

JUST AS THEY ARE

PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN FROM THE HARMS OF CONVERSION THERAPY

NCLR
NATIONAL CENTER FOR LESBIAN RIGHTS

HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUNDATION™

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Cisgender
Describes a person whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Gender dysphoria
Clinically significant distress caused when a person's sex assigned at birth is not aligned with their gender identity.

Gender Expression
External manifestation of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behaviors, mannerisms, dress, etc.

Gender Identity
One's innermost sense of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither. A person's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

Gender non-conforming (GNC)
Describes a person who does not subscribe to society's traditional expectations of gender expression or gender roles.

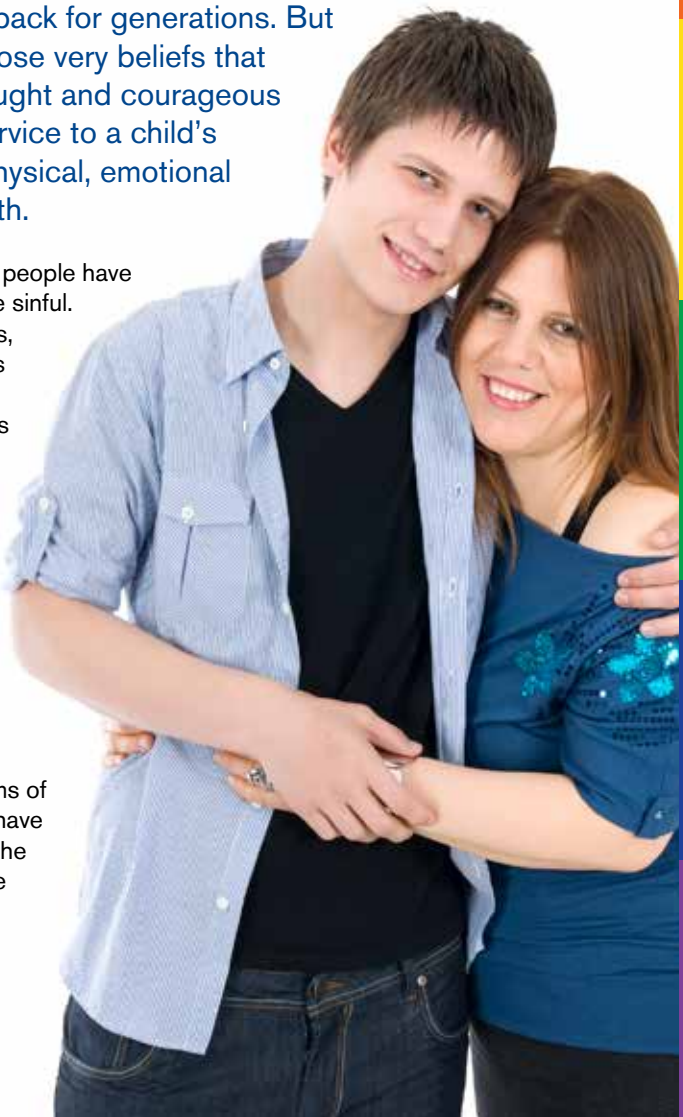
Queer
Often used interchangeably with "LGBTQ."

Sexual Orientation
An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people.

Transgender
Describes people whose gender identity and/or gender expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation.

INTRODUCTION

Parents who learn that their child is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ) embark on a journey that can be both extremely challenging and extremely rewarding. It's a journey fueled by the profound love of a parent for a child but potentially complicated by deep anxiety about that child's future and about questions of morality and religious belief. Families often struggle with closely held ideas that reach back for generations. But it's sometimes those very beliefs that require deep thought and courageous questioning in service to a child's happiness and physical, emotional and spiritual health.



For millennia, LGBTQ people have been told that they are sinful. It happens in churches, synagogues, mosques and temples around the world. (See HRC's *Coming Home* series for information and guidance.) This has prompted the idea that LGBTQ people can also be changed or "converted" to heterosexual or cisgender. (See Glossary of Terms.) In response, various forms of "conversion therapy" have been promoted, with the hope of altering a core component of a person's identity.

We have learned that such attempts simply don't work. Conversion therapy has been condemned as psychologically dangerous by virtually every major medical and mental health organization in the United States. A growing number of states and municipalities are passing laws and regulations to protect children against the practice by licensed mental health professionals.

Nevertheless, the practice continues to destroy lives. Often it exists under the radar and can even occur without the knowledge of parents. Sometimes it's the conscious choice of loving parents who think they're doing what is best for their child but who lack accurate information about its inefficacy and dangers. Often these well-meaning parents choose an option that is destructive to their child and to family relations because they trust practices that are misleadingly labeled as "therapy" or "treatment."

This resource will help parents recognize when and how conversion therapy is promoted, provides information about the dangers of the practice, and offers guidance to parents regarding practices that promote their child's health and well-being.



WHAT IS CONVERSION THERAPY?

Conversion therapy is any attempt to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

However, because the practice has come under increasing scrutiny, providers frequently change their terminology to avoid detection. Some of those terms can seem relatively harmless at first glance. Here are a few examples:

- sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE)
- sexual attraction fluidity exploration in therapy (SAFE-T)
- eliminating, reducing or decreasing frequency or intensity of unwanted same-sex attraction (SSA)
- reparative therapy
- sexual reorientation efforts
- ex-gay ministry
- promoting healthy sexuality
- addressing sexual addictions and disorders
- sexuality counseling
- encouraging relational and sexual wholeness
- healing sexual brokenness

Proponents of conversion therapy often intentionally conflate the attempted altering of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression with the treatment of an actual condition such as sexual addiction. Some claim they are helping clients explore their "sexual fluidity," or they emphasize that their clients struggle with "unwanted same-sex attractions" or "gender confusion."



WHAT HAPPENS DURING CONVERSION THERAPY?

Historically, conversion therapists have resorted to extreme measures including institutionalization, castration and electroconvulsive shock therapy. Other techniques therapists have used include:

- Pairing homoerotic images with nausea, vomiting, paralysis, electric shocks, rubber band snaps and other forms of punishment;
- Using shame to create aversion to feelings of attraction to persons of the same sex; and
- Controlling masturbation in a clinical setting with the purpose of changing the cause of sexual arousal.

Today, while some counselors still use physical aversive conditioning and sometimes prescribe psychotropic medications, the practices most commonly used involve "talk therapy" and may include:

- Training to conform to stereotypical gender norms;
- Teaching heterosexual dating skills; and
- Using hypnosis to try to redirect desires.

While these contemporary versions of conversion therapy are less shocking and extreme than some more often used in the past, they are equally devoid of scientific validity and pose serious dangers to patients.

Brandan Robertson, theologian, author and pastor, shared his own experience with conversion therapy when he testified before Colorado's General Assembly in support of a bill that would protect minors from conversion therapy by state-licensed mental health professionals in that state.[1]

"Every week for my entire senior year, I met with this professor who had studied the pseudo-psychology of conversion therapists," Robertson remembered of his time at Chicago's Moody Bible Institute. "I would come to my professor's office and be asked to confess my 'sinful' attractions, looking deep into my past to find the periods of abuse that made me gay, and using holy water, crucifixes and intense prayer,

1. Robertson, Brandan, "The Harm Of Conversion Therapy: My Testimony On Colorado House Bill 17-1156," *HuffPost*, March 2017.

we asked God to heal those wounds and to help me overcome these dangerous same-sex attractions."

It was the perspective offered by friends outside that experience that made the difference for Brandan. "Being 20 years old at the time, I was able to find a supportive community in Chicago that helped me realize that what I was experiencing in these sessions was not only scientifically unfounded but psychologically harmful," Brandan told the Colorado legislators. "I was able to maintain some degree of health and eventually come out as an openly LGBT+ evangelical."

As in Brandan's case, conversion therapy is often found outside the therapist's office. It can be practiced in pastoral counseling, in religious youth camps, in addiction treatment facilities, and in prayer and support groups. In extreme cases, it takes the form of "deliverances" or "exorcisms."

