

# SELF CARE AND PEER SUPPORT

## *for survivors of conversion therapy*

The Canadian Criminal Code describes conversion therapy as

*“a practice, treatment or service designed to:*

- a. change a person’s sexual orientation to heterosexual;*
- b. change a person’s gender identity to cisgender;*
- c. change a person’s gender expression so that it conforms to the sex assigned to the person at birth;*
- d. repress or reduce non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviour;*
- e. repress a person’s non-cisgender gender identity; or*
- f. repress or reduce a person’s gender expression that does not conform to the sex assigned to the person at birth.”*

In other words, the law defines conversion therapy as practices which try to change someone’s 2SLGBTQIA+ identity, expression, or behaviour to conform to heterosexual and/or cisgender norms.

Despite this law, we know these harmful practices have happened and continue to occur in our communities. This resource is about supporting yourself and your loved ones after conversion therapy.



No Conversion Canada

# SELF CARE

If you have experienced conversion therapy, you might have lots of different and even conflicting feelings about it. This is doubly true if your experience of conversion therapy involved people you trust(ed), such as family members, religious leaders, or medical professionals. Know first of all that there is no wrong way to feel about your experience. You are allowed to make sense of it however you choose to, just as you are allowed to make sense of your own identity and sense of self.

1

## ***Give yourself time***

Healing is not always a quick or linear process. Sometimes you might feel fine one day and then not the next—that's completely normal, and doesn't mean you're not healing. Be gentle with yourself along the way. As well, healing looks different for everyone. What may work for others might not work for you, and that's OK. The important part is discovering what you need and how to make that happen.

2

## ***Find people you trust***

Who do you have in your life that you could share your story with, find support from, or just be yourself around? This might mean friends, partners, family, or chosen family. It might also mean a supportive faith community, or a 2SLGBTQIA+ community organization.

3

## ***Find community and identity in ways that work for and are meaningful for you***

The conversion therapy you experienced might have encouraged you to doubt or suppress aspects of your identity. It might also have cut you off from communities of people who share those identities, such as 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, cultural spaces, and/or supportive, affirming faith communities. Connecting with these communities and giving yourself space to explore your various identities in whatever way works for you can be healing.

4

## ***Connect with other survivors***

Connecting with other people who share your experiences of conversion therapy can help you process those experiences, and it can be validating to hear from others that you are not alone in these experiences. [The Community Based Resource Centre](#) has some resources for connecting with fellow survivors.

# SUPPORTING A FRIEND

If you have a friend who has experienced conversion practices, you might not know what to say or how to support them. Here are some things to keep in mind when supporting a loved one who has undergone conversion therapy.

1

## ***Believe and affirm***

Survivors of conversion therapy have experienced a process of having their identities and experiences questioned and disbelieved. One of the most important things you can do for someone in your life who has experienced this process is to tell them you believe them and take their story seriously.

### ***For example:***

- ✓ *"I believe you"*
- ✓ *"That sounds really hard."*
- ✓ *"I don't think you're overreacting."*

2

## ***Active listening***

Listening actively means turning your full attention to the person you are listening to, and allowing them to direct the conversation. It's a way to make the other person feel heard. Pay attention to what they are saying and avoid interrupting. Use body language to make it clear you are listening, like turning towards them or nodding your head. Ask clarifying questions and affirm the validity of their experiences, but avoid giving them advice unless they have told you they would like it.

### ***For example:***

- ✓ *"It sounds like they didn't really let you be yourself, is that kind of what you're saying?"*
- ✓ *Nodding, interested body posture, and/or eye contact*
- ✓ *"So I just want to make sure I understand. This was when you were still in high school?"*

3

## ***Mirror their language***

People might have different ways of referring to their experiences of conversion therapy, as well as to their own sexual or gender identities. Using their language is a way to show you are listening actively and believing their experiences.

### ***For example:***

- ✓ *"I think you're allowed to call that conversion therapy if that's how it felt to you."*
- ✓ *"Of course I'll use they/them pronouns for you, thanks for telling me."*
- ✓ *"Thanks, I consider you part of my chosen family too."*

4

### **Ask what they need**

When supporting a friend, asking what they need from you can make them feel heard and can help you know you are being genuinely supportive. This is especially the case for people who have survived experiences where they have had agency and autonomy denied to them—such as conversion therapy.

#### **For example:**

- ✓ *“Is there anything I can do to help?”*
- ✓ *“Do you want advice, or do you just want me to listen?”*
- ✓ *“So does that mean you’d like to go by she/her pronouns with our friends now? What about with your mom?”*

5

### **Check your assumptions and learn more**

You might not know everything about conversion therapy. You might even have some misconceptions, or personal biases. That is totally normal. You can use this toolkit and other resources to learn more about conversion therapy, reflect on your past experiences and how they’ve shaped your perspectives, and be ready to support your friend with an informed and open mind.

#### **For example:**

- ✓ *To learn more about the history of conversion therapy in Canada, check out Wisdom2Action’s Timeline resource*
- ✓ *To learn what your friend’s rights are to help them find support or advocate for themselves, check out Wisdom2Action’s Know Your Rights resource*
- ✓ *To check your assumptions about conversion therapy, check out Wisdom2Action’s Mythbusting resource*

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### **Take care of yourself**

Supporting a friend is tough! It’s great to be there for someone, but also important to take care of yourself. This is especially true if you yourself have experienced conversion therapy in particular or homophobia or transphobia in general. Remember that it’s OK to set boundaries.

#### **For example:**

- ✓ *Give yourself time and space to relax, recharge, and engage in whatever self-care activities work for you*
- ✓ *“I’m not sure if I can give you all the support you need here. Do you have anyone else to talk to about this?”*