



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

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

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