



# **“Se hacen puentes al andar”**

**A Resource for Parents, Caregivers, and  
Loved Ones of Latino LGBTQ+ Youth**

**NC STATE**

**EXTENSION**





**NC STATE**

EXTENSION



SEXUAL HEALTH  
INITIATIVES FOR TEENS

**NC State Extension** transforms science into everyday solutions for North Carolinians through programs and partnerships focused on agriculture and food, health and nutrition, and 4-H youth development.

**SHIFT NC (Sexual Health Initiatives for Teens)** is a statewide nonprofit leading North Carolina to improve adolescent and young adult sexual health. By increasing awareness, disseminating data, improving policy, supplying professional development, and providing leadership, we are empowering North Carolina's professionals to support healthy development.

© 2022 NC State Extension

Maru Gonzalez<sup>1</sup>, Ed.D, NC State University  
Tania Connaughton-Espino, MPH  
Bianka M. Reese, PhD, MSPH, SHIFT NC

---

<sup>1</sup>For questions related to this resource, contact Maru Gonzalez at [mgonza22@ncsu.edu](mailto:mgonza22@ncsu.edu).

**Suggested citation:**

Gonzalez, M., Connaughton-Espino, T., & Reese, B. (2022). "Se hacen puentes al andar": A Resource for Parents, Caregivers, & Loved Ones of Latino LGBTQ+ Youth. NC State Extension.

**Editor:** Melissa Casey

**Graphic Design:** Amy Eller Marketing

**Reviewers:**

Cintia Aguilar, NC State University  
Kim Allen, NC State University  
Carmen Gonzalez, Latina mother  
Michael Kokozos, Florida International University  
Oscar Patrón, University of Indiana  
Liliana Vega, University of California

Produced in the United States.



# “Se hacen puentes al andar”

**A RESOURCE FOR PARENTS, CAREGIVERS, & LOVED ONES OF LATINO LGBTQ+ YOUTH**

*Caminante, no hay puentes. Se hacen puentes al andar. —Gloria Anzaldúa*

Hello, and thank you for picking up this resource. You’ve likely come across this booklet because you’re the parent, caregiver, or loved one of an LGBTQ+ young person and aren’t sure how to best support them. If so, you’ve come to the right place, as this resource is all about creating what lesbian poet Gloria Anzaldúa referred to as puentes (Spanish for bridges) of solidarity and connection.

We created this resource with the recognition that the path toward affirmation and understanding looks different for everyone. Some parents may experience grief or denial, while others question whether they are in some way at fault. These sentiments take time to process. What’s important is to respond with love and empathy and to continue to move toward greater understanding and acceptance. Our hope is that this booklet will help you along the way.

At its core, “Se hacen puentes al andar” is about highlighting the power of family belonging and the risks associated with family rejection; lack of positive LGBTQ+ representation; and rigid adherence to traditional gender roles. Each story featured is drawn from a study about Latino LGBTQ+ youth belonging<sup>2</sup> within a familial context and includes corresponding research-based and participant-informed recommendations for you—the parent, caregiver, or loved one of an LGBTQ+ youth<sup>3</sup>. This resource also provides foundational content and key research to assist you in your ongoing efforts to create bridges of empathy, support, and understanding.

We look forward to taking this journey with you!

<sup>2</sup>While the stories of the study participants featured in this resource convey the challenges faced by many Latino LGBTQ+ young people, they do not capture the richness, complexity, and diversity of *all* Latino families.

<sup>3</sup>Gonzalez, M., Reese, B., & Connaughton-Espino, T. (2022). “A little harder to find your place:” Examining Latinx LGBTQ+ youth belongingness within a familial context. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, <https://doi.10.1080/10538720.2022.205>

**NC STATE**

**EXTENSION**





The names of the young people whose stories are spotlighted in this resource have been changed to protect their privacy. All featured images are stock photos used solely for illustrative purposes.

### **Acknowledgements**

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to the LGBTQ+ young people who shared their experiences with us.

**As you review this resource, be sure to get acquainted with our glossary of LGBTQ+ related terminology at the end of this booklet, and check out our list of additional resources for more information.**

# The Power of Family Belonging

Family belonging—or the experience of feeling valued by and connected to one’s family—is essential to a young person’s social, emotional, and academic well-being. The desire to belong is particularly true for young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer, or who have an identity that does not conform to dominant social norms related to sexual orientation and gender identity (LGBTQ+).

Among LGBTQ+ youth, research<sup>4</sup> has demonstrated that family acceptance and supportive behaviors contribute to a sense of belonging and lead to:

- higher self-esteem;
- improved mental and physical health;
- improved academic success; and
- decreased rates of depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation.

Despite the well-documented benefits of familial support, aspects of the stories featured in this booklet demonstrate a lack of family acceptance. In fact, research has shown that family rejection and fear of rejection is a top concern for Latino LGBTQ+ youth. According to a study by Kahn and colleagues (2018), 72% of Latino LGBTQ+ youth have heard family members make anti-LGBTQ+ remarks, which exacerbated their fear of rejection.<sup>5</sup>

While such statistics are disheartening, there is reason to be optimistic given the emphasis Latino culture places on family bonding, an attribute at the core of family life for most Latinos and one experienced by all the young people whose stories are featured in this resource. We are hopeful that this centering of love and loyalty to one’s family will be the bridge to deeper understanding, support, and acceptance.

<sup>4</sup>Ryan, C., Russell, S.T., Huebner, D., Diaz, R., & Sanchez, J. (2010). Family acceptance in adolescence and the health of LGBT young adults. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 23, 205–213. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6171.2010.00246.x>

<sup>5</sup>Kahn E., Johnson A., Lee M., & Miranda L. (2018). 2018 Latino LGBTQ youth report. Washington, DC: Human Rights Campaign.





