
Clinical/Therapeutic

American Counseling Association Supports Free Choice In Therapy

Larry Freeman, the American Counseling Association Manager of Ethics and Professional Standards, says the ACA supports free choice in therapy—including the freedom of individuals with same-sex attractions to seek help to overcome these unwanted feelings.

Freeman responded to an email from Pastor Darryl Foster, a former homosexual who currently runs a ministry to homosexuals in Atlanta, Georgia.

In his email, Pastor Foster asked Freeman if ACA's Code of Ethics, Section A.2.B. applies to individuals with SSA. The section states: "Respecting Differences: Counselors will actively attempt to understand the diverse cultural backgrounds of the clients with whom they work. This includes, but is not limited to, learning how the counselor's own cultural/ethical/racial identity impacts her or his values and beliefs about the counseling process."

Freeman responded: "Yes, this code applies to any one who feels or perceives themselves as struggling with an issue that impacts negatively the quality and comfort of their daily life." He notes that if a person's SSA is an issue for him or her, "...the person(s) should have the freedom of choice to seek appropriate treatment for it."

Dr. A. Dean Byrd, a member of NARTH's Scientific

Advisory Committee, is encouraged by the ACA's statement in support of free choice in therapy. "This statement is welcomed by NARTH and by the numerous ex-gay ministries throughout the United States that are involved in helping individuals deal with these unwanted sexual attractions. We hope the various psychological and psychiatric associations will follow ACA's lead on this issue."

Dr. Warren Throckmorton, past president of the American Mental Health Counselors Association and current associate professor of psychology at Grove City College in Pennsylvania concurs. "As a past president of the ACA, I am glad to see this professional body recognize a client's right to self-determination. Further, if a counselor is not equipped to help a person who wants to re-orient their sexuality, then an appropriate referral should be made."

Pastor Foster is also encouraged by the ACA's stand. "As a pastor and one who has experienced satisfying change in my own sexual orientation, I welcome this wise and balanced response which truly values diversity and a client's right to self-determination. It is gratifying to know that struggling men and women seeking changes to sexual feelings won't be relegated to second class status in the mental health field simply because they want to live happier, fulfilling lives."