

**For immediate release**

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## **New campaign: ‘Modern’ conversion therapy is telling children they can be the opposite sex**

**Sex Matters is calling for a ban on treatments that modify the sexual characteristics of minors, many of whom are likely to grow up to be gay**

Human-rights campaign group Sex Matters has launched a new campaign to ban modern forms of conversion therapy that seek to treat children, young people and vulnerable people with interventions that seek to change physiological or other attributes of sex.

Many, though not all, young people who seek treatment to modify their sexual characteristics are same-sex attracted and a growing body of evidence suggests that they may be drawn to this treatment because they feel that their sexual orientation is unacceptable.

Sex Matters is campaigning for legislation that outlaws all medical or surgical treatment of minors to modify their sexual characteristics, as well as medical or surgical treatment performed on anyone who thinks it will change their sex. The group is also calling for it to be a specific offence not to provide adequate information and ensure informed consent, and for it to be an offence to take a child abroad to get around the prohibition of modern conversion therapy. The group says such legislation could use the model of laws against FGM and virginity-testing.

Recent campaigns to ban conversion therapy focus on examples of abuse that took place more than 50 years ago, and there is no evidence that these abusive practices historically labelled "gay conversion therapy" continue today.

Sex Matters therefore says that any law to ban conversion therapy should seek to solve problems that exist today, not symbolically fight the battles of yesterday.

Maya Forstater, executive director of Sex Matters, said:

“Making new laws to ban historical forms of conversion therapy makes about as much sense as it would to make new laws to ban the historical slave trade instead of modern forms of slavery.

“Modern conversion therapy is telling children that they can be the opposite sex, which if they are going to grow up to be gay makes them ‘straight’.

“In the strongest possible terms, we are calling for a ban on harmful and misleading practices that are targeting minors and vulnerable people. Puberty is a human right.”

Increasing numbers of same-sex attracted children are being prescribed drugs that halt the natural progression of puberty, and cross-sex hormones that cause secondary sexual characteristics of

the opposite sex to develop. Some go on to have irreversible surgery to remove their breasts, genitals or internal sexual organs.

Helen Joyce, director of advocacy at Sex Matters, said:

“Thousands of gay children in the UK are being told that they have been ‘born in the wrong body’, with many pushed into interventions that impede their sexual and reproductive functions throughout adulthood. It is nothing short of a scandal and is modern conversion therapy by definition.

“What happened to gay people in the past was unforgivable and harmful beyond belief. Given that those practices are already illegal, any new legislative measures must focus on current modern conversion-therapy practices.”

There is increasing evidence of patients who made decisions when they were too young or vulnerable, had confounding mental-health issues that were not addressed or were acting due to internalised homophobia or misogyny. Others made decisions based on unrealistic expectations, such as that hormones or surgery could actually change their sex, and many had not been given full information about the effects of the treatment (for example on fertility and adult sexual function) or were too young to understand them. Some made decisions based on misrepresentation of the law suggesting that other people can be forced to accept them as the opposite sex.

Sex Matters will be sharing its proposal with legislators over the coming weeks.

## Notes for editors

### Links and resources:

- *Banning modern conversion therapy* policy proposal (includes case studies), October 2023: <https://sex-matters.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Banning-modern-conversion-therapy.pdf>
- *It's time to ban modern conversion therapy* blog post, 25th October 2023: <https://sex-matters.org/modern-conversion>
- Conversion therapy resources: <https://sex-matters.org/conversion-therapy-resources/>

### About Sex Matters

Sex Matters is a human-rights organisation co-founded in 2021 by Maya Forstater, who is its director, to campaign for sex-based rights. It lobbies for clarity on sex in law and institutions; publishes research, guidance and analysis; supports and mobilises people to speak up; and holds organisations accountable.

### About Maya Forstater

Maya Forstater is co-founder and executive director of Sex Matters. In 2019 she lost her job as a researcher with the European arm of American think-tank Center for Global Development, after tweeting and writing about sex and gender. She was the claimant in the landmark test case which

established that the protected characteristic of belief in the Equality Act covers gender-critical beliefs. Her website is [forstater.com](https://forstater.com) and she tweets @MForstater.

### **About Helen Joyce**

Helen Joyce is a journalist and author of *Trans: When Ideology Meets Reality*, an Amazon top ten bestseller, and *Times of London* and *Spectator* book of the year (recently reissued as *Trans: Gender Identity and the New Battle for Women's Rights*). She was a staff journalist at *The Economist* between 2005 and 2022, holding several senior positions, including International editor, Finance editor and Britain editor. She is director of advocacy for Sex Matters. Her newsletter can be found at [thehelenjoyce.com](https://thehelenjoyce.com).

**Sex Matters** is a human-rights organisation campaigning for clarity about sex in law, policy and language | [sex-matters.org](https://sex-matters.org)