# Mateo's Story

“It’s really hard to keep up the charade.”

Mateo is one of four brothers raised by Mexican parents he described as conservative and devout followers of the Catholic faith. From an early age, Mateo was taught to adhere to rigid gender roles related to masculinity. He remembered being told: “You’re a boy. You do this. You do that.” This message was reinforced frequently, including the time a young Mateo was reprimanded for allowing his cousins to paint his fingernails or the instance he was forced to cut his hair after a classmate called him a girl.

Mateo’s father was especially quick to punish him for not following gender norms and at times even resorted to physical violence: “If he caught me doing something other than what a boy was ‘supposed to do,’ then yes, I would get a beating with either a belt or by hand.” Fearing such repercussions, Mateo made it a point to adhere to his parents’ gender expectations: “I tended to like not go against their wishes because I was afraid that, you know, I’ll be punished harshly by him.”

Despite his best efforts, Mateo, who is bisexual and describes himself as more feminine than most of his male peers, admitted: “It’s really hard to keep up the charade when you can’t really hide yourself because you want to be yourself.”

Mateo has not yet disclosed his sexual orientation to his father out of fear that he will not be supportive. He described his mother’s reaction to his coming out as bisexual as dismissive and invalidating. Specifically, his mother deemed

**Bisexuality—sometimes used interchangeably with pansexuality—is defined as romantic, emotional, and/or sexual attraction to more than one gender.<sup>7</sup>**

**Reinforcing strict gender expectations is harmful to LGBTQ+ youth, as it may contribute to depression, alienation, and lack of self-worth.<sup>6</sup>**

<sup>6</sup>Katz-Wise, S.L., Rosario, M., & Tsappis, M. (2016). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth and family acceptance. *Pediatr Clin North Am*, 63(6), 1011–25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pcl.2016.07.005>

<sup>7</sup>The Trevor Project (2021, June 21) How to support bisexual youth. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-involved/trevor-advocacy/homelessness/>

**Coming out to one's parents or caregivers is an act of courage, especially when there is uncertainty or fear about how they may react. A parent or caregiver's response can either contribute to an overall sense of confidence and self-worth or lead to increased feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, and depression.<sup>8</sup>**

his sexual orientation as “just a phase” because “she doesn’t believe in bisexuality. She says you’re either gay or straight.”

His mom went on to say she would “die of embarrassment” if he ever came out more publicly. Mateo then added: “When I came out to her, she was bringing up the Bible and God and religion. And I told her that I still am Catholic, but I am who I am and you know, you have to see it that way, that not everybody has to be straight just to be Catholic or any other religion.”

In addition to religion, his mom’s perspective has been shaped, in part, by misconceptions and stereotypes about LGBTQ+ people: “I had to explain to her ... what is the lingo because she thinks that if you’re gay, you have to dress as a woman or, you know, become a woman ... I was like, just because I like guys also doesn’t mean that I have to be a girl as well.” And while her tone has started to shift toward acceptance, he says that “she still tries to push me to marry a girl.”

Despite the challenges he’s faced at home, Mateo is embracing his sexuality and growing into his authentic self: “I feel like I’ve grown to the point where ... I know who I am.” Through this process, he has learned to advocate for himself and



### **Haciendo Puentes: Harnessing the Power of Family Belonging**

**Though Mateo described his mom as shifting toward acceptance, she still hangs onto expectations of traditional marriage and family. Building bridges means fully embracing who your child is and letting go of who you expected them to be and what life you might have imagined. Wherever you are in your journey toward acceptance and understanding, continue to listen, learn, and lean into love.**

<sup>8</sup>D’Amico, E., Julien, D., Tremblay, N., & Chartrand, E. (2015). Gay, lesbian, and bisexual youths coming out to their parents: Parental reactions and youths’ outcomes. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 11, 411-437. doi:10.1080/1550428X.2014.981627

others: “All those experiences have shaped me to a point where I can now stand up for myself ....I stand up for what’s right. I stand up for others that can’t stand up for themselves.”

**“All those experiences have shaped me to a point where I can now stand up for myself.... I stand up for others that can’t stand up for themselves.”**

When it comes to his own family, Mateo acknowledged the importance of support and belonging, claiming that feeling fully affirmed in his sexuality would give him the reassurance to “talk about it openly with them, without them being uncomfortable and me feeling awkward.”



## **Haciendo Puentes: Recommendations for Parents, Caregivers, and Loved Ones**

**Learning to fully embrace and support your LGBTQ+ child or loved one is a process that looks different for everyone. Along the way, it’s important to:**

- **provide affirmation and validation when your child comes out and continuously thereafter, even if you’re still learning;**
- **attend support groups, such as those offered through PFLAG, for caregivers and loved ones of LGBTQ+ young people (see resources section at the end of this booklet);**
- **understand that sexuality goes beyond gay and straight by learning about bisexuality and pansexuality; and**
- **recognize that you can both support your LGBTQ+ child or loved one and be a person of faith.**

**When your child or loved one comes out to you:**

- **Thank them for their vulnerability and trust in you.**
- **Tell them that you love and support them.**
- **Commit yourself to growing in your understanding of LGBTQ+ people and issues, including talking to other parents and caregivers of LGBTQ+ youth**
- **Let them know you are there to talk and listen whenever needed.**



# Nina's Story

Being a lesbian and an immigrant “makes it a little harder to find your place.”

Nina came to the U.S. from Mexico with her mother when she was a young child. “[When] we first got here, we lived with some family. But then they went back to Mexico because my grandpa was having, like, some health problems.”

“So, it’s just me and my mom, which was nice, because like, we got really close. But sometimes if something happened, I couldn’t really go to anyone besides my mom. And especially like being gay, that’s not something I really can talk to her about, which was a little isolating in some ways.”