Conversion therapy can also be promoted through self-help books and websites. These might suggest that a person pray to God to become heterosexual or declare that piety will be rewarded with a change in sexual orientation or gender identity.

Regardless of how conversion therapy is practiced, it is ineffective. It is also deeply harmful, victimizing the individual who has been convinced that a core part of their being is unacceptable to God and to the community.



DOES CONVERSION THERAPY WORK?

DOES CONVERSION THERAPY WORK?

No. There is no credible evidence that conversion therapy can change a person's sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

At the foundation of conversion therapy theory is the false idea that being LGBTQ is a mental illness that needs to be cured – an idea which has been rejected by every major medical and mental health group for decades. Also underpinning these dangerous practices is the mistaken belief that sexual orientation and gender identity are not inherent elements of a person's identity and are, thus, alterable. These misguided understandings of a person's unchanging core identity has caused unfathomable harm.

In some faith traditions, LGBTQ people are characterized as rebelling against God. They are described as mentally ill or the victims of demonic possession. Their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression have been declared the result of an unhealthy relationship with one or both parents or the consequence of abuse. All of these characterizations suggest that LGBTQ identity requires "fixing," but none of them stand up to scientific scrutiny.





DANGEROUS AND INEFFECTIVE

Conversion therapy has been rejected by virtually every major medical and mental health organization in the United States, including:

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

American Academy of Pediatrics

American Association of School Administrators

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

American College of Physicians

American Counseling Association

American Federation of Teachers

American Medical Association

American Osteopathic Association

American Psychiatric Association

American Psychoanalytic Association

American Psychological Association

American School Counselor Association

American School Health Association

Interfaith Alliance Foundation

National Association of School Psychologists

National Association of Secondary School Principals

National Association of Social Workers

National Education Association

Pan American Health Organization (PAHO): Regional Office of the World Health Organization

School Social Work Association of America

Sources: Human Rights Campaign, "Policy and Position Statements on Conversion Therapy." Just the Facts Coalition, "Just the Facts About Sexual Orientation and Youth: A Primer for Principals, Educators, and School Personnel," 2008.

A HISTORY OF HARM

Despite the claims of its proponents and regardless of what form it takes, conversion therapy has never produced scientifically validated changes in sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. It does not eliminate or reduce attractions to persons of the same gender.

Yet, survivors of conversion therapy are often told that their failure to change is due to their own insufficient desire or effort, which creates additional layers of shame and inadequacy and, often, profound depression. Some turn to substances in response. Many report spiritual "numbness," or loss of faith when their prayers do not result in a change of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Often there is deterioration in family relationships, as conversion therapy participants are taught to blame their parents or are encouraged to believe in non-existent sexual abuse scenarios. Alienation also results when parents or siblings reject an LGBTQ family member because of their inability to change. On the other hand, research has found that family *acceptance* of LGBTQ youth helps promote well-being and aids in protecting against depression, suicidality and use of illegal drugs.

THE HARMS OF CONVERSION THERAPY

The American Psychological Association – along with virtually every major mental health organization – has spoken out against conversion therapy, citing studies that list potential consequences to survivors including:

- Decreased self-esteem and authenticity to others
- Increased self-hatred and negative perceptions of homosexuality
- Confusion, depression, guilt, helplessness, hopelessness, shame, social withdrawal and suicidality
- Anger at and a sense of betrayal by conversion therapy providers
- An increase in substance abuse and high-risk sexual behaviors
- A feeling of being dehumanized and untrue to self
- A loss of faith
- A sense of having wasted time and resources
- Self-blame, including feelings of weakness and lack of effort, commitment, faith or worthiness in God's eyes
- Intrusive images and sexual dysfunction

Source: American Psychological Association, "Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation," 2009.

MEANING WELL BUT CAUSING PAIN

Often parents are acting from a place of love and concern when they subject their child to conversion therapy. Their well-meaning efforts might be based in a lack of accurate information about the nature of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. They might be grounded in the particular understanding of scripture or tradition that their religious community promotes and has chosen to live by.

LGBTQ youth who are fortunate enough to be in a position of sufficient independence and self-confidence may muster the strength to reject their parents' desire that they engage in conversion therapy. Some will find allies elsewhere in their own family or among close friends. Most, though, will see the unfortunate outcome of being subjected to these dangerous practices and the negative consequences they bring.

CONVERSION THERAPY AS A FORM OF FAMILY REJECTION

Despite parents' good intentions, LGBTQ youth whose parents attempt to change their sexual orientation or gender identity often experience conversion therapy as a form of familial rejection, which may put them at risk for negative health and mental health outcomes.

LGBTQ young people who experience high levels of family rejection – including sending youth to undergo conversion therapy – are:

8.4x MORE LIKELY TO REPORT HAVING ATTEMPTED SUICIDE

5.9x MORE LIKELY TO REPORT HIGH LEVELS OF DEPRESSION

3.4x MORE LIKELY TO USE ILLEGAL DRUGS

3.4x MORE LIKELY TO ENGAGE IN UNSAFE SEX



Source: Ryan, C. et al. (2009). *Pediatrics,* vol. 123, no. 1, pp. 346-352; see also, Ryan, C. (2009). *Supportive families, healthy children: Helping families with lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender children.* San Francisco State University, http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/publications

HOPE IN CHANGING TIMES

Happily, a growing number of states and municipalities prohibit the practice of conversion therapy with children under the age of 18 by licensed mental health professionals. At the time of publication, minors are protected from the practice of conversion therapy by licensed mental health professionals in California, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island and Vermont. Federal courts have rejected challenges to protections in California, New Jersey and Illinois.

In 2013, Exodus International, then the world's largest conversion therapy provider, disbanded and its president issued a formal apology to members of the LGBTQ community and their families. In 2015, former clients of conversion therapy provider JONAH (Jews Offering New Alternatives for Healing) won their suit for fraud in New Jersey state court. In 2016, HRC, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, and the Southern Poverty Law Center filed a consumer fraud complaint with the Federal Trade Commission against People Can Change (now known as Brother's Road), a prominent conversion therapy provider.

THE DANGERS PERSIST

Even if all formal conversion therapy programs were effectively banned, the threat would unfortunately remain. Today, most conversion therapy practices fly under the radar. They take the form of destructive advice from religious leaders or teachers offering "pastoral care." They're found in religious rituals, such as blessings, exorcisms or "deliverances." Small group ministries and discussion groups often promote the need to change one's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Survivors of such abuses often report being coerced or manipulated into participating in conversion therapy. Others sought it out because they had internalized the condemning attitudes of their religious communities or of secular society. Most of them believed that they had to change who they are in order to be loved by God. And all of them experienced psychological and spiritual trauma as a result.



HOW DO YOU SPOT IT?

As knowledge and understanding increase, many religious leaders are beginning to reevaluate their views of the LGBTQ population. Denominations across many faith traditions now have "open and affirming" or "reconciling" movements that welcome LGBTQ people into full fellowship. (See HRC's Faith Positions.)

However, it's important for LGBTQ individuals and the parents of LGBTQ youth to be on the lookout for teachings and language that is harmful. It's a good idea to meet with the leader of a faith community before getting involved and to ask questions about the community's stance on LGBTQ issues.

