

Toolkit for Mental Health Providers

Working with Survivors of
Conversion Practices in Africa



OUTRIGHT
INTERNATIONAL

Summary

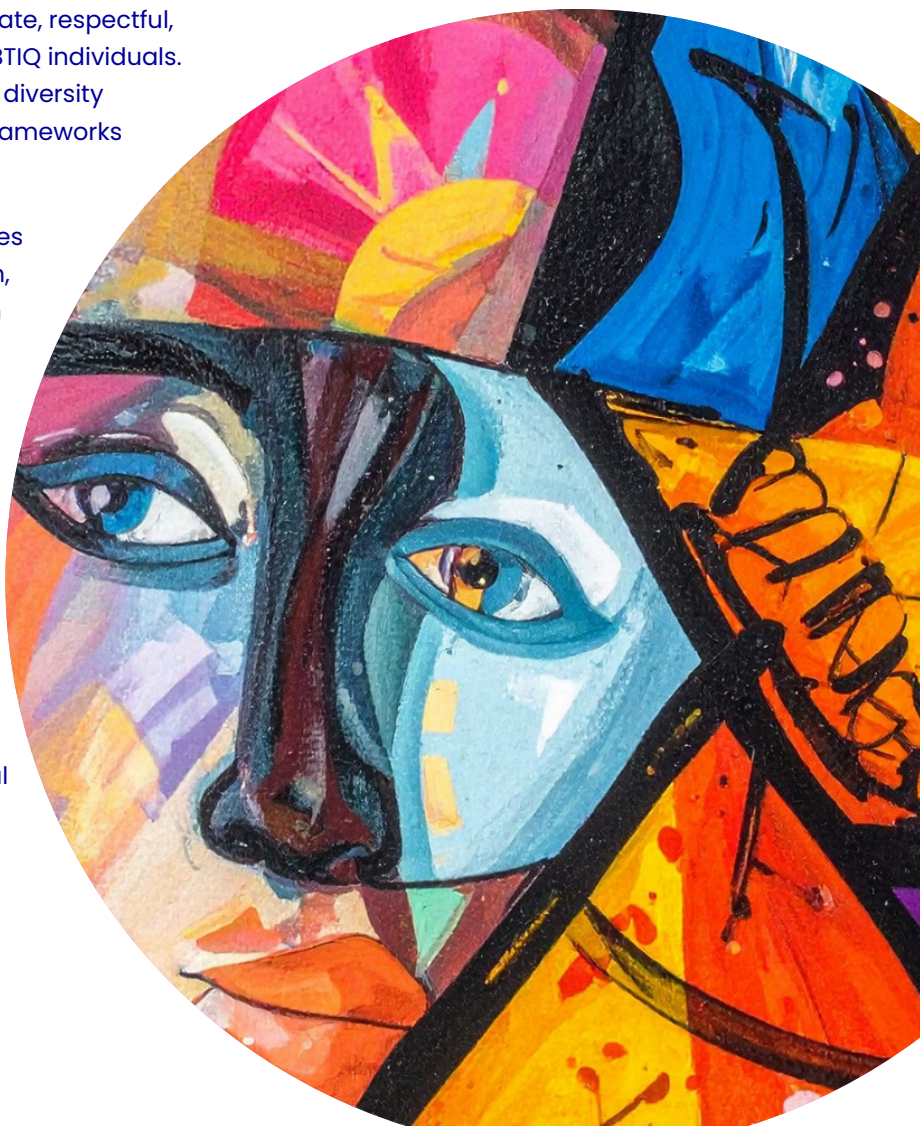
The **Toolkit for Mental Health Providers Working With Survivors of Conversion Practices in Africa** is a resource designed to equip practitioners with the knowledge, frameworks, and tools to provide affirming, trauma-informed care. Grounded in the cultural, historical, and systemic realities of the African context, this toolkit bridges the gap between theory and practice, empowering providers to support survivors of conversion practices in ways that are sensitive, effective, and ethical.

This toolkit seeks to address the long-term harm caused by conversion practices, which attempt to suppress or alter an individual's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Survivors often face enduring psychological, emotional, and social challenges, compounded by systemic stigma and societal rejection. This resource enables providers to navigate these complexities and deliver survivor-centered care that promotes healing and empowerment.