Nina did not think she could be open with her mom about her sexual orientation. She had heard her mom make fun of women who were lesbians and state that “being gay isn’t real.” Nina had many feelings she was not sure how to deal with, and she did not trust anyone enough to share these feelings. Middle school was a particularly difficult time when Nina was trying to understand herself. She referred to this time as her “gay crisis” period: “Already being a middle schooler, you have, like, a lot of insecurities to begin with ... like puberty itself. And then like being gay on top of that was difficult. Middle school was terrible.”

Nina described her mom as caring and more involved than the parents of many of her friends. Like many immigrant working parents, her mom could not always take time off to attend school events. Her mom would take days off for special events, but, says Nina, “we couldn’t really afford to be doing that.”



## **Haciendo Puentes: Harnessing the Power of Family Belonging**

**Nina described her family as grounded in faith. For many families, faith fosters fellowship, belonging, and understanding. Parents and caregivers often lean on their faith as they seek to more fully embrace and affirm their LGBTQ+ child.**

**“And especially like being gay, that’s not something I really can talk to her about, which was a little isolating in some ways.”**





Nina could not have a discussion with her mother about her sexual orientation, but she ended up coming out to her mom during a fight. It did not happen in a way that Nina would have liked: “I had this, like, random fight with my mom about something and I just got so mad. And I was like, “Well, I’m a lesbian, so ....” And then she was like, “No, you’re not.” “I don’t know how it could have gone any differently. I think actually this was the best-case scenario because even though she knows it, I haven’t gotten kicked out yet, which is very good. Because a lot of kids have been kicked out for less ....I’m grateful for that.”

Family is very important to Nina and she still hides who she truly is from the rest of her family. Her fear of being kicked out of her home also includes a fear of having to cut all ties with her aunt and cousins.

Nina admitted, “It’s a little easier for some people to cut family ties when they’re queer and their family’s not as accepting. But just because of, like, being an immigrant and having an immigrant family, I am not as comfortable, or I’m not even open to the idea of possibly having to cut those ties. Just because I feel very tied to my family ... I think by having an immigrant family... if I were to come out and they were to not be OK with it more explicitly than they already are, I don’t think I would be able to just cut those ties.”

Nina’s experience of isolation in middle school influences how she behaves around her cousins. She wants to be available to them in case they need to confide in someone “because Mexicans are very conservative. Like my family

**Fear of family rejection and of being kicked out of the home is common among LGBTQ+ youth. About 40 percent of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ+.<sup>9</sup>**

**Gender identity is one’s innermost concept of self as a woman, man, another gender(s), or no gender. This is how people know, feel, perceive, and refer to themselves. Gender identity can be the same as, or different from, the sex they were assigned at birth.**

- **One term for identifying gender is nonbinary, which is used by people who do not exclusively identify as men or women.**
- **Nina is nonbinary and uses she/her pronouns. Some nonbinary people use they/ them pronouns.**
- **Nonbinary people with Latino heritage may choose to use the term Latinx.**

in particular is very Catholic. So, I just want to let my cousins know, like, that it's OK if they have feelings that are not what their parents want ... so I just wanted to be there for them in case, like, something like that comes up. I don't want them to feel, like, isolated."

Having multiple identities makes it difficult for Nina to find a place where she truly belongs and can be her authentic self. Nina, a Latinx, immigrant, lesbian, non-binary person says:

"I think it's very difficult to find a sense of belonging, one just being Latinx. And like also, I'm an immigrant. I think that makes it a little harder to find your place. Or like you can find this where you belong. And then adding like being gay. It's a little, it's more difficult to situate yourself within those spaces. Because you're already, there's a feeling of displacement."

**"So, I just want to let my cousins know, like, that it's okay if they have feelings that are not what their parents want..."**



## **Haciendo Puentes: Recommendations for Parents, Caregivers, and Loved Ones**

**The lack of positive information about LGBTQ+ people can lead to biases and stereotyping. You can reduce these biases by getting to know the stories of people who are LGBTQ+. The stories featured in this booklet are a start. You can also find more stories in the resources listed at the end of this booklet. As you're learning, remember to:**

- **Recognize that your child or loved one can be both LGBTQ+ and Latino. Encourage them to embrace both their Latino/a/x and LGBTQ+ identities.**
- **Acknowledge that talking about your child's sexual orientation or gender identity may be difficult for you.**
- **Help your child or loved one get support from local LGBTQ+ organizations (see resource list at the end of this booklet).**

## Trans Youth 101

- **Transgender (or “trans”)** youth have a gender identity different from the sex assigned to them at birth.
- **Gender does not exist in a binary state (i.e., male and female),** but along a spectrum of identifications including but not limited to genderqueer, agender, bigender, and non-binary.
- **Gender identity ≠ sexual orientation.** That’s because sexual orientation refers to sexual, romantic, or emotional attraction, while gender identity refers to a person’s personal sense of gender.
- **Transgender is not the same as intersex.** Intersex refers to a combination of sex characteristics at birth that cannot be easily categorized into the two (binary) sex categories of “male” or “female.”
- **Supporting your transgender child or loved one means:**

-  Using the name and pronoun that aligns with their gender identity.
-  Seeking resources to better understand the experiences of trans youth, such as those included at the end of this booklet.
-  Working with school faculty and staff to ensure they have the knowledge, skills, and resources to support and affirm your child or loved one.
-  Making sure your child or loved one’s healthcare providers implement trans-inclusive policies and practices. You can find an LGBTQ+ affirming doctor using The Gay and Lesbian Medical Association’s (GLMA) provider directory, included in the resources section of this booklet.
-  Letting your child know they have your unconditional love and support.



