

Social Issues

Why We Support "Sexual Orientation Change Efforts"

By Jeff Johnston

Advocates for banning "sexual orientation change efforts" will often argue that homosexuality is no longer considered a mental illness so there's no place for counseling to change same-sex feelings, attractions or identity.

For Focus on the Family, the issue isn't whether or not homosexuality is a mental illness; our concern is rooted in the origins of humankind and how we were created.

For Christians, homosexuality conflicts with God's design for marriage and sexual expression — one man and one woman in a lifelong committed marriage relationship. So, homosexual behavior is a moral and relational issue that goes beyond mental health.



Basic Facts to Consider

Here are some basic facts to help you understand why we disagree with some professional mental health groups on the issue of change from homosexuality.

- Licensed mental health professionals often help people with moral issues — not just mental health issues.
- The drive to shut down help for those with unwanted homosexuality is largely political and ideological; it is not rooted in science or research.
- Psychology and counseling are not hard sciences, but are rooted in philosophy and values. Those who claim that homosexual behavior is "good" and "right" are clearly speaking about morality and faith, not from a "scientific" viewpoint.

Some argue that homosexuality is genetic or inborn. Others state that it is fixed and unchangeable. The reality is that there is no strong evidence for either position. While there are probably many varieties of and many roads into homosexuality, some people seem to know the factors in their lives that led to this struggle. And some therapists are especially skilled at helping men and women find freedom from homosexual thoughts, behavior,

identity and even attractions.

- We are grateful for the years of work from mental health professionals who have helped thousands find faith-affirming responses to unwanted homosexuality in a variety of ethical ways. We appreciate their wisdom and insights.
- We agree with therapists and ministries who emphasize that the goal for those leaving homosexuality is not heterosexuality, or a "100% change in orientation," but the pursuit of wholeness and holiness in all areas of life.
- Wholeness and holiness will lead some into male-female marriage, while some remain celibate. Many thousands have walked away from a gay-identity structure which they find self-limiting and opposed to their faith.

Fundamental Rights

All the major mental health groups agree that clients have basic, fundamental rights when pursuing treatment. This includes "self-determination" — the right to determine the course of their treatment. It includes "autonomy" — the right to make decisions free from coercion by the therapist or others. Mental health groups also agree that the client's faith and spirituality are very important and should be taken into consideration during treatment. Both client and therapist also have freedoms that come from God, including free speech and freedom of religion. And, parents have the right to raise their children according to their beliefs and faith.

- We agree with professional mental health groups that a client's autonomy, self-determination and spirituality are important and must be preserved. Shutting down help for unwanted homosexuality violates all three.
- Laws that ban "sexual orientation change efforts" deny clients and therapists freedom of speech, religion and association.
- Laws that ban "sexual orientation change efforts" for minors trespass on both parental rights and the First Amendment rights of minors.
- Where a child may be in conflict with parents over this issue, we uphold access to professional counseling that aids the family's relationships and emotional processes without undermining the faith-informed aspects of a parent's concerns.
- Minors dealing with unwanted homosexual behaviors, identity and attractions are undergoing formational periods of identity development. A family-centered, connected, compassionate, directional approach with a minor is a fundamental benefit and aim of professional therapy.

Government Overreach

Proponents of bans say they are trying to protect people. However, states already have licensing boards for ethics and oversee the practices of mental health professionals. When the state bans help for unwanted homosexuality, it pushes people into homosexual identities and relationships. For many this conflict with their faith creates great despair and damage.

- State licensing boards already protect the public by sufficiently regulating their practitioners in applicable ethical standards. They provide appropriate venues for grievances against damaging, coercive or unethical approaches.
- It is governmental overreach to ban change therapies for those who want it.
- When professional therapies that intrinsically relate to an individual's faith are banned, individuals are left without hope and without helpful therapeutic resources. The only professional options left are "gay-affirming therapies" which are in opposition to their faith.