

MOVIE KIT

THE MISEDUCATION OF CAMERON POST



DISCLAIMER: This movie kit is an unofficial guide for parents and ministry leaders in discussing the movie *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* and the topics therein. While this guide includes comments and criticisms on the film and its themes, neither this guide nor Lead Them Home are affiliated with or officially endorsed by any of the film's directors, writers, actors, or distributors.



This year, **conversion therapy** (the practice of attempting to change a person's sexual orientation) — along with questions about its effectiveness and potential harm and risks — has come into light of a national discussion. Multiple states have already outlawed the practice for minors and now California is proposing to ban the practice all together. This has spurred the creation of movies like ***The Miseducation of Cameron Post*** and ***Boy Erased***, presenting stories of LGBT+ teens who have gone through such therapies.

Here at Lead Them Home, we do not, have not, nor will we ever practice or endorse conversion therapy. We do not participate in politics or culture war activities. Our goal is to **increase family acceptance, enhance church inclusion, and nurture faith identity of LGBT+ individuals**. Even while conversion therapy unfortunately often affects those three areas, we want to help churches and families use movies like *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* to initiate healthy discussions on the topic and its impact on the lives of LGBT+ people and their relationship with the church.

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Movie Summary

In 1993, Cameron Post (Chloë Grace Moretz) is caught in the backseat of a car kissing the prom queen Coley Taylor (Quinn Shephard) and is outed as a lesbian. This causes her aunt Ruth to send her to a remote treatment center called God's Promise, where she is subjected to gay conversion therapy.

Cameron bonds with her fellow camp attendees and plays along with the therapies until she is released.



Audience Appropriateness

The movie sends a powerful message about the dangers of conversion therapy camps that develop over time due to internalized trauma and self-hatred. Issues including identity, shame, and guilt are explored within the context of sexuality and adolescence. Parents can use this as an opportunity to speak to their children about the need to find safe, protected spaces to share about their struggles without the expectation of judgment or correction.

In one pivotal scene, a student at the conversion therapy camp is asked to describe any cases of abuse during her time there. The movie raises the question of whether emotional and spiritual abuse can be just as damaging, if not more so, than physical abuse.

There are several uses of profanity, including the F-word. Several scenes depict women kissing other women, including a few scenes where women bring each other to orgasm. A woman's breast is shown, but no further nudity. There is one scene of off-screen violence in the form of self-mutilation; blood is shown, but no explicit actions are seen. Young adults also wander off to smoke marijuana.

Movie Discussion Questions

1. What kinds of attitudes towards the question of "change" were exhibited by the staff at God's Promise?
2. Cameron claims that the camp is "programming kids to hate themselves." In what ways do you see her allegations reinforced throughout the movie?
3. How does the movie use the theme of isolation and loneliness in its story, setting, dialogue, and ending?
4. What examples of harmful gender roles and stereotypes are the students (both girls and boys) pressured with at God's Promise?
5. What function does the iceberg diagram serve in the movie? Why or why not is this helpful for the students at God's Promise?
6. How does the movie depict trauma as opposed to the way the staff at God's Promise view trauma?
7. How are Dr. Walsh's clinical methods and psychological motivations helpful or harmful to the students at God's Promise?

Ask Lead Them Home

Adapted from *Guiding Families of LGBT+ Loved Ones*, available at leadthemhome.org

1. Can Gay People Change?

Most people, gay or straight, do not experience a material change in their orientation over their lifetime.

When change is reported, it primarily involves three common scenarios: (1) a young person growing through a questioning stage of development, (2) a woman finding security being in an intimate relationship with another woman for a time, and (3) a man or woman recovering from molestation or sexual experimentation.

2. Is there a difference between Conversion Therapy and Reparative Therapy?

Conversion therapy refers to an umbrella of many different practices which are used with the primary objective of *changing a person's sexual orientation from gay to straight*. It has included treatments all the way from shock therapy and chemical castration to psychoanalytic therapy and spiritual interventions.

Reparative therapy, though at times used as an interchangeable term with conversion therapy, refers to a specific kind of therapy associated with the psychologists Elizabeth Moberly and Joseph Nicolosi based on the theory that same-sex attraction is a person's rational and unconscious attempt to "self-repair" feelings of inferiority and the lack of healthy attachment with the person's same-gender parent and peers.