# STOP. THINK. REFLECT.

## Check Your Biases

Gender roles and expectations can be limiting for LGBTQ+ young people whose gender expression and/or sexual orientation may not fit conventional conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity. Supporting LGBTQ+ youth means thinking about gender and sexuality as complex and fluid and asking yourself:

- What biases do I have when it comes to gender and sexual orientation?
- What are my expectations about how a man should act versus how a woman should act?
- What do I know about nonbinary people?
- What do I still have questions about and where can I go to seek credible information?

## Spotlight on Faith

- **Loving and supporting your LGBTQ+ child and being a person of faith are not mutually exclusive. You can both support and affirm your LGBTQ+ child and be a person of faith.**
- **Places of worship across most faith traditions are increasingly becoming more welcoming and affirming of LGBTQ+ people.**
- **Many LGBTQ+ people are actively involved in their faith communities.**
- **If you're struggling to reconcile your religious beliefs and your LGBTQ+ child's sexual orientation and/or gender identity, it may be helpful to seek out resources—including those suggested in this booklet—and talk to other family members of LGBTQ+ youth who are also people of faith.**



## Acceptance and Belonging:

The fear of not being accepted by family is great among LGBTQ+ Latino youth. This fear can lead young people to run away from home, to experience feelings of depression, and to cause self-harm. By showing your support, you can alleviate the pressure that your child or loved one may feel.

- **Let your child know that you love them no matter what and that they have a place in your family. Ask your child what you can do to better support them.**
- **Support your child by listening to them and letting them know they belong and are accepted.**





# Isabel's Story

“I want to know [that] my mom's gonna accept me.”

Isabel lived in the same house her entire life. Isabel, her twin and two older sisters were raised by a single immigrant mother. Her mother raised them Catholic, following the guidance of the Catholic Church.

Isabel described her mother as a strict but involved parent. Her mom always wanted to know Isabel's whereabouts and kept close tabs on her activities. Her mom made sure that Isabel received a good education and helped her navigate the process of applying for college by attending college fairs and parent seminars on the topic.

Growing up in a predominantly Latino community and attending a predominantly Latino school, Isabel didn't think much about her ethnic identity. However, she did struggle with understanding her sexuality and making sense of her feelings.

Sexuality, “was a topic that wasn't really talked about in my household. So for a long time, I kind of questioned my sexuality... I think I realized by the time that I was 6 that I wasn't straight, but I knew at that age that it was 'wrong.' I guess just based on, like, how I grew up being Catholic...”

## Let's Talk About Sex

**Children and teens depend on parents or caregivers for guidance. Talking about sex and sexuality is an important part of raising children, although it can initially feel uncomfortable. Take a moment to reflect:**

- **Have you had conversations with your child about sex and sexuality?**
- **When you ask your child about relationships, are you making assumptions about their sexuality?**
- **Don't assume your teen is straight. When asking about relationships, be more general. For example, ask: “Is there someone you are interested in?”**



**Youth between the ages of 11-13 begin to question who they are and to look for answers beyond their family circle. This age period is the beginning of self-definition and it is when friends become more important.**

Isabel shared: “When I was little, all I saw were, like, heterosexual relationships and, like, the very few things that I guess I do recall is just that, like, you’re supposed to be with the men and not anyone else. So, I, I don’t know what I was doing kissing people at [age] 6 but I remember the very first was with the girl, and all I could think was, like, I know this is wrong. My mom is not going to like it, but like, why do I feel like it’s right?”

There were not a lot of places for Isabel to get information about what she was feeling: “I only learned kind of through what I saw on TV, and even then, when I was growing up, we didn’t have a lot of representation or it was kind of just like one-sided. Uhm, like, information about the LGBT community.”

Isabel continued questioning her sexuality throughout middle school: “Am I straight? Am I bisexual? And what does this even mean, like, I didn’t understand, and I started doing my own research, kind of, like, what does it mean to be lesbian, what does it mean to be gay? What did it mean to be bisexual—because I knew what the term meant. I just didn’t know how it applied to me.”

Because Isabel had in her mind that what she was feeling was wrong, she decided “to push everything else under the rug. Just kind of like a lot of Hispanic families do. So, growing up, it was like, I may have had all these questions, but I didn’t have anybody to ask.”

**A 2017 review of prime-time characters on Spanish-language TV programs showed that only 3 percent of characters were LGBTQ+ and, in many cases, the storylines killed off the character. Such lack of representation impacts young people’s ability to understand their feelings and can lead to internalized shame.**

Isabel was not ready to talk to her mom about how she was feeling: “I didn’t want her opinions about me to change or how close we’ve gotten just because I also like to date women too... That’s definitely the number one reason. And I think another reason is, like, I just don’t want to put myself in an environment where my own mother doesn’t accept my sexuality.”

“Quite honestly, I don’t know how I would handle not having my mom support me because she’s... I’ve done a lot of things she may not have agreed with, but she’s had my back the whole time. And I don’t want this to be the one thing that she doesn’t, you know, have my back on. So, I think it’s, that’s probably why I don’t know how to have a conversation with her on, like, how I came to realize my sexuality.”

Once at college, Isabel felt she was in an environment where she could accept herself. “[College] provided me the environment—and I guess the safe space—to kind of slowly come into my own sexuality.”

She added: “College was the first time that I kind of felt that I had more people who look like me, identify like me. Not a lot, but I had a few more people. I did have a friend who was gay ... She was Mexican as well. But it was kind of just, like, OK, cool, like we fully accepted her for her, like it wasn’t like we looked at it like, ‘Oh, you’re Mexican and you’re gay.’”

Finally having a place where she could accept her identity led Isabel to feel more comfortable: “I was questioning for such a long time. Eventually, that was a place I was gonna have to, like, finally admit it to myself. And once I did, it alleviated a lot, like, stress and, like, a weight off me kind of... I had friends who identified the same way. So having people, a lot of people, around me who identified within the community was nice because it’s like they also understood the struggles of what it’s like.”