RED FLAGS RISING

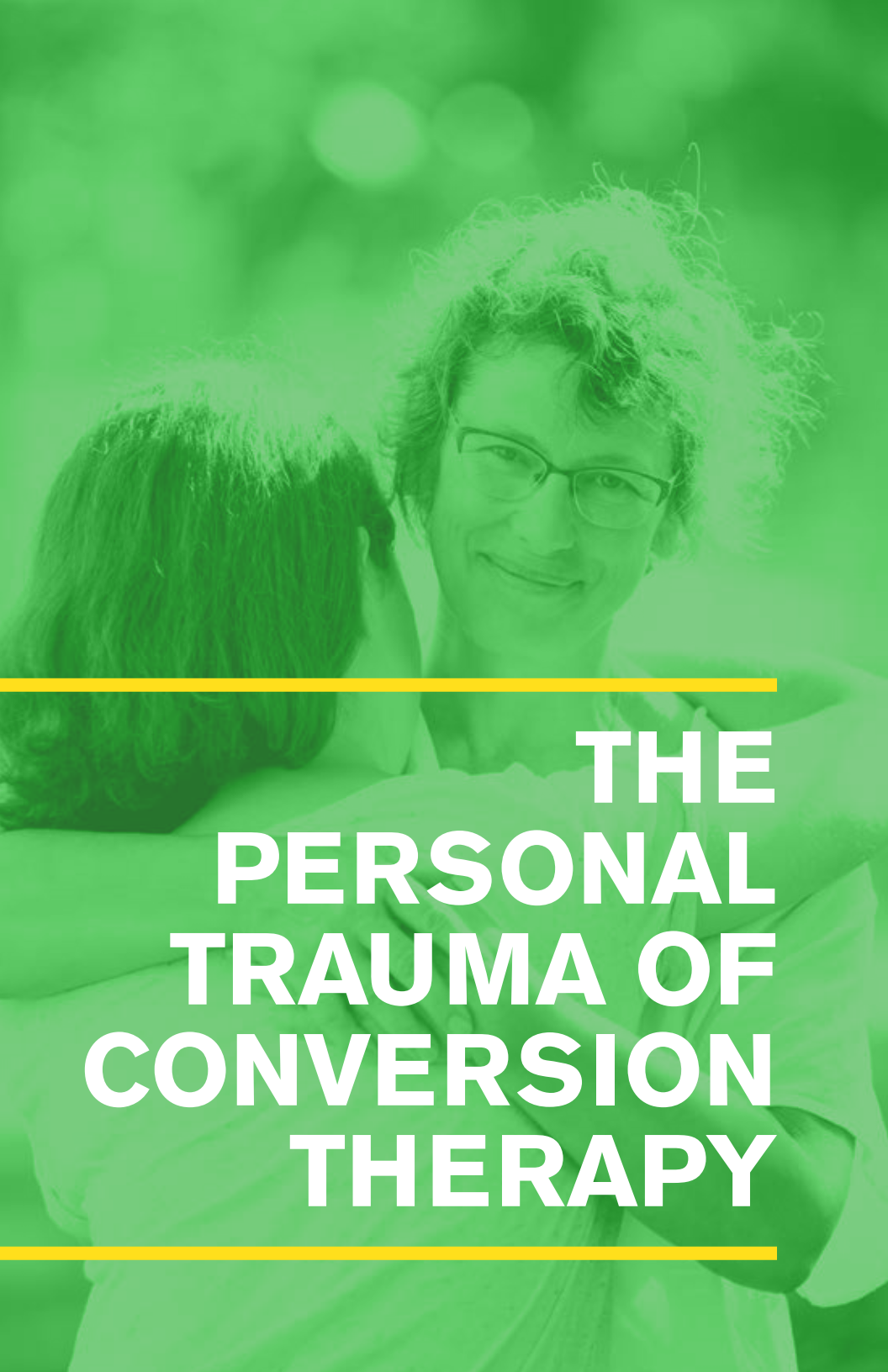
There are clear warning signs that a religious community promotes conversion therapy or relies on its theories. These include:

- Rejection of identifiers like "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual" or "transgender" in favor of phrases like "same-sex attraction" or "same-gender attraction"
- Insistence that LGBTQ people not "label themselves" or that acceptance of an LGBTQ identity represents "a distorted view of self"
- Use of phrases such as "struggling with homosexual feelings" or "struggling with same-sex attraction"
- A view of homosexuality as a "habit" or an "addiction"
- Explicit or implicit statements that LGBTQ people need to "align their behavior" with their religious values
- Language about "freedom from homosexuality"
- Language about "sexual and relational wholeness" or about being "broken by sexual and relational sin"
- Presence of brochures published by proponents of conversion therapy, like the Family Research Council or Focus on the Family
- Referrals to conversion therapists, conversion camps or retreats, or support groups providing conversion therapy
- On site "ex-gay ministry," in the form of "support groups" or other gatherings led by clergy or laity

Church leaders, counselors or religious educators may offer referrals to faith-based youth camps that employ conversion therapy practices. Parents should study camp materials carefully, looking for the red flags listed above.

LGBTQ youth at these camps are often taught that they are an "abomination" to their family, friends, society and God. They're told that if they try hard enough they can become "normal" people. They are purposefully not told that LGBTQ people across the country enjoy full and happy lives and that many LGBTQ people experience a deep engagement with their faith community.





THE PERSONAL TRAUMA OF CONVERSION THERAPY

While each survivor of conversion therapy has a unique story to tell, there are some common practices employed in attempts to change a core element of a person's identity. The stories below illustrate how a counselor, mentor or pastor working from the false premises of conversion therapy might 1) reject the client's expression of their own emotions or experiences, 2) isolate the client from information that challenges an anti-LGBTQ stance, and 3) ignore the client's right to privacy, employing public shaming as a tool of "therapy."

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE DENIED

From his earliest memories, Mordechai felt that he was different from other boys but found that self-knowledge undermined by a therapist who convinced him he was "delusional," and who named those feelings invalid and untrue. It took years of internal struggle for Mordechai to regain his confidence and his belief in himself.

The first son of a Jewish Orthodox family, Mordechai grew up with a father who was studying to be a rabbi and a mother who was a rabbi's daughter. ***"I came out of the womb not what they thought,"*** he remembers. ***"From the age of two or three I was already very flamboyantly gender non-conforming."***

At Orthodox gatherings Mordechai insisted on sitting on the women's side. He asked for Barbie dolls for his fourth birthday and threw the boyish gifts he received in the garbage. At the age of five, his parents took him to a psychiatrist who encouraged them to compromise when it came to toys but also chipped away at Mordechai's confidence.

Mordecai did well in school and bonded with his father through a common interest in religious study. As he neared puberty, he became aware of his attraction to men and engaged in his first same-sex sexual experimentation at a summer camp. When he confessed to a camp counselor, he was sent to the rabbi and kicked out of the camp. ***"It was very traumatic for me and my parents,"*** *he says.* ***"I was 11 and I felt like I was being treated as some sort of criminal."***

By the time he entered high school Mordechai had become anorexic. ***"My parents also completely disconnected,"*** he says. ***"They stopped going to parent teacher meetings. They didn't want to hear the same message again. 'Your child is smart but different.'"***

He was placed in conversion therapy briefly and returned to it in college, when he began to suffer from depression. ***"I wanted to get married and have children,"*** Mordechai recalls. ***"It becomes a much more self-motivated thing, like 'I've got to get rid of this!'"***

Mordechai began to take sexuality classes and devoured everything in the literature on sexual orientation. At twenty, he finally realized that his sexual orientation would never change. ***"I couldn't find any expert or person offering the kind of conversion therapy that made sense,"*** he says. ***"It dawned on me that I should probably just surrender myself, that I can't do anything about it, that I'm just gay."***



Mordechai turned his energies to creating more supportive resources for LGBTQ individuals in the Jewish Orthodox world, founding Jewish Queer Youth (JQY). ***"It wasn't till JQY that I started to hear the horror stories of other kids,"*** *he says.* ***"I was spared the terrible trauma of some conversion therapy stories. Kids would be kicked out of school, be forced to look at AIDS patients and verses in the Bible."***

He played a role in shutting down JONAH, a Jewish conversion therapy organization that was forced to close in 2015. And he looks to the future with optimism. ***"It's nice to see the mainstreaming of gender non-conforming and transgender identity,"*** *he says.* ***"If I had had that opportunity when I was young, it would have been a different journey."***

ISOLATION FROM ACCURATE INFORMATION

Often the person subjected to conversion therapy has restricted access to accurate information and knows only what is taught by their immediate community. As Lynse became more involved at her church, she was advised not to attend college so she wouldn't be exposed to secular people and their ideas.

When her family moved to Colorado Springs, Lynse, a high school student, joined Ted Haggard's New Life Church. Active in the political right, Haggard frequently preached about "family values" and about marriage being exclusively heterosexual.

