

1 March 2022

Clarifying ACC's Position on Conversion Therapy and Related Issues

ACC is an ecumenical Christian organisation that holds a register of professionally qualified counsellors under the Professional Standards Authority. As such we are Christians *in* counselling and psychotherapy.

ACC along with other professional bodies were requested by the Department of Health to be involved in discussions about how to avoid the harmful effects of conversion therapy and took an active role in the group that developed the Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy (MoU). ACC were signatories to the original document and MoU2, and remain active members of this group.

We agree with the primary purpose of the MoU which is the protection of the public through a commitment to ending the practice of conversion therapy in the UK. Our understanding of conversion therapy is set out in the MoU:

“an umbrella term for a therapeutic approach, or any model or individual viewpoint that demonstrates an assumption that any sexual orientation or gender identity is inherently preferable to any other, and which attempts to bring about a change of sexual orientation or gender identity, or seeks to suppress an individual's expression of sexual orientation or gender identity on that basis.”

There is a body of research evidence, in addition to the many accounts of the lived experience of LGBT+ people, which convicts us professionally that attempts at conversion therapy are deeply harmful to the psychological and spiritual wellbeing of people. Conversion therapy also presents safeguarding concerns, due to the associated risks of self-harm and suicide, particularly for children, young people and vulnerable adults. See for example [here](#).

All individual counselling members of ACC, including students and ACC affiliated organisations are required as a condition of membership to work within the MoU, which is fully compatible with ACC's code of ethics. The MoU expresses a commitment to end conversion therapy practices stating clearly in section 6 that:

“This position is not intended to deny, discourage or exclude those with uncertain feelings around sexuality or gender identity from seeking qualified and appropriate help. This document supports therapists to provide appropriately informed and ethical practice when working with a client who wishes to explore, experiences conflict with or is in distress regarding, their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Nor is it intended to stop psychological and medical professionals who work with trans and gender questioning clients from performing a clinical assessment of suitability prior to medical intervention. Nor is it intended to stop medical professionals from prescribing hormone treatments and other medications to trans patients and people experiencing gender dysphoria.

For people who are unhappy about their sexual orientation or their gender identity, there may be grounds for exploring therapeutic options to help them live more comfortably with it, reduce their distress and reach a greater degree of self-acceptance. Some people may benefit from the support of psychotherapy and counselling to help them manage unhappiness and to clarify their sense of themselves. Clients make healthy choices when they understand themselves better.

Ethical practice in these cases requires the practitioner to have adequate knowledge and understanding of gender and sexual diversity and to be free from any agenda that favours one gender identity or sexual orientation as preferable over other gender and sexual diversities. For this reason, it is essential for clinicians to acknowledge the broad spectrum of sexual orientations and gender identities and gender expressions.”

To read the MoU in full please follow this link [here](#).

ACC is a Christian organisation whose members will hold different personal beliefs about many issues relating to being human and living well in a complex world. However, it is foundational to all counselling ethics that a counsellor puts aside their own beliefs and agendas (religious or otherwise), to enter the world of their client and to undertake the work of therapy that they are trained to do.

Although recognising the intrinsic value of debate and discussion, nonetheless ACC regret the distress that continues to be experienced by LGBT+ people and LGBT+ people of faith and their families by the recent public questioning of the principles behind the MoU.

ACC is committed to welcoming into membership, employment, volunteer and governance roles all Christians who have protected characteristics listed in the 2010 Equalities Act and/or are otherwise marginalised or disadvantaged¹.



Sue Monckton-Rickett, Chair, ACC



Chris Williams, Deputy Chair, ACC's representative on the MoU Group



Kathy Spooner, CEO, ACC

¹ As a membership body and register of Christian counsellors we have an intentional and lawful reason to discriminate on the grounds of religious belief.