### **Haciendo puentes: Harnessing the Power of Family Belonging**

**Though she hasn’t yet come out to her mom, Isabel emphasized the importance of having her love and support. Regular expressions of unconditional love and affirmation when coupled with open and honest communication help create a bridge that lets your child or loved one know you will support them no matter what.**

Isabel has come out to her sisters but has not yet come out to her mom. "I think she knows I'm bisexual ...Have I told her? No; but I think she definitely knows ...."

Even now that she feels more comfortable with herself and has found a group of supportive friends, Isabel still fears her mom's reaction: "I want to know [that] my mom's gonna accept me, but I also, I kind of don't because, you know, it's just scary ... I don't want her to ask me straight up, like, are you straight? I think a lot of that was just, like ... I don't want to have that conversation."

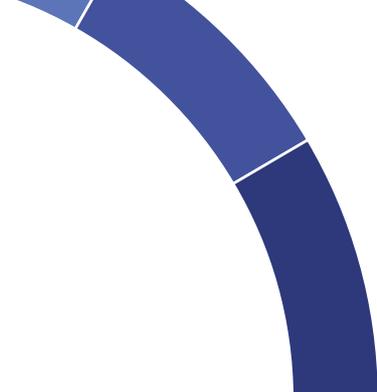


### **Haciendo Puentes: Recommendations for Parents, Caregivers, and Loved Ones**

**Adolescence is a time when young people are starting to take a romantic interest in others. To encourage open communication, it's important to:**

- **Start conversations with your child about who their friends are at school and who they are close to.**
- **Avoid asking presumptuous questions, like "Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?" as this may reinforce fears that you won't be accepting.**
- **Let your child know that you are open to learning and will support them no matter what. You can say something like, "I know things have changed a lot since I was your age, but the most important thing is that the people you like respect you and like you for who you are."**
- **Watch or read stories of Latino parents with LGBTQ+ children and invite your child to watch with you. There are links to short documentaries in the resources pages.**





# Carlos' Story

“She knows we’re dating, but she doesn’t say anything.”

Carlos was born in South America and moved to the U.S. with his parents and siblings at the age of 15. Carlos first began to realize that his thoughts and feelings were different from those of his friends at around age 10. “I just remember having friends and just not, like, thinking the same way they thought ... like what they will talk about, like girls and all that. I was like yeah, ‘I like girls—but I also think you are attractive.’”

At a young age, Carlos found it challenging to understand his sexuality because it was something that was never talked about in his family. “When I started realizing ... I wasn’t straight or whatever, it was weird. It was very weird because it’s something that I didn’t see. It wasn’t something that was talked about or common or, like, if it was talked [about], it was bad.”

Growing up in South America, Carlos had issues with self-harm, including experiences with cutting, and even attempted suicide. He says his struggles with self-harm were related to his feelings about his sexuality and the lack of support he felt: “... not being able to, like, figure myself out ... My sexuality, or like, [not] having somebody to talk to about it.”

**A decreased sense of belonging has been connected to an increased capacity for suicide, higher rates of depression, and low self-esteem among Latino LGBTQ youth.<sup>10, 11</sup>**

<sup>10</sup> Conner, K.R., Britton, P.C., Sworts, L.M., & Joiner, T.E., Jr. (2007). Suicide attempts among individuals with opiate dependence: The critical role of belonging. *Addictive Behaviors*, 32, 1395–1404. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2006.09.012>

<sup>11</sup> McLaren, S. (2009). Sense of belonging to the general and lesbian communities as predictors of depression among lesbians. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 56, 1–13. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00918360802551365>





Carlos believes that moving to the U.S. was instrumental in his coming out. “I feel like if I never moved here, or like anywhere ... I think it would have taken me longer for me to be where I am now.” While living in the U.S., Carlos grew close to his aunt and uncle, and even came out to them before he came out to his mother. “It didn’t feel like that big of a deal because we have ... more of like a friendship ....I think that’s how it is with most uncles and aunts, you know?” His aunt and uncle would ask Carlos about his relationships, which always “felt good.”

But his parents were not as accepting as his aunt and uncle. Growing up, Carlos heard negative messages about being LGBTQ+, especially from his father. Carlos believes his father’s lack of acceptance stems from his strong religious views, along with minimal exposure to gay people back in South America: “He’s very religious. So, like, anything gay or, like, anything like that was like ‘you’re going to hell.’... at least where I was, you really don’t see any gay men and lesbians or anything. I don’t think I’ve ever met a gay person back home—ever.”

Carlos does not plan to come out to his dad. “I’m not gonna tell him because I really don’t care what he has to say. We’ve never had a really good relationship anyway.” He did recently come out to his mother; however, her reaction was disheartening: “I came out to my mom like less than a year ago ... and she was disappointed, [saying] ‘How could you do this to me?’”



### **Haciendo puentes: Harnessing the Power of Family Belonging**

**As Carlos’ story demonstrates, siblings and extended family members—including aunts, uncles, and grandparents—often act as sources of support and reliance for youth. Many youth turn to these family members for advice and mentorship, especially when they lack support and acceptance from their parents. You might seek out help from extended family for advice on navigating your child’s coming out process. Be sure to talk to your child first about how and with whom they want you to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity, to make sure you are respecting their wishes.**

## How Did You Feel After Learning of Your Child's LGBTQ+ Identity?

Some parents and caregivers may have a difficult time understanding and accepting their child's LGBTQ+ identity. You may have questions and conflicting feelings, especially regarding your faith or cultural beliefs.

You may be wondering:

- Did I do something wrong?
- What will my child's future be like?
- How will people treat my child?
- Will my child be able to "fit in" and be happy?
- How do I tell my family and friends?
- How can my child be sure? Maybe it's just a phase.

It is key to remember that your child's LGBTQ+ identity is not a "choice," "phase," or "personal attack on you or your values." If your child has come out, they have usually gone through a long, hard process of acknowledging their true self. By demonstrating support for their identity, you can build your child's self-esteem and help buffer any rejection and negative reactions they may experience from others.



