

Association of



Professional Behavior Analysts

APBA Board of Directors Position Statement on Use of “Conversion” Therapy or Related Practices

Approved: February 08, 2024

The Association of Professional Behavior Analysts (APBA) is a nonprofit professional association with the mission to support and advance the professional practice of applied behavior analysis (ABA). APBA affirms that gender expression, gender identity, and sexual orientation occur on a natural and expected spectrum and are not considered pathological or mental illnesses.^{2,3,4}

Therapies, such as “conversion” and “reparative” therapies, are those that focus on changing an individual’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression in favor of heterosexuality and/or a gender binary.^{5,1,10} These therapies have been demonstrated to cause grave short-and-long-term harm to children, adolescents, and adults (e.g., depression anxiety, loneliness, social isolation, increased suicidal behavior^{2,3,4}). Due to the documented harms caused by these therapies, they are widely accepted as unethical.^{2,3,4} In addition to specific therapies or interventions focusing on changing an individual’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression in favor of heterosexuality and/or a gender binary, some practices, whether explicit or implicit, may have the same or similar effect (e.g., failing to include and allow teaching materials, play/leisure activities, choices, and learning targets that align with an individual’s gender identity), particularly for LGBTQIA+ individuals, and are considered harmful⁷.

APBA acknowledges that the science of behavior analysis has been used to change individuals’ gender identity, gender expression, and/or sexual orientation, including in several published research studies conducted by behavior analysts. The review by Morris and colleagues⁹ summarizes past behavior-analytic publications (including research) that focused on these topics. APBA acknowledges the harm caused to those individuals and to all LGBTQIA+ individuals, because of such practices and research studies.

Therefore, it is the position of the APBA Board of Directors that ABA practitioners, in accordance with the Ethics Code for Behavior Analysts⁸, should:

- engage in ethical practices and therapies that respect and affirm individuals' gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual orientations; and
- practice only within their scope of competence and regularly evaluate their scope of competence and their biases, in accordance with the Ethics Code for Behavior Analysts⁸, when addressing client needs related to gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation; and
- not implement interventions (including conversion “reparative” therapy) or other applied behavior analysis-based therapies or practices focused on influencing or changing an individual’s gender identity, gender expression, and/or sexual orientation.

References

1. APA Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation. (2009). *report of the task force on appropriate therapeutic responses to sexual orientation*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
2. American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry. (2018, February). *Conversion therapy*.
https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Policy_Statements/2018/Conversion_The_rapy.aspx
3. American Medical Association. (2022, April). *Issue brief: Sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts (so-called “conversion therapy”)*.
<https://www.ama-assn.org/system/files/conversion-therapy-issue-brief.pdf>
4. American Psychiatric Association. (2018, November). *Position statement on conversion therapy and LGBTQ patients*.
<https://www.psychiatry.org/about-apa/policy-finder/position-statement-on-conversion-therapy-and-lgbtq>
5. American Psychiatric Association Commission on Psychotherapy by Psychiatrists. (2000). Position statement on therapies focused on attempts to change sexual orientation (reparative or conversion therapies). *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 57(10), 1719-1721.
6. American Psychological Association. (2009). *Report of the American psychological association task force on appropriate therapeutic responses to sexual orientation*.
<https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/sexual-orientation>

7. Association for Behavior Analysis International. (2022). *Statement on conversion therapy and practices, 2022*.
<https://www.abainternational.org/about-us/policies-and-positions/policy-statement-on-conversion-therapy-and-practices,-2021.aspx>
8. Behavior Analyst Certification Board. (2020). *Ethics code for behavior analysts*. <https://www.bacb.com/wp-content/ethics-code-for-behavior-analysts/>
9. Morris, C., Goetz, D. B., & Gabriele-Black, K. (2021). The treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals in behavior-analytic publications: A historical review. *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, 14(4), 1179-1190.
10. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2015, October). *Ending conversion therapy: Supporting and affirming LGBTQ youth*. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 15-4928. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2015.
<https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/sma15-4928.pdf>
11. The Trevor Project. (2021, May). *National survey on LGBTQ mental health 2021*. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/>