3. Does Reparative Therapy Work?

Lead Them Home has never engaged in **reparative therapy (RT)**. Adults making an informed and voluntary decision to pursue RT should not be ridiculed. **Parents, however, should never force a minor or young adult into such treatment.** In many states, RT is illegal.

Adults report varying levels of success. Some have reported that it worked for a while, but that "change" was unsustainable over time.

To claim that a treatment effectively works, (a) it should be helpful across a wide range of individuals and (b) healing should be sustainable over the long-term (permanent). In truth, a number of former proponents who once claimed "healing" (orientation change) are today living in a same-gender relationship. While we do not criticize or want to limit the rights of adults who voluntarily find value in it, we do not recommend reparative therapy.

Lead Them Home has direct reports of RT **severely damaging the emotional and mental health of both teenagers and adults, as well as their family members.** For every person, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, the biblical objective is holiness rather than the elimination of temptation.

4. Does Conversion Therapy still occur?

Conversion therapy, though declining in its popularity, still occurs today. Sadly, it mostly occurs in connection to Christian churches and ministries. Reports estimate that 698,000 LGBT+ Americans between the ages of 18 and 59 have undergone conversion therapy at some point in their lives. About 350,000 of those received that treatment as adolescents. The report also estimates that 20,000 LGBTQ youths currently between the ages of 13 and 17 will be subjected to conversion therapy from a licensed healthcare professional before they turn 18 (The Williams Institute, 2018).

For more answers on LGBT+ care, order *Guiding Families of LGBT+ Loved Ones*, at leadthemhome.org/resources.



Additional Video Resources to Discuss

Check out the following video and then discuss using the discussion questions listed below:

1. How Conversion Therapy Affects Your Mental Health

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=naJcqBtHCfM>

1. What did you think of the video?
2. How can you help a LGBT+ person who has been negatively affected by conversion therapy?
3. How would you guide parents of LGBT+ youth who are considering sending their child to conversion therapy?

2. Bridging the Divide: LGBT+ People and the Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7N03xXUIG4k>

Bill Henson, founder and president of Lead Them Home, discusses many of the issues faced by LGBT+ people and how the Church can bridge the gap between the Church and LGBT+ people.

1. How does the video say mistreatment (which forced conversion therapy can be included as) deconstructs the faith identity of LGBT+ people?
2. As Bill says, increasing family acceptance is crucial to nurturing faith identity in LGBT+ people. How does parents sending their children to conversion therapy work against that goal?
3. How can the Church begin to change its history related to the treatment of LGBT+ people and the use of conversion therapy?

Further Reading

Collection of Articles Related to LGBT Victimization

<https://www.leadthemhome.org/victimization>

Scholarly Reports on the Efficacy of Conversion Therapy

<https://whatweknow.inequality.cornell.edu/topics/lgbt-equality/what-does-the-scholarly-research-say-about-whether-conversion-therapy-can-alter-sexual-orientation-without-causing-harm/>



Conversion Therapy and LGBT Youth

<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Conversion-Therapy-LGBT-Youth-Jan-2018.pdf>

Conversion Therapy: Statistics, Dangers, & Christian Hope

According to the Williams Institute (Jan 2018):

- **698,000 adults have received conversion therapy in the U.S.**
- **350,000 of that figure received conversion therapy as adolescents**
- **57,000 youth (ages 13-17) will receive conversion therapy from religious/spiritual advisors**

"I just got done with an interview today. It was about the Exodus situation. I don't think I communicated my thoughts and heart about this very clearly. (I often feel that sense of "I wish I had said that differently." Or "I wish I hadn't framed it that way.")

So let me say this: I don't think there is that much research support for reparative theory or therapy, and that is not an approach I take in my work. But a reparative approach is not the only means by which some people attempt to change orientation. Many have entered into Christian ministries with the hope that they would experience a meaningful change in their sexual orientation. The research on their experiences is limited.

*In the study I worked on (where the focus was on whether orientation could change through involvement in Exodus ministries), the findings did not please anyone on either side of the debate. **Some people reported meaningful change over time, and that change appeared to be change of behavior, identity, and self-reported attractions. But most did not experience as much change as they would have liked, in my view, and even the more successful experiences were still marked by some attraction toward the same sex.***

I think it is wise to have an honest discussion about those kinds of findings — about what that could mean in terms of informed consent to someone who is considering likely outcomes."