The toolkit provides mental health providers with:

Clarity on terminology and concepts to ensure accurate, respectful, and affirming communication when working with LGBTIQ individuals. This includes an understanding of sexual and gender diversity contextualized within African cultural and historical frameworks

- A foundation in the cultural, historical, and systemic forces that shape LGBTIQ experiences in Africa, including the legacies of colonialism, religious stigma, and systemic discrimination
- Insights into the lived realities, pathways, and needs of survivors of conversion practices, highlighting both the harm they endure and their capacity for resilience
- Practical strategies for creating safe, affirming, and empowering therapeutic relationships tailored to survivors' unique needs
- Tools and resources to support providers' self-care, reflective practice, and professional ethics, recognizing the emotional demands of this work



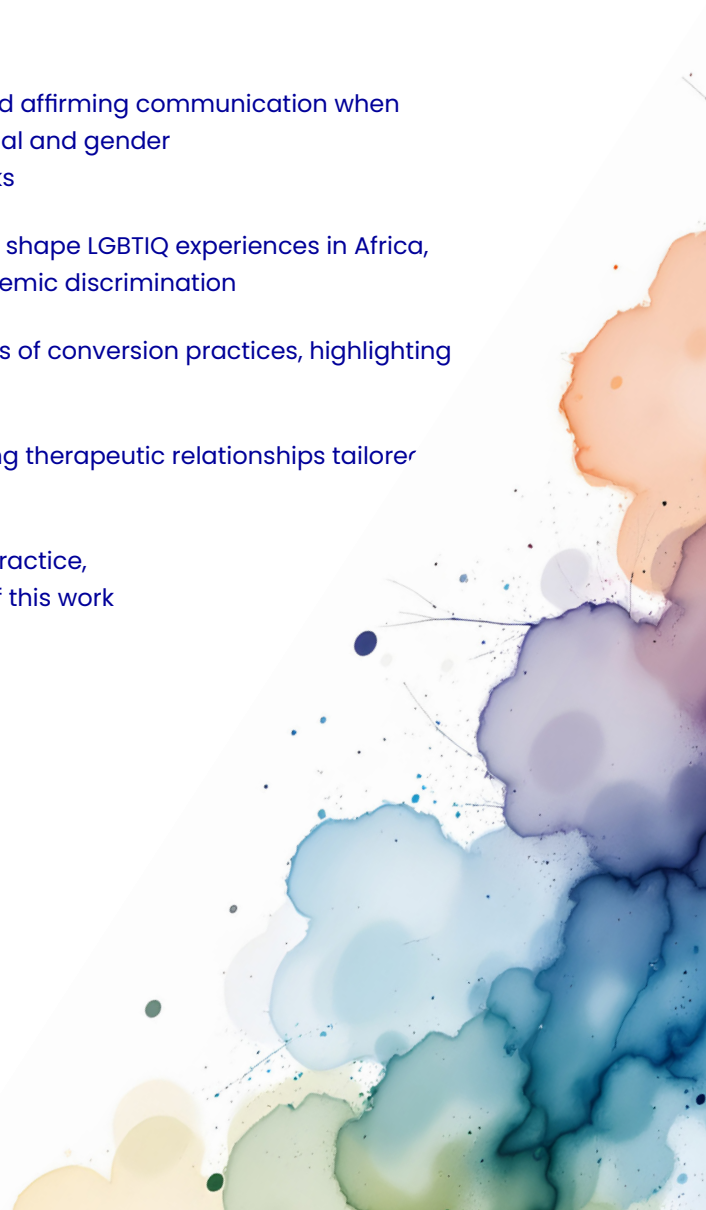
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Key Objectives

THE TOOLKIT AIMS TO:

Clarity on terminology and concepts to ensure accurate, respectful, and affirming communication when working with LGBTIQ individuals. This includes an understanding of sexual and gender diversity contextualized within African cultural and historical frameworks

1. Equip mental health providers with the contextual knowledge needed to offer culturally responsive, affirming care in African settings
2. Deepen understanding of survivors' experiences, needs, and recovery pathways to guide survivor-centered interventions
3. Introduce evidence-based frameworks, including affirmative practice and trauma-informed care, to create safe, ethical therapeutic environments

Offer adaptable tools and guidelines that address survivors' unique challenges while supporting providers in maintaining their own well



Overview of the Guidelines

GUIDELINE 1: Creating a Safe and Affirming Environment

Creating an environment of safety is the foundation for effective care. Survivors of conversion practices often carry deep mistrust and fear of judgement due to their experiences. By incorporating visible affirming symbols, inclusive language, and practices that prioritize confidentiality and safety, providers communicate acceptance and care from the outset

GUIDELINE 2: Rebuilding Trust in the Therapeutic Relationship

Rebuilding trust after the harm caused by conversion practices is a complex but vital process. Survivors' autonomy and identity have often been invalidated, making it essential to establish clear boundaries, maintain transparency, and engage in collaborative decision-making. Trust-building is framed as a gradual, mutual process where survivors regain confidence in themselves, others, and the therapeutic relationship.

GUIDELINE 3: Navigating Trauma Responses and Emotional Regulation

Survivors of conversion practices often struggle with trauma triggers and emotional overwhelm. This guideline equips them with tools to identify triggers, regulate emotions, and build resilience. Foundational concepts such as the window of tolerance and grounding techniques help create a sense of stability and safety, enabling survivors to reclaim control and fully engage in their healing journey.

