

# UK conversion therapy ban to include trans people

By Vanessa Clarke  
BBC News

**[Note: For an in-depth look at Conversion Therapy in action, read *As Nature Made Him* by John Colapinto. Ed.]**

**A new law to ban all forms of conversion therapy in England and Wales will include transgender people, the government says.**

The ban will outlaw attempts to change someone's sexuality or gender identity.

Mental health groups have warned all types of conversion therapy [are "unethical and potentially harmful"](#).

The government had previously said transgender conversion therapy would not be included in the ban.

Culture Secretary Michelle Donelan said [in a written statement](#) that the bill is promised shortly and "will protect everyone, including those targeted on the basis of their sexuality, or being transgender".

Ms Donelan says it is a "complex" area and legislation must not "harm the growing number of children and young adults experiencing gender-related distress, through inadvertently criminalising or chilling legitimate conversations parents or clinicians may have with their children".

"We recognise the strength of feeling on the issue of harmful conversion practices and remain committed to protecting people from these practices and making sure they can live their lives free from the threat of harm or abuse," she added.

The bill will undergo pre-legislative scrutiny by a joint committee.

- [What is conversion therapy and will it be banned?](#)
- [Ban gay conversion therapy, religious leaders say](#)
- [Government to fund conversion-therapy helpline](#)

Conversion therapy - sometimes called "gay cure" therapy - tries to suppress someone's sexual orientation or stop them identifying as a different gender to their sex recorded at birth.

It can include talking therapies and prayer, but more extreme forms can include exorcism, physical violence and food deprivation.

It is not known exactly how widespread the practice is but 5% of 108,000 people who responded to a [UK-wide LGBT survey in 2018](#) said they had been offered some form of conversion therapy, while 2% had undergone it.

Of the transgender respondents, 8% said they had been offered conversion therapy and 4% said they had undergone it.

Last year the government said there were worries that a ban including transgender people [could have "unintended consequences"](#) which might affect teachers, parents and therapists helping children who are struggling with their gender identity.

That decision followed the [Cass Review interim report](#) which called for a re-think of children's gender

identity services in England.

However a group of mental health bodies, including the NHS, [published an open letter](#) downplaying the risk of unintended consequences and called for any ban to include all forms of conversion therapy.

Tuesday's announcement comes after the [UK government blocked Scottish plans](#) designed to make it easier for people to change their legal gender.

Minister said the draft law would conflict with equality protections applying across Great Britain.

## What is conversion therapy?

According to the British Psychological Society (BPS), conversion therapy - sometimes called "reparative therapy" or "gay cure therapy" - tries to change someone's sexual orientation or gender identity.

In practice, it means trying to stop or suppress someone from being gay, or from living as a different gender to their sex recorded at birth.

It can include talking therapies and prayer, but more extreme forms can include exorcism, physical violence and food deprivation.

The BPS and other professional bodies, including NHS England and the Royal College of Psychiatrists, have warned all kinds of conversion therapy are ["unethical and potentially harmful"](#).

The government said it would ban conversion therapy aimed at changing a person's sexual orientation - but not their gender identity. The plans were confirmed in the Queen's Speech.

The proposed law will protect under-18s. However, it won't apply to people over 18 if they've consented and haven't been coerced.

Last month, the government announced that it was entirely scrapping plans for a ban, then quickly backtracked and said elements of the ban would go ahead.

## Why does the government not want to include gender identity in the proposed ban?

The government said that transgender conversion therapy is too complicated to be included for now and separate work will be carried out into the "complexity of issues".

It said there were worries a ban could have "unintended consequences" which might affect teachers, parents and therapists helping children who are struggling with their gender identity.

Its decision came on the back of an NHS-commissioned report which called for a re-think of children's gender identity services in England.

[The Cass Review interim report](#) said that some healthcare professionals already felt under pressure to "take a purely affirmative approach" to young people who said they wanted to transition.

However, [a number of clinicians said](#) that a ban which still allowed for explorative therapies was possible and had already been enacted in other countries.

Dr Adam Jowett, chairman of the British Psychological Society's sexualities section, said: "Clinicians can still help people fully explore their gender identity where appropriate but it's time for this unacceptable and harmful practice to end."

More than 100 organisations called the decision to exclude trans people "unacceptable" and pulled out of this summer's first global LGBT+ Conference that was due to be held in London, [leading to the event being cancelled.](#)

## **How common is conversion therapy?**

It's difficult to know exactly how widespread the practice is. There is no standard legal definition and victims may be reluctant to share their experiences.

About 5% of the 108,000 people who responded to the government's [UK-wide LGBT Survey in 2018](#) said they had been offered some form of conversion therapy, while 2% had undergone it.

Those from an ethnic minority background were twice as likely to be affected. About 10% of Christian respondents and 20% of Muslims said they had undergone or been offered conversion therapy, compared to 6% with no religion.

More than half said it was conducted by a faith group, while one in five received it from healthcare professionals.

The figure was higher among transgender respondents. Almost one in 10 trans men said they had been offered conversion therapy, and one in 25 said they had undergone it.

But the survey did not define what it meant by conversion therapy, and did not ask when it had happened, or whether it was in the UK.

## **What are religious groups saying about a ban?**

Some religious groups oppose any ban on conversion therapy, and argue that it would infringe on traditional religious teachings, such as the belief that all sex outside a heterosexual marriage is sinful.

The Evangelical Alliance, which says it represents 3,500 churches, said a ban [could jeopardise religious freedoms](#), such as supportive prayer.

However, the Church of England said the practices have "no place in the modern world" and a group of Christian leaders wrote a letter to the prime minister calling for trans people to be included, as have various psychotherapists and counsellors.

## **Have other countries banned conversion therapy?**

Approximately 16 countries have introduced a full or partial ban, including Brazil, Canada and Germany.

About 20 US states have banned the practice for minors, although many of these do not include religious counsellors and organisations.

Some other countries, including Ireland, Denmark and Israel, are currently introducing measures to ban conversion therapy or launching consultations.