



RELIGIOUS TRAUMA & THE LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY

ANCHORED COUNSELLING SERVICES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

I would like to honour the traditional custodians of
the land we live and work on.

Today I am on Gundungarra Land.

I pay my respects to the Elders past, present and
emerging for they hold the memories, the traditions
and cultures of our First Nations Peoples. I also pay
respect to any First Nations people joining us
today.

We must always remember that the land below our
feet is, was and always will be Aboriginal Land.



ARTWORK: BIGI NAGALA



INTRODUCTION

- Registered Therapist & Clinical Supervisor since 2017
- Specialising in religious trauma, faith deconstruction, and supporting the LGBTQIA+ community.
- Joined by sweet & intuitive Naya in the room.
- Podcast host of 'Beyond the Surface' & 'Inside the Therapy Room'.

Outside of the therapy room

- Wife to Chrissy
- Spirituality and knowledge seeker
- Cricket & reality tv obsessed

MY STORY



Despite not being raised with religion, I was exposed to teachings that deemed my attraction to women as immoral and sinful through the church I attended.

The cognitive dissonance was real; I had no sense of who I was, only who I was supposed to be. The only thing that I knew for sure was that I loved God, and I had a deeply personal relationship with Him.

It all changed when I met, dated and eventually married Chrissy, I lost my church, my community, my friends and my second family. I lost everything that made me who I was; eventually I lost my faith as I had always known it.

WEBINAR OVERVIEW

01 Definition of Key Terms

02 Understanding Religious Trauma

03 Intersection with LGBTQIA+ Identities

04 Trauma-Informed Care

05 Affirming Therapy and Creating a Safe Space

06 Q&A and Discussion

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Religious Trauma

Religious Trauma occurs when a person's religious experiences results in an emotional, physical or psychological response that is disruptive, overwhelming or leads to adverse effects.

LGBTQIA+

Acronym stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual. The + includes all people who fall outside of heteronormativity.



Conversion Therapy/Practices

Conversion therapy, refers to a range of practices aimed at changing an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity. These practices are based on the false premise that being LGBTQIA+ is a mental illness that needs to be cured.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS



Cisgender & Heteronormativity

"Cisgender" refers to individuals whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.

"Heteronormativity" is the assumption or belief that heterosexuality is the norm or default sexual orientation.

Homophobia/Transphobia

"Homophobia" and "Transphobia" refers to prejudice, discrimination, or hostility directed towards individuals who are attracted to people of the same sex or towards transgender or gender non-conforming individuals.

WHAT IS IT LIKE FOR LGBTQIA+ PEOPLE IN RELIGIOUS SPACES.



- Rejection by Religious Communities
- Family Estrangement
- Conversion Therapy/Practices
- Internalised Homophobia/Transphobia
- Fear of Divine Punishment
- Exclusion from Religious Rituals
- Subjected to Traumatizing Religious Rituals
- Misinformation about LGBTQIA+ Identities
- Public Shaming and Stigmatisation
- Conflict with Self-Identity
- Pressure to Conform
- Lack of Affirming Religious Spaces
- Spiritual Distress
- Loss of Faith and Community