After Carlos came out to his mother, she became overly concerned about who he was spending time with, not always letting him hang out with other boys: "And then after that, she was, like, being weird. She would, like, call me every time I would hang out and be like, 'Who are you with?'"

"It took a toll on me...how, like, my parents didn't really approve, even though...obviously they know."

Carlos told his mother how much her behavior bothered him, and she stopped hovering as much. But now, she never wants to talk about his sexuality or relationships. "And then she stopped and ... now I have a boyfriend [and] we've been dating for almost four months. He goes to my house a lot. And I'm pretty sure she knows we're dating, but she doesn't say anything. I don't say anything about it. She doesn't say anything about it." Carlos admits this situation is "very weird" and is the opposite of how his parents treat his sister's relationships. She is allowed to bring home boyfriends and spend time with them out in the open. "And it's annoying because like my sister brings her boyfriend home every day ... and just ... they just

**“Everything revolves around family and I think that’s a beautiful thing...”**

hang out like in the living room and cuddle up and watch movies and I can’t do that, which is something that’s, like, very annoying, and it gets tiring sometimes....”

His parents’ reactions caused Carlos to withdraw from his family out of fear of being judged: “It took a toll on me ... how, like, my parents didn’t really approve, even though ... obviously they know.” Indeed, having parental support and

affirmation is instrumental to growing up as healthfully as possible, especially when it comes to mental health: “I probably would have not tried to like kill myself or like, I probably wouldn’t have such a bad year ... not like everything [would have been] rainbows and flowers, but it probably would have been a lot easier to know that I had the support of my parents.”

Carlos defines belonging in his family as feeling comfortable being yourself: “I think it’s just being comfortable, where you are or who you are with.” Feeling this sense of belonging to his family is important to Carlos and his culture: “I think, especially as a Latin household and being from a Latin family ... everything is very family rooted. Everything revolves around family and I think that’s a beautiful thing....”

**A focus on family bonding and loyalty, known as *familismo*, is at the core of family life for most Latinos. Such closeness may make it particularly difficult and complicated for your child or loved one to come out to you, as they want to be careful not to strain existing bonds.**

However, over time, Carlos has become less concerned with being accepted by his parents and now finds ways to show his parents who he genuinely is: “I wear shirts, like, with rainbows or that say stuff like that, but they don’t say anything and then I don’t say anything.” He prefers these acts of resistance rather than “getting stepped all over or getting invalidated.” Carlos also found support outside of his parents’ home: “But then, knowing that I could talk to [friends and teachers] and they could really understand what I’m talking about ... it was great. It really helped me a lot.”

Carlos just wants his parents to accept him and treat him like they treat his siblings: “I just need them to like, just let me live my life, you know? Like ... and let everyone live their lives.”



**“It took a toll on me...  
how, like, my parents  
didn’t really approve,  
even though...  
obviously they know.”**





## Haciendo Puentes: Recommendations for Parents, Caregivers, and Loved Ones

**Carlos acknowledges that representation matters when it comes to shaping perceptions about LGBTQ+ people among Latino families. Misconceptions and stereotypes may persist when families do not have access to what Carlos describes as “resources or people to talk to...about gay people.”**

**To learn more about LGBTQ+ identities and how to demonstrate support, be sure to seek out trusted, informed sources, such as those provided at the end of this booklet. You can also:**



- **Attend support groups that offer opportunities to openly talk about your feelings and experiences, while learning from other parents and loved ones of LGBTQ+ youth.**
- **Stimulate discussions with other parents and caregivers about ways to demonstrate acceptance and support.**
- **Identify how specific behavior and communication patterns may contribute either positively or negatively to your child’s well-being.**
- **Adopt strategies for changing “rejection” behaviors, in ways both big and small.**
- **Use respectful language to talk about sexual orientation and gender identity.**

## Glossary of Terms

**Ally:** A term relating generally to individuals who support marginalized groups. In the LGBTQ+ community, this term is used to describe someone who is supportive of LGBTQ+ individuals and the community, either personally or as an advocate. Allies include both heterosexual and cisgender people who advocate for equality in partnership with LGBTQ+ people, as well as people within the LGBTQ+ community who advocate for others in the community. “Ally” is not an identity, and allyship is an ongoing process of learning that includes action.

**Asexual:** A sexual orientation term that describes low to no sexual attraction to other people, or low/absent desire for partnered sexual activity. Being asexual is not the same thing as being celibate—asexual refers to a lack of sexual attraction, not to abstinence. Asexual people can and often do experience romantic feelings, and they can have successful relationships with people who may or may not also be asexual.

**Bisexual (“bi”):** An umbrella term for people who are emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to more than one gender. It is sometimes used interchangeably with pansexuality.

**Biphobia:** Animosity, hatred, or dislike of bisexual people that often manifests itself in the form of prejudice and bias. People of any sexual orientation can be biphobic, and these feelings are often expressed through negative stereotypes of bisexual people.

**Cisgender (“cis”):** A term to describe the gender of someone who exclusively identifies as the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Coming Out:** The process of accepting one’s own sexual orientation or gender identity and/or sharing it with others. It is possible to be “out” to yourself, to everyone, or only to certain people—for instance, some people choose to come out to their families and friends but not their teachers or coworkers.

**Gay:** A term for people who are emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to some members of the same gender. While anyone can identify as gay, the term tends to be associated more with men than with women (who may also identify as lesbian).

**Gender Expansive:** When a person’s identity or behavior is broader than the commonly held definitions of gender and gender expression in one or more aspects of their life. An example of gender-expansive is a person who does not identify with being either male or female, or who identifies as a combination of both or who expresses their gender in a different way.

