

Declaration on Avoiding Harm

A RECONCILIATION AND GROWTH PROJECT STATEMENT

This declaration applies to the spectrum of sexual and gender diversity, whether an individual identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, a different label, or chooses not to identify according to sexual attraction or gender experiences.

We advocate the following therapeutic principles when dealing with sexuality, gender identity, and faith:

Self-determination requires that mental health providers see each client as a multifaceted person with the right to explore, define, and live out their own life path. It is important that we use approaches that are respectful and compassionate to all lived experiences regarding sexuality, gender identity, and faith.

Do no harm means that mental health providers refrain from client-focused actions that:

- Impair an individual's intellectual, emotional, or psychological development;
- Convey to the individual that they are defective, unlovable, or of lesser value;
- Assert that individuals should meet the expectations of other persons, institutions, or customs.

These interventions and approaches are potentially harmful:

- Violating professional ethics;
- Basing treatment on the assumption that a change in sexual orientation or gender identity will or should occur;
- Fostering expectations of a specific sexual orientation, gender identity, or faith outcome;
- Using direct or indirect manipulation, coercion, punishment, or aversion to achieve a specific sexual orientation, gender identity, or faith outcome;
- Using pharmacological interventions or shock therapies to achieve a specific sexual orientation or gender identity outcome;
- Urging the client to discard deeply held beliefs about religion, faith, sexuality, or gender identity;
- Basing treatment on assumptions that every client's experience adheres to a one-size-fits-all model or theory;
- Basing treatment on assumptions that a person is necessarily mentally ill or exhibiting a learned, reactive, or addictive behavior because they experience sexual diversity, gender diversity, and/or a deep devotion to faith;
- Neglecting to assess minority stress and to provide counter-interventions;
- Failing to spend adequate time assessing the client's unique experience with religion, faith, sexuality, or gender identity;
- Failing to explore family systems and cultural and ethnic traditions;
- Asking voyeuristic questions of the client that reflect the therapist's curiosity rather than the client's need to share;
- Failing to inquire periodically about clients' feelings regarding therapy, if they feel understood, and, if necessary, making adjustments to the therapeutic process or making a referral to a more suitable therapist;
- Failing to examine the therapist's own preconceptions about the possibility of positive mental health for clients in their current or preferred relationship/single status;
- Limiting the client's exploration of sexuality, gender identity, personal values, or faith;
- Violating the sexual boundaries of the client, such as using nudity in sessions.

For the purposes of this declaration, this is how the following terms have been used:

Last update: July 9, 2018. To provide feedback, please go to ReconciliationAndGrowth.org