— Dr. Mark Yarhouse, Psy.D. (Wheaton College) ¹

As we saw in the video resource **How Conversion Therapy Affects Your Mental Health**, well-intended practices ended up being very damaging to thousands of young people, leading to shame, trauma, and often, a departure from Christianity — or at least, the type of Christianity that was represented to them. Christians may be asking, "Where is God's power, then? If someone's orientation can't change, where is hope?"

Christians do not need to fear the notion that orientation may not change over the course of someone's life. Many of us walk through life with challenges, disabilities, temptations, and weaknesses that will loom with us throughout our days this side of heaven. This isn't evidence of God's weakness; in fact, God can use our weaknesses to demonstrate His strength and sufficiency.

For an LGBT+/SSA person, hope is not in a change in orientation, a life outcome of marriage, or any other circumstance.

Gay or straight, our hope is in nothing other than the person of Jesus. Throughout the Scriptures, we see evidence of men and women finding satisfaction, purpose, spiritual family, and hope in the Gospel whether they were married or unmarried, whether or not they bore children, and whether or not they fit in with cultural expectations for how their family should look. Widows and orphans, a teen virgin mother, an unmarried man named Jesus, and many more find their place in God's plan.

Will God call every non-straight person to marriage? Will God call every non-straight person to celibacy? Perhaps, as in many life questions, the answer may be, "We cannot know, but we can trust and pray that God will make a way that glorifies Him." Rather than prescribing a singular life path for our non-straight friends, our role as missionaries is to demonstrate the heart of God toward people, and to help eliminate injustices that keep them from hearing the voice of God in their lives.

¹<https://psychologyandchristianity.wordpress.com/tag/reparative-therapy/>

Further statements from Dr. Mark Yarhouse on conversion therapy:

<https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2015/04/what-the-white-houses-opposition-to-conversion-therapy-means>

<http://www1.cbn.com/newsroomtalk/archive/2015/04/15/the-conversion-therapy-debate-why-it-matters>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/19/magazine/therapists-who-help-people-stay-in-the-closet.html>

Self-Harm and LGBT+ Young People

Trigger warning: This page discusses self-injury and may contain content that is triggering or distressful. Please skip this page if the content may not be beneficial for you.

What is Self-Harm?

Self-harm is the deliberate, repetitive, and non-suicidal harming of one's body with the aim of relieving emotional distress.

Self-harm may also be called self-injury, self-mutilation, or self-violence. Types of self-harm may include cutting (the most common type of self-harm) and a host of other actions.

According to the Journal of Clinical Psychology:

- 14-38% of teens and young adults self-injure²
- 1.5-4% of U.S. adults self-injure¹
- 75% use multiple methods
- More research is needed on self-harm specifically among LGBT+ youth

Mark's Self-Injury

In *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*, a young man named Mark is a "disciple" at God's Promise, the gay conversion therapy camp that acts as the main setting of the film. One morning, as Mark is approaching graduation from the program, he receives

a letter from his father saying that he must remain at the camp another year because he is still "too effeminate" and is "an embarrassment."

Mark shares the letter during group therapy and suffers a nervous breakdown.

That evening, we follow Cameron into the community bathroom to find blood on the floor of the shower. Shock and confusion leave us uncertain as to what happened. The next day, the counselors

What are some reasons young people self-injure?*

- To relieve emotional tension.
- To distract from emotional pain with physical pain.
- To feel more awake, alive, or real when feeling numb.
- To evoke a good mood (pain can release endorphins).
- To punish oneself due to shame, guilt, or negative self-perception.
- To feel special, unique, or powerful by producing shock or disapproval.
- To produce control or reliability (ex: If I cut, I there will always be blood).

**Not an exhaustive list.*

explain that Mark was taken to the hospital after a self-harming incident. Cameron meets with Reverend Rick, demanding to know what happened. Hesitantly, Rick described the horrific injury to Mark's body. The next day, investigators come to the camp to interview the disciples, but we do not find out what becomes of the camp.

How can Christian parents and leaders care for teens who self-injure?