COMMON SOURCES OF RELIGIOUS TRAUMA FOR LGBTQIA+ INDIVIDUALS

DOGMATIC TEACHINGS

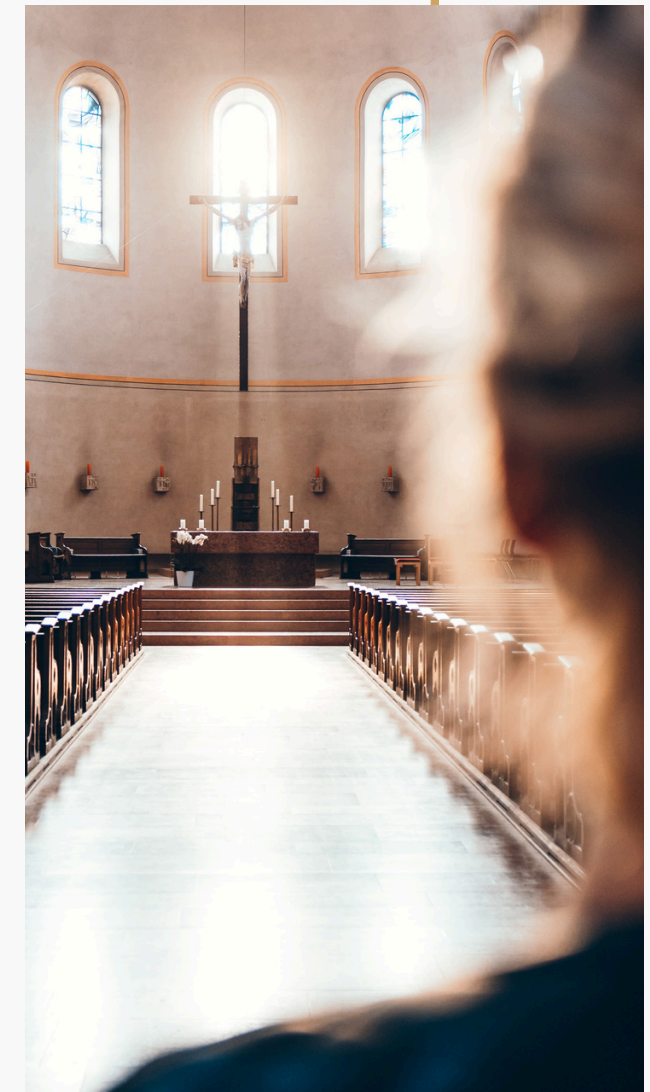
- Rigid and inflexible religious doctrines.
- Teachings that label LGBTQIA+ identities as sinful or immoral.
- Literal interpretations of religious texts that condemn LGBTQIA+ lifestyles.

EXCLUSION & REJECTION

- Being ostracised or shunned by religious communities.
- Family rejection due to religious beliefs.
- Loss of social support networks within religious settings.

CONVERSION THERAPY & PRACTICES

- Forced participation in conversion therapy aimed at changing sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Psychological and emotional abuse associated with these practices.



INTERNALISED HOMOPHOBIA/TRANSPHOBIA

- Internal conflict trying to reconcile LGBTQIA+ identity with beliefs
- Feelings of guilt, shame, and self-hatred due to religious indoctrination.
- Struggles with self-acceptance and identity.

FEAR OF DIVINE PUNISHMENT

- Anxiety and fear related to divine retribution or eternal damnation for being LGBTQIA+.
- Nightmares or intrusive thoughts about religious punishment.
- Hyper-vigilance and avoidance behaviours stemming from fear of spiritual consequences.

ABUSIVE RELIGIOUS LEADERS

- Manipulative or controlling behavior by religious authorities.
- Sexual abuse or exploitation by religious figures.
- Emotional and psychological abuse under the guise of spiritual guidance.

COMMUNITY STIGMATISATION

- Public shaming or discrimination within religious communities.
- Gossip and slander perpetuated by religious members.
- Hostile or unwelcoming church environments.

MISINFORMATION

- Spread of false information about LGBTQIA+ identities within religious teachings.
- Promoting discredited scientific claims about sexuality and gender.
- Encouraging harmful practices based on misinformation.

SUPPRESSION OF AUTHENTIC SELF

- Pressure to conform to heteronormative and cisnormative standards.
- Denial of one's true identity to fit religious expectations.
- Long-term effects of living a double life or inauthentic existence.

RITUALISTIC SHAMING

- Rituals or practices designed to "cleanse" or "purify" LGBTQIA+ individuals.
- Public confessions or ceremonies that reinforce feelings of shame and unworthiness.
- Psychological trauma from being subjected to such rituals.

LACK OF AFFIRMING STRATEGIES

- Scarcity of religious communities that are accepting and affirming.
- Isolation from spiritual support due to lack of inclusive religious spaces.
- Difficulty finding a religious community that aligns with both faith and identity.

IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH, WELLBEING & RELATIONSHIPS

MENTAL HEALTH

- Anxiety - Persistent worry and fear related to religious condemnation, fear of divine punishment, or rejection by religious communities.
- Depression - Feelings of hopelessness, sadness, and worthlessness stemming from internalised religious teachings that condemn their identity.
- PTSD Symptoms - Flashbacks, nightmares, and intrusive thoughts related to traumatic religious experiences. Avoiding places, people, or activities that remind them of the trauma, such as religious institutions or family gatherings.