**Gender Expression:** The external expression of gender in ways that can be seen, heard, and/or observed, such as behavior, mannerisms, clothing, haircut, language, and speech. This communication may be conscious or subconscious and may or may not reflect their gender identity or sexual orientation. All people have gender expressions.

**Gender Identity:** One’s innermost concept of self as a woman, man, other gender(s), or no gender. This is how individuals know, feel, perceive, and refer to themselves. It can be the same as, or different from, their sex assigned at birth.

**Homophobia:** Animosity, hatred, or dislike of LGBTQ+ people that often manifests itself in the form of prejudice and bias. Homophobia often stems from a lack of knowledge about LGBTQ+ people.

**Intersex:** An umbrella term describing the presence of a combination of sex characteristics at birth (such as genitals, reproductive organs, hormones, or chromosomes) that cannot be easily categorized into the two (binary) sex categories of male or female. This term describes a wide range of natural variations in human bodies.

**“In the Closet” (or Closeted):** A term used to describe a person who is not open about their sexual orientation or gender identity. People who are in the closet may be in denial about their identity, or they may be comfortable with their identity but not ready to share it publicly (though they may share with select people).

**LGBTQ+:** An acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. The plus sign represents other diverse sexual orientation and gender identities, such as asexual, questioning, two-spirit, and pansexual. The plus sign also represents intersex people.

**Latinx/Latine:** Alternative terms to “Latino/a” that include people of all genders, not solely those who identify as men and women.

**Lesbian:** A term for women who are emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to some other women (including those who are cisgender and transgender).

**Nonbinary:** An umbrella term for people who do not exclusively identify as male or female. This can include people who are gender fluid, gender queer, gender expansive, gender creative, pangender (all genders), and a-gender (no gender). It can also include people who describe themselves as both nonbinary and as a man and/or a woman, such as “nonbinary woman.”

**Pronouns:** The parts of speech that we use to talk about ourselves (such as “I” or “me”) or about someone else in the third person, like “she”, “he”, or “they”. People who speak English often use different pronouns depending on who they are talking about and what they think that person’s gender is.

**Pansexual:** Pansexual is an identity term for romantic and/or sexual attraction to people regardless of gender identity or to people of all genders. For some pansexual people, gender is not a defining characteristic of the attraction they feel toward others. Other pansexual people may feel that gender is a significant part of their experience of attraction.

**Queer:** An umbrella term used to refer to people who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or those who have nonbinary or gender-expansive identities. It’s important to note that queer was once considered a derogatory term for members of the LGBTQ+ community. While many people within the community think the word has been reclaimed, it may still be offensive to some people, especially those from older generations. Due to its varying meanings, use this word only when self-identifying or quoting someone who self-identifies as queer (for example: “My cousin identifies as queer” or “My cousin is a queer person”).

**Questioning:** A term for people who are in the process of questioning or exploring their own sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression. Adolescence is often the time when sexual attraction develops; however, questioning can happen at any time, including later in life. Understanding or struggling with identities is not a simple or universal process; it is different for each person.

**Sex Assigned at Birth:** The sex that a person was labeled or categorized as at birth based on the visual appearance of their genitals (and sometimes the detection of chromosomes).

**Sexual Orientation:** A person’s emotional, romantic, and/or sexual feelings of attraction toward other people; a description of how someone experiences their sexuality.

**Transgender (“Trans”):** An umbrella term used to describe someone who does not exclusively identify with the sex assigned to them at birth.

**Transphobia:** Animosity, hatred, or dislike of trans and gender-expansive people that often manifests itself in the form of prejudice and bias.

## LGBTQ+ Affirming Organizations, Resources, and Providers

### National

#### **GLAAD** (Website in English)

GLAAD has worked with news, entertainment, and social media to bring culture-changing stories of LGBT people into millions of homes and workplaces every day. The GLAAD website provides information about Spanish-language media. Spanish-language media shares LGBTQ+ stories that impact Spanish-speaking communities and analysis of the media that serves those communities.

[www.glaad.org/issues/spanish-language-media](http://www.glaad.org/issues/spanish-language-media)

#### **The Gay and Lesbian Medical Association (GLMA)** (Website in English)

The GLMA offers a directory that lists providers who are welcoming to the LGBTQ+ community and knowledgeable about its unique health needs and concerns. [www.glma.org](http://www.glma.org)

#### **Gender Spectrum** (Website in English)

Gender Spectrum works to create gender-sensitive and inclusive environments for all children and teens. [www.genderspectrum.org](http://www.genderspectrum.org)

#### **GLSEN** (Website in English)

GLSEN works to ensure that LGBTQ students are able to learn and grow in a school environment free from bullying and harassment. [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

#### **Immigration Equality** (Website in English and Spanish)

Immigration Equality is a national organization fighting for equality under U.S. immigration law for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and HIV-positive individuals. The organization's website provides information on immigrants' rights, LGBTQ+ policy advocacy, and other equality resources. [www.immigrationequality.org](http://www.immigrationequality.org)

#### **Latinx LGBTQ+ Youth Report** (Resource in English)

This resource presents data collected from Latinx youth, shedding light on their challenges and triumphs encountered while navigating multiple, intersecting identities.

[www.hrc.org/resources/latinx-lgbtq-youth-report](http://www.hrc.org/resources/latinx-lgbtq-youth-report)

#### **Q Christian Fellowship** (Website in English and Spanish [ver sección "Recursos en Español"])

Q Christian Fellowship is a "diverse community with varied backgrounds, cultures, theologies and denominations, drawn together through our love of Christ and our belief that every person is a beloved child of God." Resources for parents and caregivers are provided.

[www.qchristian.org/resources/family](http://www.qchristian.org/resources/family)

#### **Somos Familia** (Website in English and Spanish [ver sección "Recursos en Español"])

Somos Familia offers videos and other resources as educational tools to support families of LGBTQ+ youth in building awareness and acceptance of LGBTQ+ youth. Creator of Entre Nos (Between Us), an animated novela about family acceptance.