- **Remain calmly curious** about what is behind the self-injury without making behavior modification the focus.
- **Create safe, consistent emotional space** for teens to express emotions without judgment, punishment, or harsh advice.
- **Ensure your teen has access to a network of support.** Where possible, include licensed counselor, pastors, parent leaders, and teachers.
- **Never "out" an LGBT+ teen without their permission.** Even without outing a teen, professional help can be obtained for potentially the dangerous risks of self-injury.



Further Reading

- [The Razor's Edge \(Christianity Today\)](#)
- [How to Support Someone Who Self-Harms \(Befrienders Worldwide\)](#)
- [Hidden lives: self-harm and the LGBT community \(Pink News\)](#)

¹Prinstein, M. J. (2008). Introduction to the special section on suicide and nonsuicidal self-injury: A review of unique challenges and important directions for self-injury science. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 76(1), 1-8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.76.1.1>

²Walsh, B. (2007). Clinical assessment of self-injury: A practical guide. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 63(11), 1057-1068. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20413>

Jacob's Story

A young Christian man recounts his experience with same-gender attraction and conversion therapy

Gay. I heard the word constantly at school as a 10-year-old. What did it mean? Why was I being called this word? I already knew I was attracted to other boys, but I never had a word for it. Yet "gay" was constantly thrown around in school by bullies to describe me.

So I went home after school one day and, before my parents arrived home, I decided to look it up online. You can imagine what I found: gay porn. My mind finally connected the dots: *I am gay!* I thought. I did not realize, though, how much that day would change my life. As I continued to look on the internet, my parents arrived home and found what I had been looking at. We didn't talk about it for a long time, but I knew one day it would come up. Finally, months later, as we were driving back from taking my sister to college, my parents confronted me with what they had found and informed me they would be taking me to a counselor.

My heart sank, and tears filled my eyes. More people knew about my sexuality than ever before in my life, yet I had never felt so alone.

We went to the counselor, who talked with me about what it means to be a man, yet this talk only seemed to bring me more confusion. I had barely any idea of what it even meant to be gay. **I was 11 years old! How was I supposed to be thinking about the kind of husband I would want to be to a woman?**

I was filled with shame as we went to counseling week after week, and yet outside of counseling sessions, my parents would not address my sexuality. As Christmas approached, all I would ask for was to stop going to counseling. After much pleading, we finally stopped, and my parents and I did not talk about sexuality again for years.

Conversion therapy continued to cause struggles in my mind even after we stopped going. I continued to be bullied in school, even after changing schools and was completely disconnected from my parents. I felt worthless and had no one to whom I could talk to without suggesting more conversion therapy.

Shame was my identity, and solitude was my home.

I ended up dealing with depression and anorexia, as well as suicidal thoughts. My literal closet became my bed

at times because it was the safest place from the world.

I wish I could say that conversion therapy ended with that initial time when I was 11 years old. But throughout my childhood and adolescence, I went to conversion therapy on multiple different occasions, most of them voluntarily or under pressure from church leaders, hoping it would make me straight and take away my depression – and suicidal thoughts (which I was continuously told was a "side effect" of being gay).

I was pushed to look for abuse in my past to the point that I invented possible instances when I was abused which could have caused my homosexuality. Ultimately, heterosexuality became my god in place of God himself.

Conversion therapy and my church's emphasis on it was one of the main factors that drove me from the church. I knew I couldn't become straight and believed what people had told me that I was unacceptable if I did not pursue heterosexuality. So I left and did not return to Christianity for many years.

It took me years after those experiences to realize that God can love me even as a person attracted to the same gender. I worked through and came to realize that my depression and suicidal thoughts stemmed not from being gay, but from the bullying, family disconnection, and even the conversion therapy I experienced as a child. Some of these issues I am still working through as an adult.

Altogether, I am not saying counseling in general has not helped me grow as a person, nor that my parents took me to conversion therapy with bad intentions. I know my parents tried to do what they thought was best and I have since forgiven them for the mistakes they made. What I hope people can take from this is that conversion therapy has little to no success and can be extremely harmful on children and adolescents who are forced or pressured to go through it.

Parents, what your children need from you is your love and an open dialogue to discuss with you what they are going through. Pastors, walk alongside your LGBT+ congregants, helping them know God personally and see that church can be a safe place where they can encounter Him.



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