Lynse remembers, ***"I knew homosexuality was wrong and if I wanted to be godly I would make efforts to change that about myself."*** She joined a mentorship program, got involved in youth leadership, and sought change through prayer, scripture study and aversive techniques like flicking her wrist with a rubber band every time she felt attractions to women. ***"I was asked not to look at scenes of kissing at the movies,"*** Lynse says. ***'" Don't look at it,' they kept saying. 'Why would you be interested in being entertained by something that would grieve God?'"***

After graduation, Lynse hoped to study to become a therapist but church leaders advised her to enroll in an internship program at a partner church in Birmingham, Alabama. "They said, ***'We don't think you're strong enough to go to college. We recommend this first before you go to college, because your faith is not strong enough to handle secular people.'"*** The new environment was highly structured and controlled, including the monitoring of Lynse's web browsing. She was very open with her church leaders and quick to share her struggles. ***"Confessing takes the burden off you but it adds a boatload of shame,"*** she says now.

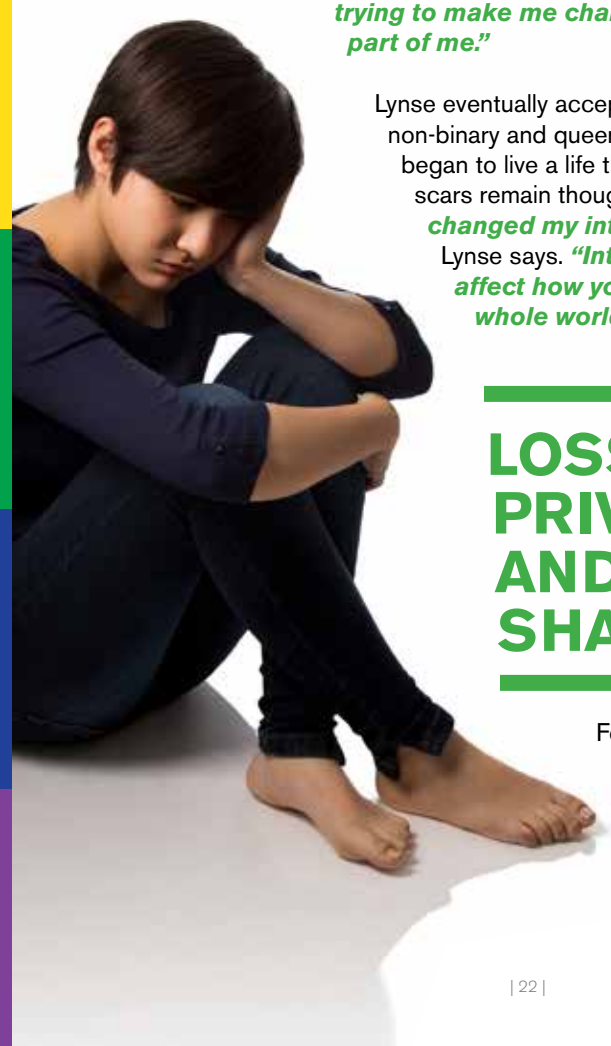


She also enrolled in a "deliverance ministry" called Cleansing Streams. ***"It covers all the areas of deliverance from alcoholism to abuse"*** Lynse explains. ***"I was put through the homosexuality program 3 or 4 times."*** Around the same time, Ted Haggard was involved in a gay sex scandal and Lynse's own father came out to her as gay, provoking her to question what she had been taught to believe. Church leaders allowed

her to see a therapist on condition that she sign waivers allowing that therapist to report everything to the church.

Engaged to be married, Lynse sensed that something was fundamentally wrong with the situation but her mentors insisted she move forward and that "the sex stuff will just work itself out." The wedding night was emotionally devastating and Lynse knew she had made a mistake. Nevertheless, she tried to make it work and eventually had two children.

After she and her family moved to Portland, Oregon, Lynse had enough distance from the church to reevaluate her choices. ***"I went back to therapy, this time with a non-Christian therapist who self-identified as queer,"*** she explains. ***"She was very much open to whichever decision I made, not leaning me one way. I finally got help that was affirmative, that wasn't trying to make me change or push aside this part of me."***



Lynse eventually accepted that she was gender non-binary and queer. She got a divorce and began to live a life that felt more authentic. The scars remain though. ***"It has completely changed my interaction with everyone,"*** Lynse says. ***"Internalized shame can affect how you interact with the whole world."***

LOSS OF PRIVACY AND PUBLIC SHAMING

For LGBTQ youth – and their parents – the practice of conversion therapy may involve a large number of people having access

to closely held personal information – information that may be used to shame both the youth and their family. Melissa was publicly shamed and then sexually assaulted by two members of her congregation after her bishop leaked information about her sexual orientation.

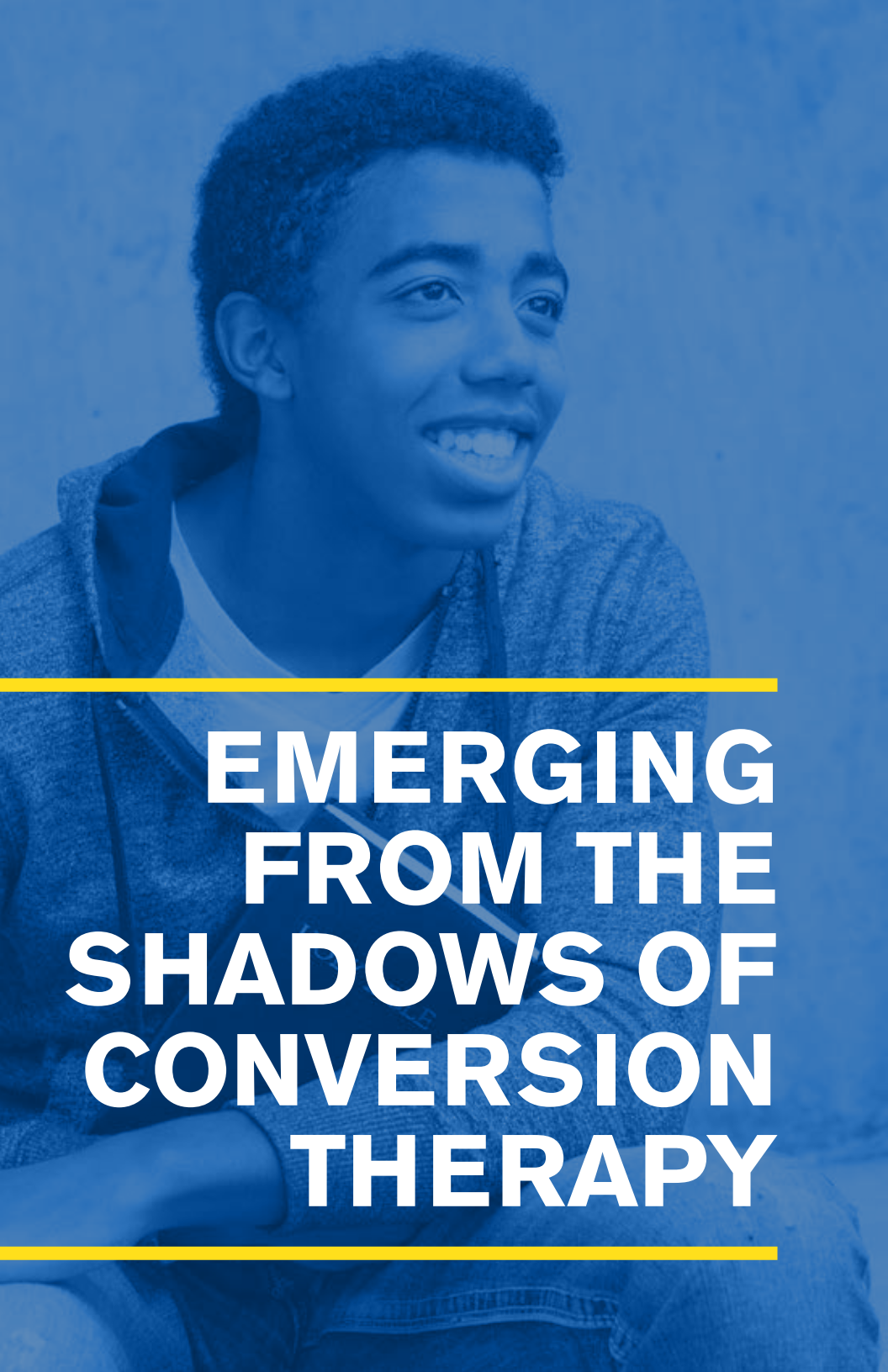
With a religious background that included Jewish, Catholic and Muslim practices, Melissa converted to Mormonism at 14 because she found its teachings about the afterlife especially appealing. When she posed for a photo at a church dance with a girl she had a secret crush on, she was scolded by church leaders because the picture "looked like a couple photo." A few months later, she was sexually assaulted by two young men who "wanted to make her straight."