MENTAL HEALTH

- Internalised Homophobia/Transphobia - Deep-seated self-loathing due to religious teachings that view LGBTQIA+ identities as sinful. Overwhelming feelings of guilt and shame about their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Low Self-Esteem/Worth - Believing they are inherently flawed or unworthy of love and acceptance. Struggling to develop a positive and authentic sense of self.
- Substance Abuse & Self-Harm - Increased risk of using drugs, alcohol, or self-harm as a way to cope with emotional pain and distress.



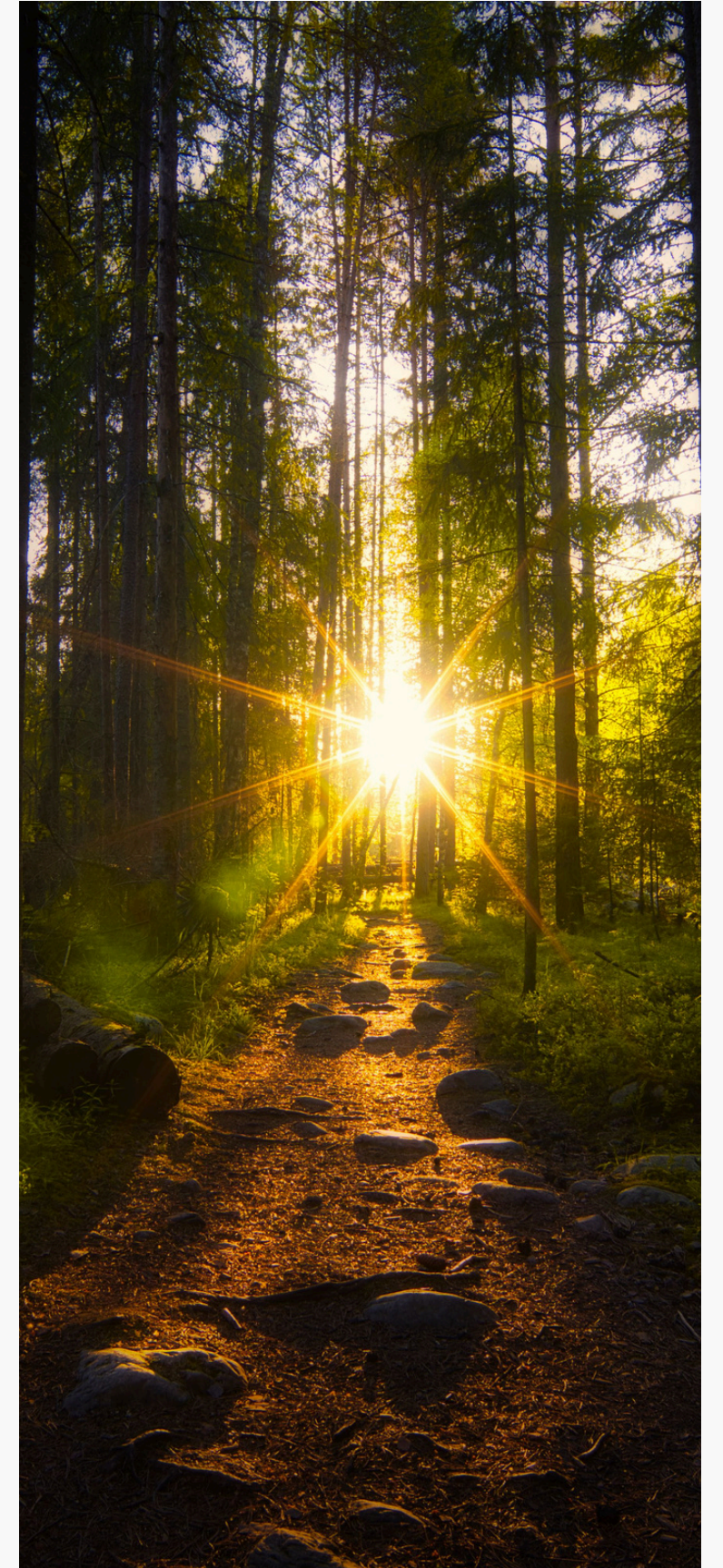
WELLBEING

- Stress - Stress-related physical health issues, such as headaches, gastrointestinal problems, and chronic pain. Constant mental strain leading to burnout and emotional exhaustion.
- Grief - Loss of community, loss of support, sometimes loss of family and friendships. For some there is a loss of faith and relationship with the divine. Loss of purpose, certainty and stability that church and religious beliefs brought.
- Spiritual Distress - Struggles with faith and spiritual beliefs, feeling abandoned by or disconnected from their religion. Questioning life's meaning and purpose, leading to existential anxiety and despair.