GUIDELINE 4: Healing From Loss, Shame, and Regret: Finding Hope and Meaning

Survivors frequently experience grief, shame, and regret related to their experiences. This guideline supports them in processing these emotions, reframing their narratives, and rediscovering a sense of hope and purpose. By fostering self-compassion and growth, survivors can find meaning and move forward in their lives with renewed confidence.

GUIDELINE 5: Reclaiming and Affirming Identity

The harm of conversion practices often leaves survivors disconnected from their authentic selves. This guideline supports them in exploring, affirming, and celebrating their multifaceted identities. By addressing internalized stigma and rejection, survivors can rebuild self-esteem. Culturally nuanced approaches also help them reclaim and celebrate pride in their LGBTIQ and African identities.

GUIDELINE 6: Building Resilience and Strength

This guideline focuses on helping survivors identify and develop their inner strengths. Strategies include normalizing fear, introducing gradual exposure to challenges, and celebrating successes. These tools empower survivors to rebuild self-confidence, approach life with courage, and regain a sense of stability and empowerment.

GUIDELINE 7: Establishing Boundaries and Safety in Relationships

Navigating crisis situations can be overwhelming for survivors, especially those experiencing intense emotional distress. This guideline helps survivors create personalized crisis management plans, implement harm-reduction approaches, and use grounding techniques to stay safe and regain control during high-risk situations. These strategies empower survivors to feel prepared and supported in moments of uncertainty.

GUIDELINE 8: Managing Crisis Situations and Emotional Distress

Survivors frequently experience grief, shame, and regret related to their experiences. This guideline supports them in processing these emotions, reframing their narratives, and rediscovering a sense of hope and purpose. By fostering self-compassion and growth, survivors can find meaning and move forward in their lives with renewed confidence.

GUIDELINE 9: Reconnecting with Significant Others

Rebuilding relationships with supportive friends, mentors, or communities can reduce isolation and foster belonging. This guideline focuses on planning safe, meaningful interactions and re-establishing connections in ways that feel affirming and empowering. Survivors are encouraged to prioritize emotional readiness, communicate openly, and maintain boundaries to protect their well-being.

GUIDELINE 10: Supporting Clients With Spiritual, Religious and Cultural Reconciliation

Conversion practices often exploit survivors' spiritual and cultural identities, leaving lasting harm. This guideline provides support for survivors to reclaim or redefine these aspects of their lives on their terms. By offering non-judgmental, affirming guidance, providers help survivors navigate complex experiences and rebuild a sense of connection to their values, beliefs, and traditions.

GUIDELINE 11: Exploring Intimacy, Romance, and Sexual Well-Being

This guideline addresses the challenges survivors face in reclaiming intimacy and connection. Survivors are supported in unpacking internalized shame, recognizing trauma responses, and exploring intimacy in ways that feel safe and empowering. By defining healthy boundaries and embracing diverse expressions of connection, survivors can reclaim a sense of sexual and emotional well-being at their own pace.

GUIDELINE 12: Navigating Complex Family Dynamics

Families often play a central role in survivors' experiences, both as sources of harm and potential healing. This guideline helps survivors explore family relationships, address feelings of betrayal, and set appropriate boundaries. Survivors are encouraged to navigate intergenerational differences, foster reconciliation where possible, and find balance between biological and chosen families.

GUIDELINE 13: Engaging Safely in Digital Spaces and Building Online Connections

Digital spaces can be both a source of connection and risk for survivors. This guideline equips survivors with strategies to navigate online spaces safely, manage harmful interactions, and build affirming digital networks. Emphasizing digital literacy and privacy, it fosters confidence in engaging with supportive online communities.

GUIDELINE 14: Identifying and Addressing Disinformation and Misinformation

Survivors often encounter harmful narratives or misinformation about LGBTIQ identities. This guideline promotes critical thinking and media literacy, helping survivors recognize bias and challenge disinformation. Providers can guide survivors in accessing credible, affirming information, empowering them to combat stigma and misinformation.

GUIDELINE 15: Navigating Power and Privilege in the Therapeutic Relationship

Providers play a critical role in creating equitable and respectful therapeutic relationships. This guideline encourages practitioners to reflect on their own power and privilege, ensuring culturally humble and survivor-centered care. Collaborative approaches prioritize survivors' voices, fostering trust, empowerment, and a sense of shared purpose in the therapeutic process.

GUIDELINE 16: Self-Care for the Mental Health-Care Provider

Supporting survivors of conversion practices can be deeply meaningful and rewarding work, but it also requires intentional self-care to sustain emotional resilience. This guideline encourages providers to reflect on their own boundaries, seek supervision or peer support, and engage in practices that maintain their well-being. By nurturing themselves, providers are better equipped to offer compassionate, affirming care and remain fully present in their work.