[www.somosfamiabay.org/resources](http://www.somosfamiabay.org/resources)

**Trans Youth Family Allies** (Website in English and Spanish [ver sección “Recursos en Español”])

Trans Youth Family Allies empowers children and families by partnering with educators, service providers, and communities to develop supportive environments in which gender may be expressed and respected.

[www.imatyfa.org](http://www.imatyfa.org)

**The Trevor Project** (Website in English)

The Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) young people under 25.

[www.thetrevorproject.org/resources](http://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources)

## North Carolina

**Campaign for Southern Equality**

An Asheville-based organization that promotes full LGBT equality throughout the South through community organizing, funding, legal work, and other strategies. [southernequality.org](http://southernequality.org)

**Equality NC**

A statewide organization dedicated to securing equal rights and justice for LGBTQ+ North Carolinians. [equalitync.org](http://equalitync.org)

**iNSIDE oUT**

A Triangle area youth-founded and youth-run LGBTQ+ social and support network. [insideout180.org](http://insideout180.org)

**LGBTQ+ Affirming Mental Health Providers in North Carolina**

A list of LGBTQ+ affirming mental health providers across North Carolina. [carolinapartners.com/2017-gsdi-transgender-provider-resource-list](http://carolinapartners.com/2017-gsdi-transgender-provider-resource-list)

**PFLAG**

PFLAG supports friends and families of LGBTQ+ people; chapters exist across North Carolina. [pflag.org](http://pflag.org)

**Time Out Youth**

A Charlotte area center offering LGBTQ+ youth support, advocacy, and opportunities for personal development and social interaction.

[www.timeoutyouth.org](http://www.timeoutyouth.org)

## Recursos en Español

### LILA

LILA es una organización sin fines de lucro en Carolina del Norte enfocada en la promoción y el empoderamiento de la comunidad Latinx LGBTQIA+. [www.lilanc.org](http://www.lilanc.org)

### Q Christian Fellowship

Q Christian Fellowship es “una comunidad diversa de diferentes culturas, teologías, y denominaciones, unidos por nuestro amor a Dios y en nuestra creencia que cada persona es un querido niño de Dios.”

- Padres y Madres de Hijos LGTBI que Recientemente Han Salido del Armario es un recurso para los padres y tutores de hijos LGBTQI que recientemente han salido del armario. [www.qchristian.org/manual/padresymadres](http://www.qchristian.org/manual/padresymadres)

### TransYouth Family Allies (Aliados y Familia de Jóvenes Trans)

Esta organización empodera a los niños y las familias al asociarse con educadores, proveedores de servicios y comunidades para desarrollar entornos de apoyo en los que se pueda expresar y respetar el género. [www.imatyfa.org/espanol.html](http://www.imatyfa.org/espanol.html)

### Todo Mejora

La Fundación Todo Mejora se dedica a “promover el bienestar de niños, niñas y adolescentes que sufren bullying y comportamiento suicida, debido a discriminación basada en orientación sexual, identidad y expresión de género.” [todomejora.org](http://todomejora.org)

### Somos Familia

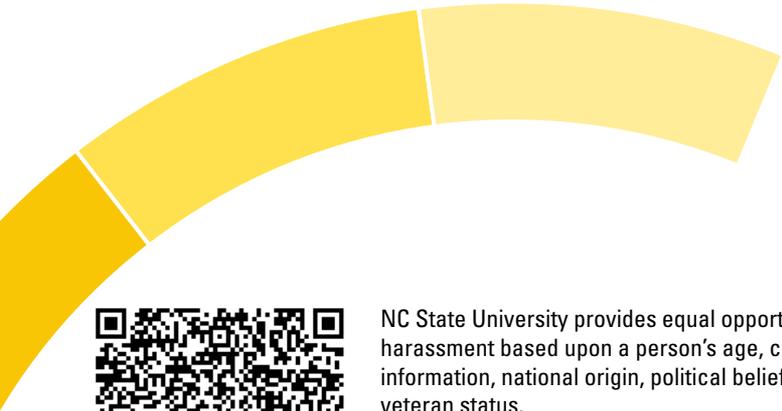
Ofrece videos y otros recursos como herramientas de aprendizaje para apoyar a familias de jóvenes LGBTQ+ en crear conciencia y aceptación de jóvenes LGBTQ+. Crearon la novela animada Entre Nos, sobre la aceptación familiar.

[www.somosfiliabay.org/resources/?lang=es](http://www.somosfiliabay.org/resources/?lang=es)

### PFLAG

PFLAG apoya a la familia y los amigos de personas LGBTQ+. Tienen varios materiales de apoyo incluyendo:

- Nuestras Hijxs — una publicación para las familias y otras personas sobre qué hacer cuando un ser querido sale del clóset ([pflag.org/nuestrashijxs](http://pflag.org/nuestrashijxs))
- Sé tú misma/o — una publicación para jóvenes LGBTQ+ en cuestionamiento ([pflag.org/setumisma](http://pflag.org/setumisma))



NC State University provides equal opportunity and affirmative action efforts, and prohibits discrimination and harassment based upon a person's age, color, disability, family and marital status, gender identity, genetic information, national origin, political beliefs, race, religion, sex (including pregnancy), sexual orientation and veteran status.

Publication Number FCS-543 | 05/22  
[content.ces.ncsu.edu/se-hacen-puentes-al-andar-a-resource-for-parents-caregivers-of-latino-lgbtq-youth](https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/se-hacen-puentes-al-andar-a-resource-for-parents-caregivers-of-latino-lgbtq-youth)

1,000 copies of this public document were printed at a cost of \$8.53 per copy.





**NC STATE**

EXTENSION

