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Conversion Therapy

Conversion therapy, sometimes referred to as reparative therapy or sexual reorientation therapy, is an umbrella term for a wide array of approaches designed to change a person's sexual orientation to heterosexuality or their gender identity to match the sex that they were assigned at birth. Sometimes people offering conversion therapy are not licensed mental health professionals; they may be religious officials, self-taught advocates, or people who claim to have changed their own sexual orientation using conversion therapy techniques. In other cases, conversion therapists may be trained in psychology and mental health, offering conversion therapy alongside treatment for other psychological challenges such as depression or anxiety.

Conversion therapists use a range of approaches that can include conventional talk therapy, prayer, re-education, hypnosis, or aversion therapy. Aversion therapy is the most controversial approach because of its potential to turn dangerous. As recently as the 1970s, many conversion therapy programs used electroshock therapy or vomit-inducing chemical compounds when a person in treatment demonstrated an attraction to a member of the same sex. Milder aversive techniques include encouraging a person to snap a rubber band on his or her wrist when experiencing same-sex attractions. Many aversive techniques, particularly those deemed physically abusive, have largely fallen out of favor in the United States.

Today, many conversion therapists draw from conventional psychotherapeutic practices, employing principles of cognitive behavioral therapy, to help people change their thoughts. Many conversion therapy practitioners argue that early trauma, including sexual abuse, can change sexual orientation, and by addressing this trauma, they believe a person's sexual orientation can be changed or modified.

Most mental health professionals agree that ethical therapy encourages self-exploration, self-acceptance, and increased insight. According to most professional counseling organizations, the role of a good therapist is to help people eliminate unhealthy beliefs about themselves and others. Conversion therapy typically encourages people to change or conceal who they are, convincing them that their sexual orientation or gender expression is a source of shame and caused by psychological maladjustment. Every mainstream therapeutic body accepts that homosexuality is not a mental health issue, but conversion therapy treats it as such. Conversion therapy is especially problematic when parents force it upon their children. Forced conversion therapy may lead to anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and an overwhelming sense of profound rejection.

Conversion therapy remains highly controversial and has been disavowed by the following national professional organizations in their policy and position statements on conversion therapeutic practices:

- **American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry**
- **American Academy of Pediatrics**
- **American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy**
- **American College of Physicians**
- **American Counseling Association**
- **American Medical Association**
- **American Psychiatric Association**
- **American Psychoanalytic Association**
- **American Psychological Association**
- **American School Counselor Association**
- **American School Health Association**
- **National Association of Social Workers**
- **Pan American Health Organization: Regional Office of the World Health Organization**

For example, The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry finds *“no evidence to support the application of any therapeutic intervention operating under the premise that a specific sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression is pathological. Furthermore, based on the scientific evidence, the AACAP asserts that such “conversion therapies” (or other interventions imposed with the intent of promoting a particular sexual orientation and/or gender as a preferred outcome) lack scientific credibility and clinical utility. Additionally, there is evidence that such interventions are harmful. As a result, “conversion therapies” should not be part of any behavioral health treatment of children and adolescents.”*

Broward County Conversion Therapy Ban

In 2018, Broward County enacted Ordinance No. 2018-03 which amended Chapter 16 ½ (Human Rights) of the Broward County Code and banned the use of conversion therapy on minors by licensed mental health professionals. The controversial psychiatric counseling therapy’s goal is to change a child's sexual orientation or gender identity. Conversion therapy is typically used on children who are lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender or questioning their sexual identity.

The new ordinance prohibits a Florida licensed professional counselor, or a person who performs counseling as part of his or her professional training, from providing conversion therapy to a minor in Broward County. The ordinance is not intended to prohibit licensed mental health professionals from engaging in expressive speech or religious counseling with minors if they are acting in their pastoral or religious capacity as members of the clergy or religious counselors

The new law imposes a civil penalty of \$250 for the first violation and \$500 for each repeat violation.

The following articles/documents were used to prepare this document:

1. 'Policy and Position Statements of Conversion Therapy' HRC, Human Rights Campaign
2. 'Conversion Therapy February 2018' American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychology
3. 'Position Statement on Therapies Focused on Attempts to Change Sexual Orientation' The American Psychiatric Association Commission on Psychiatry by Psychotherapists
4. 'Conversion Therapy' Wikipedia
5. 'How Christians Turned Against Conversion Therapy' The Atlantic
6. 'The Lies and Dangers of Efforts to Change Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity' HRC Human Rights Campaign