Soon after Melissa confided her concerns about her sexuality to her bishop, she found that an increasing number of people knew that she was a lesbian, possibly through the gossiping of the bishop's wife. The bishop, himself, asked her to fast and pray that the Lord would "take this affliction from her." Later, the leader of her mission to Argentina promised that if she were faithful enough, she would no longer be a lesbian. ***"He told me I would be able to marry a man in the temple and live a righteous life,"*** she remembers.

Upon return from her mission and struggling with depression because of her unsuccessful attempts to change, Melissa was referred to Mormon Family Services, where counselors promised they would help her "redirect her thinking." She didn't realize that the intake papers she signed allowed her therapists to report everything to her bishop, who then leaked personal information to members of her congregation.

When Melissa refused medication meant to control her "impulse problems," she was dismissed from the program for being uncooperative. Her bishop entreated her to try again. ***"He told me there were children waiting to be born to me on the other side,"*** she says. When she refused to return to Mormon Family Services, the bishop declared that she had "chosen not to follow the Lord."

Deeply depressed and sometimes suicidal, Melissa gradually learned of the many other Mormons struggling to reconcile their sexuality with their faith. Eventually she found her way to Affirmation: LGBT Mormons, Families & Friends, which helped her experience a sense of belonging. Her commitment to the Mormon church continues today, but she has stopped trying to change this core element of her being and is focusing on self-acceptance and service to the LGBTQ Mormon community.



EMERGING FROM THE SHADOWS OF CONVERSION THERAPY

Recovery from the trauma of conversion therapy can be a long and difficult process. Each person responds in their own way, drawing on their unique resources. The stories below illustrate how survivors might 1) emerge from their traumatic experiences to take a leadership role that helps others in the same struggle; 2) build a supportive community by reaching out to extended family; 3) embark on a period of introspection and discernment regarding their personal faith journey; and 4) explore new opportunities in communities of faith that are affirming of LGBTQ people.

COMING TO A LEADERSHIP ROLE

Darren was told to quit college and give up his photography business in order to "cure" his homosexuality. He spent years living in a church basement, not allowed to leave without permission from his pastor. Nevertheless, he emerged from those traumatic experiences to live a full life and now serves on the board of The Reformation Project, an LGBTQ-affirming evangelical organization.

Raised Catholic, Darren always struggled with a sense of being different. ***"What I was being taught about bodies and puberty just didn't seem to apply to me,"*** he remembers. ***"I wanted to be normal just like everyone else."***

In his teens, he began attending a charismatic, nondenominational church. When an acquaintance threatened to out him after seeing pictures on his computer, Darren responded by coming out. ***"I'm Black, I'm Christian, I'm gay, get used to it,"*** he told people. Friends and church leaders responded with equal strength, telling him that the Bible names homosexuality an abomination.

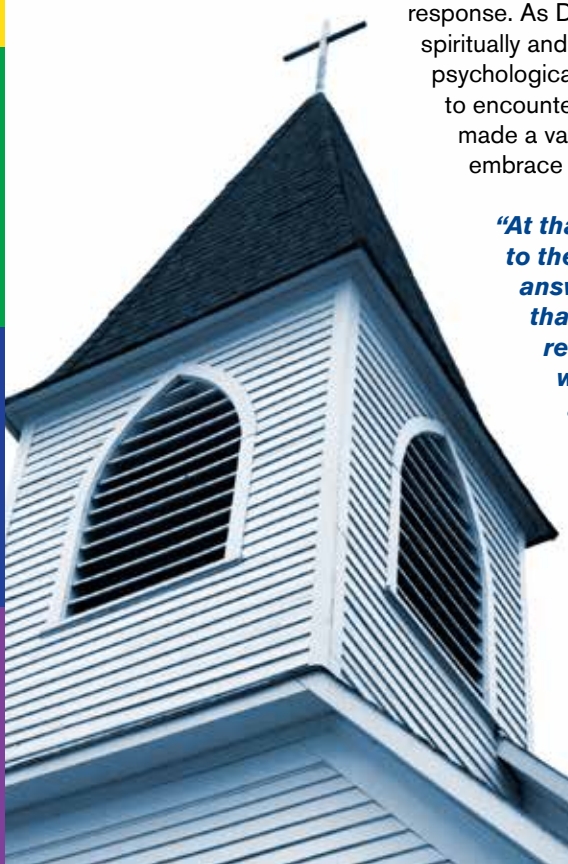
The soul-searching that followed in Darren's college years took place among his conservative Christian friends. He explains, ***"I had a born-again, I'm-not-gay-anymore kind of conversion experience."*** Eventually he became an ordained minister, but received some harsh advice on his first day.

"The pastor of my church pulled me aside and said I should never talk about my homosexuality," he remembers. ***"I should forget that it ever happened, and I should be ashamed that I ever made that a part of my life. And that started a real cycle of shame that led to compulsive behavior. And in my church, addiction and demonic oppression were one and the same."***

After being robbed at gunpoint after a casual sexual encounter, Darren confessed his sexual behavior to a pastor, who advised an extreme regimen of isolation and religious discipline. The pastor told him to quit school and give up his photography business. Darren lived in the church basement, unable to do anything without the pastor's approval. He was fasting, losing so much weight that his family became worried.

But he never experienced a change in his sexual orientation and finally recognized he was in an unhealthy situation. He explains, ***"God impressed on me that my Christian belief was true but that everything happening to me was wrong."***

Darren joined a church that accepted his sexual orientation but that insisted on celibacy as the appropriate response. As Darren continued to grow spiritually and heal from the years of psychological and spiritual abuse, he began to encounter LGBTQ Christians who had made a variety of choices, including to embrace same-sex relationships.



"At that point I stopped looking to the church to give me a single answer," he says. ***"I realized that it was coming down to my relationship with God and what I felt I could be most accountable to at the end of time."***

Darren chose to approach life with a greater sense of grace and opened himself to the possibility of a relationship with a man. ***"When I was in those anti-gay churches, my worship was about how***

unworthy I was and how terrible I was and how bad a person I was," he remembers. ***"It was so focused on me as bad and God as good and how separate and opposite we were. In a church where I was more loved and accepted and had more grace, I finally felt like I could come to God and be seen. Now I could actually bring all of me."***

Darren offers a powerful reminder to parents, siblings and friends. ***"If you get it wrong with an LGBTQ young person, this can be life and death,"*** he warns. ***"We can already see that this can cause suicide; that there's higher violence toward LGBTQ people; most of the homeless population are LGBTQ youth. It is so difficult to believe that we are loved as we are. When you have so many people that you trust but that actively condemn, the impact of that is huge. I spent eight years constantly asking the question, 'Are you with me?' It took eight years of asking that question to undo eight years of being told I was worthless."***

FINDING ALLIES IN EXTENDED FAMILY

Latinx and transgender, Malachi experienced rejection from their family and suffered from the conversion therapy practices of their church. (Note: Malachi uses "they/them" pronouns to reflect their gender expression.) They found a champion in an older generation – their own grandmother – and the lesbians in their neighborhood. It was they who helped Malachi recover a sense of self-worth.

Born into a devout Pentecostal family, Malachi was immersed in the faith. Their father was a children's minister and held weekly church meetings in their home. In junior high, Malachi became aware that their gender expression (masculine) did not align with their sex assigned at birth (female) and faced ridicule and rejection from classmates.

