to so-called
'conversion therapy'.*



TRUTH

Often, unequal power dynamics can limit someone's ability to consent freely. For example, the dynamics between parent and child, between faith leader and congregant, or between community leader and community member.

In these scenarios, a person might be relying on someone for housing, financial support, community connection, even access to faith. Research for the Government noted these power dynamics, stating that although some people underwent conversion therapy 'voluntarily', they feel these 'choices' were shaped by powerful influences in their social environment and under guidance from authority figures." (Government Equalities Office, 2021).

So-called 'conversion therapy' is abuse and it is not possible to consent to abuse that results in serious harm. (The Human Rights Act, 1998) (United Nations, 2020).

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

If any of the above myths sound familiar, you can reach
out to us for support, we're here to help.

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Getting support for victims, survivors, and the
people who know them

The myths listed in this resource can make it harder for victims and survivors of conversion therapy to identify what is happening, to come forward, and to get the support they need to live safely as themselves.

If you need support, Galop can help. We run a helpline and a live chat service. Conversations will last up to 40 minutes, but that doesn't mean you can't get in touch again on another day.

0800 130 3335

Opening times:

Monday, 10.00 – 20.30

Tuesday, 10.00 – 20.30

Wednesday, 10.00 – 20.30

Thursday, 10.00 – 20.30

Friday, 10.00 – 16.00

If you don't want to talk to someone on the phone, you can speak with one of our advisors during opening hours through our online chat, at:

conversiontherapysupport.org.uk

If you're not ready to speak to a person yet, our auto chatbot can help you to find more information - available 24/7, 365 days a year at

conversiontherapysupport.org.uk

If you'd prefer to email us, you can reach out via:

CThelp@galop.org.uk

