

# Resolving Distress Between Faith-Based Values and Sexual and Gender Diversity

## AN ABBREVIATED GUIDE

Mental health providers, communities, policy makers, churches, and families can provide better support and avoid harm by following these key ethical principles. We advocate moving beyond terminology such as “reparative,” “conversion,” “sexual orientation change efforts,” and “affirmative” therapies because they fuel adversarial tensions and foster misunderstanding. Instead, we favor language that focuses on reducing the distress associated with same-sex attractions and non-traditional gender.

1. Assessment and interventions should adhere to the two core principles of “do no harm” and “facilitate self-determination.”
2. It is important that we have an appreciation for and understanding of individuals who experience non-traditional gender, attractions to the same sex, or both.
3. It is equally important that we exercise respect for and understanding of the religious, spiritual, cultural, and other ideological values of individuals and communities.
4. It is important that we have an appreciation for and understanding of sexuality, gender, and ideological values as a spectrum of diverse identities.
5. It is important that we utilize approaches that are respectful and compassionate to all the lived realities on all points of the spectrum, without dismissing any.
6. Individuals may experience distress related to same-sex attractions and/or gender identity. However, a person is not mentally ill, developmentally delayed, or addicted simply because they experience same-sex attractions or non-traditional gender.
7. All sexual orientations, gender identities, and religious/spiritual and other ideological values have the potential to be lived in healthy and unhealthy ways. The focus should be on improving functioning and changing unhealthy expressions.
8. Approaches are inherently harmful if they:
  - foster expectations of a specific sexual orientation or gender identity outcome;
  - use direct or indirect coercion;
  - base interventions on bias, unfounded theories, or prejudice; or
  - limit the exploration of sexual orientation, gender, faith, and cultural identity and expression possibilities.
9. It is essential to provide a safe environment for individuals to explore, define, and articulate their own identity in order for each to discover their authentic self.
10. Individuals and institutions that have social privilege and power have a responsibility to avoid demanding specific types or outcomes of identity change and instead encourage mental and physical health.

**FULL GUIDE MAY BE ACCESSED AT: [ReconciliationAndGrowth.org/guidelines](https://ReconciliationAndGrowth.org/guidelines)**