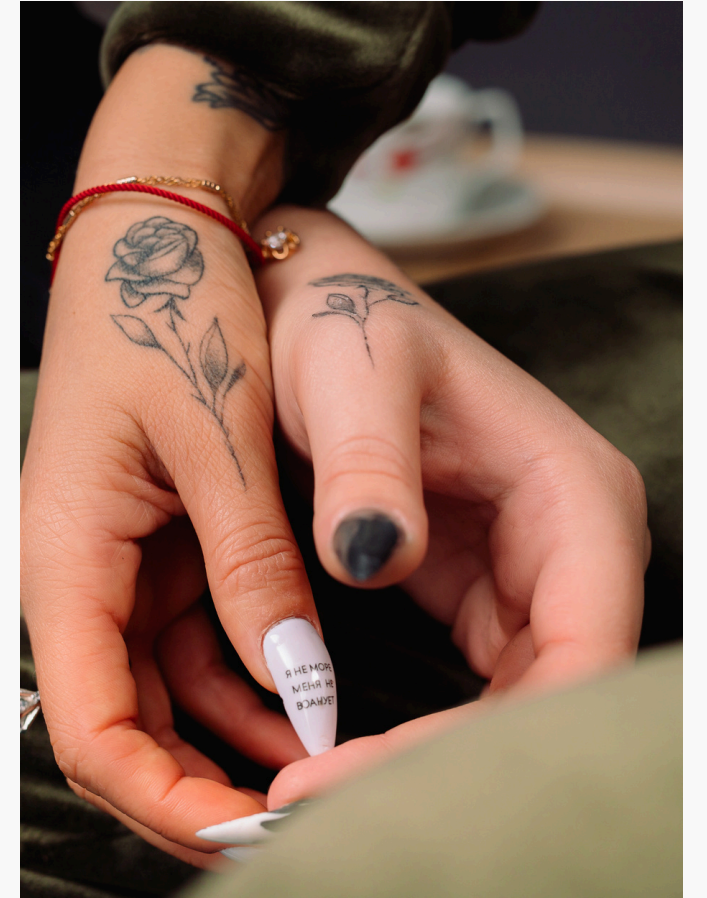
WELLBEING

- Difficulty with stillness/mindfulness - Trouble being still or present due to an overactive mind filled with trauma-related thoughts, as well as former association with prayer. Difficulty engaging in mindfulness or meditation, which may trigger traumatic memories or discomfort.
- Spiritual Bypassing - Pressure to "stay positive" or "focus on the good," which invalidates real feelings of pain and trauma. Using spirituality to bypass dealing with trauma, leading to unresolved emotional issues and hindered healing processes.



RELATIONSHIPS

- Family Relationships - Strained or severed relationships with family members who hold rigid religious beliefs. Feeling unsupported or rejected by family due to their LGBTQIA+ identity.
- Romantic Relationships - Difficulty trusting partners, especially if past relationships were affected by religious trauma. Challenges in forming and maintaining intimate relationships due to fear of rejection or shame. Sexual shame due to purity culture impact.
- Friendships - Reluctance to form close friendships due to fear of being judged or abandoned if their LGBTQIA+ identity is revealed. Feeling isolated from former friends within religious communities who may not accept their LGBTQIA+ identity.
- Support Systems - Struggling to find supportive and affirming networks, leading to feelings of isolation. Also, a heavy reliance on LGBTQIA+ friendly spaces for support, which might not always be available.
- Isolation & Loneliness - Distancing self from social interactions and support systems due to fear of judgment or rejection. Intense feelings of loneliness and isolation from being cut off from both religious and LGBTQIA+ communities.