At church, Malachi was exposed to extreme anti-LGBTQ rhetoric, the belief that LGBTQ people would go to hell and the equating of homosexuality with AIDS. They remember a church Halloween party in particular. ***"There was a kind of morality play that portrayed different individuals who died in a variety of ways, such as a construction worker who fell off a beam,"*** they remember. ***"After***

they died, they would get carried away by demons or angels, depending on what kind of life they had lived. I remember a portrayal of a man who died of HIV/AIDS, and he was gay, and when he died, the demons came for him. I remember him screaming and being dragged away."

In the ninth grade, Malachi's mother said that Jesus told her in prayer that Malachi was a lesbian and possessed by demons. Malachi had one session of individual conversion therapy and one session with a family therapist. ***"During those two sessions I was very suicidal, pretty immediately,"*** Malachi says. ***"That wasn't a situation I wanted to sit in very long."***

Malachi's response was a strong one. They came out at school, organized a Gay Straight Alliance, and began to stand up to students who tried to ridicule and bully them. Meanwhile, Malachi's parents began to host PFOX (Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays) meetings at their home and attended meetings of conversion therapy provider Exodus International.

Malachi got support from an elder lesbian in their neighborhood, who allowed Malachi and their friends to use her home as a hangout and as a place to stage poetry readings, make pottery, and play music together. ***"That LGBTQ community lesson around caring for each other across generations has stuck with me to this day,"*** Malachi says.

Malachi turned to other religious traditions, such as the Unitarian Universalist church, for spiritual exploration and support, including theological support that allowed for healthy debates with their father about how homosexuality is presented in the Bible. But the schism between Malachi and their parents continued.



"Homosexuality took over the whole framework of my relationship with my parents," Malachi says. ***"There was no more parenting. No more looking at a report card or calling a teacher or figuring out a bank account or teaching me how to become a functioning adult. All of that stopped and it became about conversion and religion and gayness and damnation versus salvation."***

Malachi finally went to live with their grandmother, who offered unconditional love and support. Malachi remembers her saying, ***"The Virgin Mary made you and loves you and I love you. The Virgin does not make mistakes."***

"That was radical," Malachi explains. ***"It was in the name of religion that I was being ostracized and seen as demonic. But it was also in the name of religion that I was seen as holy and worthy of love."***

Over time, their parents began to come around. ***"My parents saw how the majority of parents in PFOX and Exodus lost contact with their kids and that scared them. They moved from you are possessed by demons, to love the sinner hate the sin, to full support."***

That support grew to the point of walking Malachi down the aisle. ***'I was healthy enough not to just take care of myself but also love my parents from a healthy distance and support them on their journey all the way to walking me down the aisle at my gay wedding,"*** Malachi says. ***"This is a story about staying in. A story about a 20 year journey of finding a way back home but more importantly of being brought back into love."***



ALLOWING TIME FOR GROWTH AND CHANGE

A person in the process of discovering, acknowledging and accepting that they are LGBTQ needs time – and so do their parents. Often both parties are confronting deeply held understandings of scripture and tradition and of the expectations of society. Love for self and for others can be a lifelong journey. For Jason and Roger, moving past the traumatic experience of conversion therapy included a long and careful look at the scriptures they had been taught were condemning of LGBTQ people.

As a child, Jason was traumatized by an exorcism that was intended to rid him of "the demon of homosexuality." As a young man, his personal study of the Bible convinced him that God loved him just as he was.

A born-again Pentecostal Christian from a large family, Jason grew up in a church where homosexuality was considered the product of demonic possession. When he was twelve, his uncle, a Pentecostal minister, tried exorcising that purported demon. Looking back, Jason believes that his uncle was motivated by compassion as he stood over him with a Bible and "yelled for the demon of perversion to leave me and go back to hell."

"Part of me was actually excited, because I thought I was going to be 'healthy and normal'." he says. By his early twenties Jason had started writing a scripture-based book to try to prove that a person could successfully change their sexual orientation.

He immersed himself in scripture only to emerge with the realization that his assumptions about the Bible being vehemently anti-LGBTQ were entirely unfounded. ***"I meant to write a book to help people come out of being gay,"*** he says. ***"But by the time I ended it was about God being completely fine with who you are!"***

"I'm still 100% a believing Pentecostal," Jason says. ***"It breaks my heart when so much of the gay community distances themselves from the church or God. I'm so thrilled that many churches are becoming welcoming and affirming."*** He looks to the future with hope. ***"I'm a gay Christian, so I'm a niche within a niche,"*** he says. ***"But I think that narrow path is gradually widening."***

READING SCRIPTURE

Holy Scripture – across traditions – has often been interpreted as anti-LGBTQ. A careful study of sacred texts, however, offers a different story. For responsible, theologically sound explorations of the Bible, check out Jay Michaelson's *God vs. Gay? The Religious Case for Equality* and Matthew Vine's *God and the Gay Christian*. For a similar exploration of the Qur'an, there's Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle's *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflection on Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims* and *Living Out Islam: Voices of Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims.*

The therapist assigned to Roger by the Mormon church told him that his homosexuality was caused by something that must have happened to him in puberty and could be fixed. He believed it.

Roger's awareness of feeling different from others began early and grew throughout his high school years. His peers began to assume he was gay because of his gender-nonconformity. He angrily denied it when his father confronted him at 14 and began channeling his energies into scholarly and extracurricular pursuits.

His church's teachings on homosexuality were made clear, especially in material presented in its youth programs. Growing up in a Latinx Mormon congregation also had its unique challenges. Roger recalls, ***"There was a lot of machismo. You're told to 'man up.' My dad scolded me for being effeminate. My bishop told me to control my mannerisms, to try not to talk with my hands. I learned that I had to be careful how I walked and how I talked."***

Roger confessed his feelings of same-sex attraction to his bishop, who advised against telling his parents and placed him with a therapist who convinced him that something had happened to him in puberty that caused him to confuse wanting to "be one of the boys" with being attracted to other boys.

When his church put its weight behind California's Proposition 8, which would successfully – and temporarily – reverse marriage equality in the state, Roger joined his parents and volunteered for the cause. ***"I was telling myself, 'This is what God wants,'"*** he remembers. ***"This is what we need to do. I can't give in to my carnal wants."***

With his feelings of attraction to other men still strong, Roger met with another therapist from Mormon Family Services, but this one confessed that his work as a church employee was "out of harmony" with his moral obligation to tell Roger that there was nothing wrong with him. Roger rejected this invitation to healing and enrolled at Brigham Young University (BYU), a Mormon institution.

"I was going to find a wife, get married, everything was going to work out," he says. ***"I felt led to BYU, and I thought God was leading me there to save me, to give me my spouse. But he was leading me there because that was where I was going to find my voice."***

At BYU, Roger connected with other LGBTQ students through student organizations and, later, Affirmation. ***"I connected with other gay Mormons,"*** he explains. ***"I finally accepted myself. I was led to BYU but not for the reasons I thought I was being led there,"*** he says.

The future is bright, but the challenges continue. ***"My mom said she wished she had known,"*** he says. ***"She was upset that the bishop told me not to tell them."*** His father continues to struggle with the mistaken notion that he failed his son at an early age, when he feels change might have been possible.

"For our parents to come into acceptance they have to mourn the son or the daughter they thought they had," Roger points out. ***"They have to mourn that loss before they can come to accept it. I think for my dad, he's still in that mourning."***

RETURNING HOME OR FINDING A NEW ONE

Many of the individuals whose stories are told here eventually found support and friendship in religious communities that welcome and affirm LGBTQ individuals without requiring them to attempt to change or suppress their sexual orientation or gender identity, to enter into a different-sex relationship or marriage, or to choose celibacy because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Others remained within their original faith communities, working to enact change and to model the kind of inclusive love that is taught across faith traditions.

Once a devout Muslim, Omar lost faith in God, in Islam, and in religion generally after years of attempting to change his sexual orientation. Gradually, though, he began to pray again, and to explore his Muslim faith from a new perspective.

