

Providing Safe and Supportive Environments for LGBT Youth

Founded in 1991 by the Southern Poverty Law Center, Teaching Tolerance promotes and supports safe environments for all students, including those who are or are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT). Teaching Tolerance can provide: resources for parents and students, films for community or club screenings, tips for creating safe and respectful environments for LGBT students, book recommendations for your school library, and materials about the rights of LGBT youth, the adolescent development of sexual orientation, and dispelling myths about homosexuality.

What is “ex-gay” therapy?

“Ex-gay” or “reparative” therapy refers to counseling and psychotherapy that attempts to eliminate a person’s gay sexual orientation. The most important fact about these “therapies” is that they are based on a view of homosexuality that has been rejected by all the major health professional organizations. The nation’s leading professional medical, health, and mental health organizations do not support efforts to change young people’s sexual orientation through therapy and have raised serious concerns about the potential harm from such efforts.

Do attempts to change a person’s sexual orientation work?

Simply put, no. The American Psychological Association (APA) has determined: “There is simply no sufficiently scientifically sound evidence that sexual orientation can be changed.” The APA has also expressed concern that the aggressive promotion of efforts to change gay sexual orientation “create an environment in which prejudice and discrimination can flourish.” The nation’s leading professional medical, health, and mental health organizations do not support efforts to change young people’s sexual orientation through therapy and have raised serious concerns about the potential harm from such efforts.

How are efforts to change a person’s gay sexual orientation harmful to young people?

Like most heterosexual youths, most lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths are healthy individuals who have significant attachments to and make contributions to their families, peers, schools and religious institutions. However, lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth must also cope with the prejudice, discrimination, and violence in society. Efforts to change a young person’s gay sexual orientation risk causing depression, anxiety, and self-destructive behavior, since they present views of homosexuality that may reinforce self-hatred caused by societal prejudice.

“Where do I go for more information?”

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SUPPORTIVE RESOURCES, YOU MAY CONTACT Teaching Tolerance (www.tolerance.org) Equality Maryland Foundation (www.equalitymaryland.org)

*Information in this flyer was adapted from “Just the Facts About Sexual Orientation and Youth,” available at www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/just-the-facts.pdf.

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