THE IMPACT OF SOCIETY & CULTURE



- Widespread Homophobia/Transphobia: Societal prejudice and discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals contribute to feelings of fear and isolation.
- Legal Discrimination: Laws and policies that discriminate against LGBTQIA+.
- Negative Media Representation: Stereotypical or negative portrayals of LGBTQIA+ individuals in media perpetuate harmful stereotypes and bias.
- Lack of Legal Protections: Absence of legal safeguards leaves LGBTQIA+ individuals more susceptible to discrimination and abuse.
- Pressure to Conform to Heteronormative Norms: Societal pressure to adhere to heterosexual and cisgender norms.

THE IMPACT OF SOCIETY & CULTURE



- Cultural Expectations and Traditions: Traditional cultural practices and expectations often exclude or marginalise LGBTQIA+ individuals.
- Discrimination: Systemic discrimination within institutions such as schools, workplaces, and healthcare systems.
- Bullying and Harassment: Persistent bullying and harassment in various settings lead to significant psychological distress.
- Marginalisation of LGBTQIA+ Voices: LGBTQIA+ individuals often have their experiences and voices ignored or invalidated in broader societal narratives.
- Economic Disadvantage and Job Discrimination: Employment discrimination and economic inequities disproportionately affect LGBTQIA+ individuals, compounding their stress and trauma.

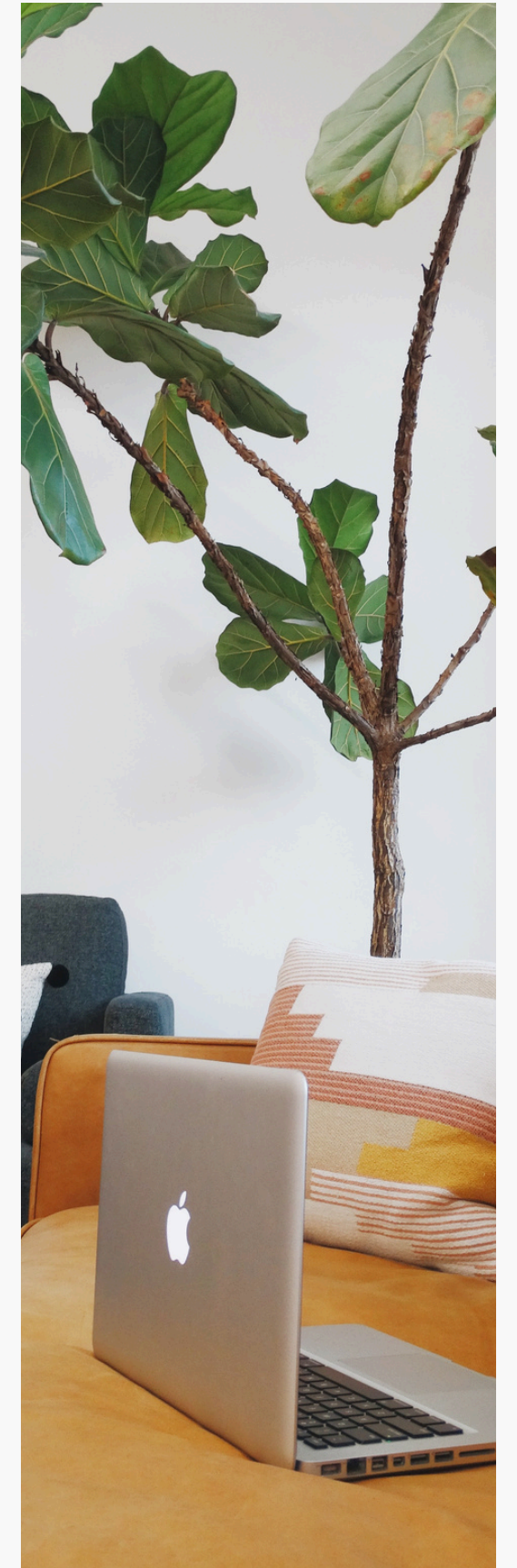
WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

- LGBTQIA+ individuals are at higher risk for mental health issues, with depression rates being 3-4 times higher and anxiety rates being twice as high compared to the general population.
- A report by La Trobe University found that 75.7% of LGBTQIA+ young people experienced high or very high psychological distress, compared to 11.9% of the general youth population.
- A survey conducted by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society found that 60% of LGBTQIA+ individuals who had grown up in religious environments reported negative impacts on their mental health.
- The same study highlighted that 35% of respondents had experienced conversion therapy or pressure to change their sexual orientation or gender identity within religious settings.
- Research by the Equality Australia organisation indicates that LGBTQIA+ individuals face significant discrimination in religious schools and institutions, with many reporting feelings of exclusion and fear of being outed.

TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

SAFETY

- Create a welcoming and affirming space, free from symbols that might trigger religious trauma. Ensure the environment is inclusive of LGBTQIA+ identities (e.g., inclusive signage, literature).
- Use language that respects the client's gender identity, sexual orientation, and religious background.
- Validate clients' experiences and feelings. Make it clear that their stories are heard and respected.
- Regularly affirm the client's identity and choices. Acknowledge their autonomy and encourage self-advocacy.



TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

COMPETENCY

- Show an understanding of the unique challenges faced by individuals dealing with religious trauma and those within the LGBTQIA+ community.
- Regularly engage in professional development to stay informed about issues related to religious trauma and LGBTQIA+ experiences.
- Provide or suggest resources (books, articles, online forums) that address both religious trauma and LGBTQIA+ issues.
- Know your own scope, and know when you need to refer on to someone else.



AFFIRMING THERAPY FOR LGBTQIA+ CLIENTS

WELCOMING

A welcoming environment is inclusive and non-discriminatory. It involves creating a space where LGBTQIA+ clients feel accepted and safe.

Examples include using inclusive language, displaying rainbow flags, and not making assumptions about a client's gender or sexual orientation.

AFFIRMING

Affirming therapy takes this a step further by actively validating and celebrating LGBTQIA+ identities. It involves acknowledging the unique challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals, providing specific support for these challenges, and advocating for their rights and well-being.

Affirming therapy is proactive, intentional, and deeply supportive of the client's identity.



PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

INCLUSIVITY

- Always use the client's chosen name and pronouns. If you're unsure, ask respectfully and consistently use the correct ones.
- Familiarise yourself with LGBTQIA+ terminology and use it appropriately. Avoid outdated or offensive terms.
- Display LGBTQIA+ symbols, such as pride flags or inclusive posters, in your office, website and social media.
- Have LGBTQIA+ affirming books, pamphlets, and referral lists available in your practice.

EDUCATION

- Participate in ongoing training about LGBTQIA+ issues, identities, and experiences.
- Stay updated with the latest research and best practices in LGBTQIA+ affirming therapy.



SUPPORTING & UNDERSTANDING

- Support clients through the process of coming out, recognising it can be a significant and stressful experience.
- Understand and address the unique stressors faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals, such as discrimination, micro-aggressions, and internalised homophobia/transphobia.
- Be aware of the intersecting identities (e.g race, disability) that might affect the client's experience.

ADVOCATE

- When you hear discriminatory remarks or witness unfair treatment, speak up. Also share positive and affirming content. Like, share, and comment on content that promotes LGBTQIA+ rights and visibility.
- Support policies and legislation that protect LGBTQIA+ rights. Participate in rallies, marches, and community events that support LGBTQIA+ rights.





DON'T BE
AFRAID TO BE
A LOUD ALLY.



QUESTIONS?
COMMENTS?
THOUGHTS?



RESOURCES

EMBRACING QUEERNESS & FAITH - A REFLECTIVE JOURNEY

The workbook is 204 pages and is designed to be a safe space for individuals to explore and reconcile their Queer identity with their spiritual beliefs, regardless of their specific faith or religion. This workbook is not about breaking down doctrine or referencing specific scriptures, instead is about personal reflection and exploration.

INTRODUCTION TO RELIGIOUS TRAUMA

Blurb...

A SHATTERED SANCTUARY: FROM FELLOWSHIP TO FREEDOM

In this raw and real journey, I invite you to join me as I navigate through the highs and lows, the twists and turns of my own life. My hope is that as you read, you'll not only find pieces of yourself mirrored in my words but also feel seen, believed, and valued in your own unique narrative.



LET'S CONNECT

E-mail	info@anchoredcounsellingservices.com.au
Website	www.anchoredcounsellingservices.com.au
Phone	0497 630 574
Socials	@anchoredcounsellingservices