Born to Pakistani immigrants, Omar was raised by moderately religious Sunni Muslims who taught their children the principles of Islam and upheld its basic moral views. He became more religiously observant while a freshman in college, joining a group that considered "homosexual acts" haram, or condemned by God. Omar was told that celibacy was the only

appropriate path for him, and that "the greatest reward in paradise" meant abstaining from "homosexual behavior."

When he developed a crush on a fellow student, Omar began conversion therapy with Irving Bieber, an author of repudiated works promoting conversion therapy. During his work with Bieber, Omar remembers praying to God "***to help me get back to my heterosexual core, which I believed I had.***" After four years of therapy and of dating women, Omar had experienced no progress in changing his sexual orientation.

"I finally said I think I'm done with this," he recalls. ***"I don't see it providing any benefit. I'm ready to embrace that I'm attracted to other guys, and that's not going to change. I'm gay and I should embrace whatever that means."***

Sharing that new attitude with his family proved a mixed bag. ***"My mother was sympathetic at first, but then she spent seven months trying to dissuade me,"*** he says. ***"'You'll get AIDS,' she'd say. 'You'll never find anybody.' It was all coming from a place of sheer ignorance."***

Omar's father asked that his son not share his news with the extended family, a request that Omar granted. His siblings were more accepting. ***"They were supportive from the beginning, though even they agreed that this should be kept in the***



immediate family," he says. That request soon became a burden. ***"It conflicted with my desire to express myself openly and not be ashamed or embarrassed or monitor how I talked or what I said at a family gathering."***

Omar's overall experience left him disillusioned with religion and unsure of God's existence. More recently, though, he has found himself praying in moments of need. He has begun a slow return to Islam and to an LGBTQ-affirming belief in God.

"It wasn't until last year that I became interested in ways to ground myself spiritually," he says. ***"I became involved with the Muslim Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity (MASGD). We're a small community but I've been active with so many people who have a similar story to mine."*** Following the Orlando killings in 2016, Omar and MASGD have worked to educate Americans about Islam and to educate fellow Muslims about the LGBTQ experience.

For guidance on how to remain part of a faith tradition that is not fully welcoming of LGBTQ people – and to explore other options – check out the HRC *Coming Home* series of guides for LGBTQ Muslims, Catholics, Protestants, Mormons and Jews.



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Parents struggling with the realization that their child is LGBTQ often don't know where to turn, how to best help their child, and how to best help themselves.

Conversion therapy can seem like a clear and easy answer to their problems if they haven't been exposed to accurate information about its inefficacy and dangers. Although parents may find themselves in a place of personal struggle after learning their child is LGBTQ, it is imperative to remember that their decisions about how they respond carry life-long consequences.

Susan Cottrell knows first hand the challenges of being deeply involved in a conservative religious community and learning that her child is LGBTQ.[2] "I know this can look very scary," she says. "To pull out this one piece about homosexuality – something that you've been taught is a deep sin – can look like the whole pile is going to collapse."

Her advice to parents might seem counterintuitive. She suggests that the best thing to do is to step back. "Let God be God," she says. "God will shake up, deconstruct and *re*construct your faith." Her trust in that process is grounded in a single, core concept. "God is good," she says. "You don't have to be afraid of that. Fear is not from God."

2. Cottrell, Susan, Interview with Norman Allen. Human Rights Campaign. 2017.

WHEN YOUR ADULT CHILD CHOOSES CONVERSION THERAPY

LGBTQ youth who have been raised in the belief that being LGBTQ is a sin often live with the conviction that a core part of their being is unacceptable to God. These youth may choose conversion therapy for themselves when they become adults, hoping to alter their sexual orientation or gender identity. The impossibility of making that alteration, and the continuing belief that they are sinful before God, can lead to depression, despair and even suicide. Parents can – quite literally – save their child's life by helping them accept themselves for who they are.



While Susan suggests that parents “Let God be God,” she, and all those working on behalf of LGBTQ youth, also understand that concrete, affirming steps are necessary. Those steps might include engaging in affirming spiritual counseling and/or psychotherapy; identifying and sharing accurate information; building affirming families; sharing the work with others; and understanding your own faith community and its stance on LGBTQ issues.

SEEK OUT AFFIRMING COUNSELING

For many survivors of conversion therapy, the idea of counseling – whether spiritual or secular – can carry uncomfortable, even frightening implications. However, affirming counseling is available in many denominations that are welcoming and inclusive of LGBTQ members.

Psychotherapy can also be enormously helpful to survivors of conversion therapy and to their families.



Affirming psychotherapists and spiritual counselors support their clients by:

- Accepting LGBTQ identities as normal and positive variants of human experience;
- Accepting and supporting youth as they address the stigma sometimes associated with being LGBTQ;
- Supporting youth as they explore their identities and begin to experience important developmental milestones, such as dating and coming out;
- Reducing family and peer rejection; and
- Increasing family and peer support.[3]

As a parent, Susan Cottrell found it important to remember that everyone is made in the image of God. "To LGBTQ people who are ashamed of their sexuality, I want to say, 'God made you the way you are,'" she says. She emphasizes that sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression are inherent, but that hatred – directed inward or outward – is not.

"You learned or were conditioned to feel loathing," she explains. "It was not inherent in you to loathe anything about yourself. If you can find a way to get past all the head noise and ask God how *God* sees you, and if you're able to listen for an answer, you will hear God's love for you."

For those who have experienced one of the many forms of conversion therapy, and the hate-filled beliefs that underlie them, such statements can be transformative.



IDENTIFY AND SHARE ACCURATE INFORMATION

Many LGBTQ youth – and their family and friends – view being LGBTQ as intrinsically different from the "normal" human experience. This can have profoundly harmful effects on everyone involved. However, responsible, science-based studies quickly disprove this experience of "otherness."

It's of critical importance that parents have access to accurate information about sexual orientation and gender identity and that they share that information with their family. Parents can help their children – all their children – understand that sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression are real, inherent aspects of every person's make-up across the spectrum of human experience. Being LGBTQ is just one normal variation on that experience. Check the list of Resources below for a full range of informative opportunities.

BUILD AND STRENGTHEN AFFIRMING FAMILIES

A family that rejects their LGBTQ family members can be the unwitting cause of serious, even life-threatening actions. Parents might feel that responding to a struggling LGBTQ child with love and affection will be understood as condoning behavior. But affection, especially in the midst of a difficult period of discernment, can make all the difference in protecting a child from extreme risks to physical and mental health.

Even as a parent considers how best to respond to learning that their child is LGBTQ, they can listen with an open heart to that child's struggles, insist on respectful and loving behavior from the rest of the family, and protect their child from bullying and discrimination.

3. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "Ending Conversion Therapy: Supporting and Affirming LGBTQ Youth," October 2015.

SUPPORTING AND AFFIRMING LGBTQ YOUTH

There are many different ways in which parents and family members can show support for LGBTQ children, which can in turn reduce their risk for health and mental problems and help promote their well-being.

Here are some ways to demonstrate support that fit naturally into most people's lives:

- Create social settings that bring your straight, cisgender and LGBTQ family and friends together.
- Talk openly and honestly with your LGBTQ children about their lives.
- Find opportunities to talk openly with your straight, cis friends about your LGBTQ children, friends and family and the issues they face.
- Make sure to include LGBTQ friends, boyfriends or girlfriends of your child in events and activities just as you would for any other child.
- Don't allow anti-LGBTQ jokes or statements expressed in your presence to go unchallenged.
- Integrate inclusive language into your regular conversations, professional interactions and/or spiritual life.
- Get involved with pro-LGBTQ groups and campaigns and contact your elected officials about equality.
- Join pro-LGBTQ causes or groups on Facebook and through other social networking opportunities.
- Attend pride celebrations and other LGBTQ community events.
- Demonstrate your open support by displaying bumper stickers, mugs, posters, clothing or other similar items.

For further information, please see HRC's *Coming Out as a Supporter* guide.

SHARE THE BURDEN – AND THE JOY – WITH OTHERS

Just as LGBTQ youth often feel isolated within their religious community, so do the families who are doing their best to support them. A quick online search reveals hundreds – even thousands – of families in the same situation. Organizations such as Fortunate Families: Catholic Parents of LGBT Children offer a wide range of resources and personal stories. The Human Rights Campaign's bilingual project *A La Familia* provides similar resources for the Latinx community. Additionally, Mama Dragons was founded by the mothers of LGBTQ Mormon children. See Resources below for many more.

KNOW YOUR CHURCH, KNOW YOUR OPTIONS

Sometimes families – including their LGBTQ children – feel there is only one church that offers a true experience of their chosen faith, and that to step away from that particular church is to step away from God. Those who do step away, however, often find themselves immersed in a rich renewal of their faith and a new understanding of God's love for all of creation.

Susan Cottrell and her family made that difficult decision. After she learned of her daughter's sexual orientation, Susan approached a leader at the church and shared her story. "She told me it's a sin and that I can't accept it," Susan remembers. "I told another woman leader in the church and she said the same thing. So we stopped telling people and we left."

After taking a break from church for a period of healing, the Cottrells were ready to try again. "A few years later we found [an inclusive] church," Susan reports. The match proved a good one, and Susan was thrilled. "I really love Jesus and Jesus was the entry point of me to my relationship with God," she says. "And I really love God. But the non-affirming church is too afraid to love the people Jesus told them to love – which is everyone."

Religious communities that provide LGBTQ-positive ministry typically nurture:

- Open and non-stigmatic usage of terms like "lesbian," "gay," "bi," "trans," "queer," "LGBTQ;"
- Language inclusive of LGBTQ people, including "you were made in the image of God" or "God loves you as you are'"
- Explicit rejection of language about LGBTQ people that they are sick, sinners or in need of healing;
- LGBTQ-affirming interpretation of religious texts;
- An understanding of LGBTQ lives as a normal variation of human experience;
- Accurate information about the harms and inefficacy of conversion therapy;
- Promotion of family acceptance of LGBTQ members;
- Referrals to LGBTQ-affirming therapy (both family and individual);
- Symbols of LGBTQ-acceptance, such as the rainbow flag;
- Statements that the community is "open and affirming," "reconciling" or "LGBTQ affirming;"
- Support for marriage equality, equal access to facilities, programs and activities in accordance with one's gender identity, and other LGBTQ civil rights;
- A presence at local Pride celebrations.

HRC's listing of Faith Positions offers a quick overview of many denominations' views on LGBTQ issues. Its series of *Coming Home* guides can be helpful in deciding how to work within a chosen faith tradition or begin exploring beyond it. Other resources include The Institute for Welcoming Resources' publication *All in God's Family: Creating Allies for Our LGBT families*. See below for many more resources.



CONCLUSION

While the public specter of conversion therapy is fading and responsible community leaders are working to bring about its final demise, the practice continues to create traumatic experiences for LGBTQ youth, casting a shadow across innocent lives – and sometimes resulting in the loss of those lives.

As a parent who has traveled this difficult road, author and faith advocate Susan Cottrell suggests a preemptive strategy that puts scriptural teachings about love at the center of family life. "Your job with these children God has entrusted to you is to love them to the ends of the earth," she says. "Be the safe place for your child – *whatever* their story."



The result, she hopes, is that young people will grow up in an environment where they know they are loved unconditionally, and where they can be open with their parents and siblings. For Susan, creating that safe place also means that a child's friends and the wider family – nieces, nephews, aunts and uncles – know there is a place where they are loved and where they can be their true selves. "You just make sure your children are safe and love them and God will bring out the treasure in them."



RESOURCES

RESOURCES

LGBT-Affirming Religious Organizations

A growing number of religious groups have issued statements officially welcoming LGBTQ as members.

To see where a particular religious denomination stands please visit:
www.hrc.org/resources/faith-positions

Believe Out Loud

An online community that empowers Christians to work for justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA) people.
believeoutloud.com

Institute for Welcoming Resources – National LGBTQ Task Force

A national, ecumenical collaboration of the Welcoming Church Movement working to achieve full acceptance of LGBTQ in the life of the Church.
www.welcomingresources.org
info@WelcomingResources.org

Many Voices

A Black church movement for gay and transgender justice, Many Voices envisions a community that embraces the diversity of the human family and ensures that all are treated with love, compassion, and justice.
www.manyvoices.org
info@manyvoices.org

Soulforce

An interfaith movement working to end the political and religious oppression of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex people through relentless nonviolent resistance.
www.soulforce.org
info@soulforce.org

Faith in America

A non-profit organization whose ultimate goal is to end decades and centuries of using religious teachings to justify marginalizing and discriminating against others. Faith in America is dedicated to influencing media and faith community narratives on religion and sexuality.
www.faithinamerica.org
info@faithinamerica.org

Family Acceptance Project's Faith-Based Training

Faith-based training and resources to help religious leaders, families and congregations to prevent risk and promote well-being for LGBTQ youth.
familyproject.sfsu.edu/
fap@sfsu.edu

GLAAD Religion, Faith and Values Program

A program of GLAAD that works to amplify the voices of LGBT-affirming communities of faith and LGBT people of faith.
www.glaad.org/programs/faith
murray@glaad.org

HRC Religion and Faith Program

A program of the HRC Foundation helping shape a world where no one has to choose between who they are, whom they love and what they believe.
www.hrc.org/religion
religion@hrc.org

PFLAG

Uniting people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) with families, friends, and allies, PFLAG is committed to advancing equality through its mission of support, education, and advocacy.
www.pflag.org

Religious Institute

A multifaith organization dedicated to advocating for sexual health, education, and justice in faith communities and society.
www.religiousinstitute.org

Transfaith

A national nonprofit that is led by transgender people and focused on issues of faith and spirituality.
www.transfaithonline.org

Transgender Faith and Action Network – Freedom Center for Social Justice

A collective of trans people of faith who recognize the value of being connected to one another and providing mutual support. TFAAN exists not only to change policies and raise awareness about issues that affect the trans community, but also to provide spaces for trans folks to network and heal.
www.transfaan.com

Please note that no list is fully comprehensive. There are LGBTQ people of faith in a number of religions not listed including Sikhism, Native American religions and others. There also are many LGBTQ people who practice forms of spirituality found outside organized religion.

For More Information about LGBTQ Acceptance and the Dangers of Conversion Therapy

Family Acceptance Project ®

The Family Acceptance Project® is a research, intervention, education and policy initiative that works to prevent health and mental health risks for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) children and youth, including suicide, homelessness and HIV in the context of their families, cultures and faith communities. FAP uses a research-based, culturally grounded approach to help ethnically, socially and religiously diverse families to support their LGBT children.
familyproject.sfsu.edu/

Human Rights Campaign

Being supported at home, in school and in the community is important for all children and youth – especially LGBTQ youth. From creating an inclusive learning environment for students – whether a student is in the process of transitioning or has two moms – to understanding the challenges and resiliency of LGBTQ youth, HRC provides a wealth of resources for supporting LGBTQ youth.
www.hrc.org/explore/topic/children-youth
and
www.hrc.org/resources/the-lies-and-dangers-of-reparative-therapy

National Center for Lesbian Rights

In June 2014, NCLR launched #BornPerfect: The Campaign to End Conversion Therapy by passing laws across the country to protect LGBTQ children and young people, fighting in courtrooms to ensure their safety, and raising awareness about the serious harms caused by these dangerous practices.
www.nclrights.org/our-work/bornperfect/

If someone is trying to change your child's sexual orientation or gender identity, contact the National Center for Lesbian Rights at **BornPerfect@nclrights.org o**r **1-800-528-6257** to explore your legal options.

Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)

People who have undergone conversion therapy have reported increased anxiety, depression, and in some cases, suicidal ideation. Conversion therapy can also strain family relationships, because practitioners frequently blame a parent for their child's sexual orientation.

Through litigation, education and advocacy, SPLC works to expose and stop this harmful practice.
www.splcenter.org/issues/lgbt-rights/conversion-therapy

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)

(October 2015) *Ending Conversion Therapy: Supporting and Affirming LGBTQ Youth* store.
samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA15-4928/SMA15-4928.pdf



HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUNDATION™

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