

Faith Family Equality

The Latinx Roundtable

**WELCOMING
YOUR TRANS FAMILY MEMBER:
GROWING
AS LATINX FAMILIES
AND COMMUNITIES**

The single most important factor for a trans person to thrive is family acceptance.



Center for
LGBTQ and Gender Studies
in Religion

A decorative graphic on the right side of the page. It features a large yellow triangle pointing downwards from the top left. Overlapping this triangle are several concentric, semi-circular arcs. The top two arcs are blue, and the bottom two are a muted green color. The arcs are partially cut off by the right edge of the page.

Thank you for picking up this guide, it is an important step in learning more about LGBTQ+ persons. Gaining this knowledge is important to becoming more welcoming to LGBTQ+, trans, and gender non-conforming persons. It is important to acknowledge that there is an ongoing learning process. No matter how successful an individual, family member, or a congregation is in welcoming LGBTQ+ people, there is always room to grow and extend your acceptance, understanding and affirmation.

This guide is specifically about trans and gender non-conforming persons, and it is intended for persons and families who want to respond in a more affirming way to them. Whether you are an LGBTQ+ person, trans or gender non-conforming, a parent or friend, we hope that the following information will help you be more positive and supportive of your loved ones.

Introduction

Thank you for picking up this guide, it is an important step to learning more about the transgender community—both the gifts that they bring to our society and the challenges they face. Gaining this knowledge is also critical to becoming more welcoming to trans and gender non-conforming people. It is important to acknowledge that there is an ongoing learning process. No matter how successful an individual or a family is in welcoming trans family members, there is always room to grow and extend your love and acceptance.

Many families find themselves initially unsure about trans people or trans family members, or have questions about trans identities. This is normal. But we have found that the more families, friends, and church communities know about the trans community, the more accepting they become over time. Having the facts is really important.

Maybe you are using this guide because you have questions about transgender people or the transgender community, or want to help prepare your family to welcome a trans family member or friend, or even want to advocate more widely for the trans community, because of a trans person in your life. Regardless of how many trans family members you have, or how open you are to your trans family members, families can always be more welcoming by creating a safer place for trans people.

Similar to other countries, recently the United States has witnessed a political shift that focuses on trans people in discriminatory ways. In the United States, we find that in the wake of the nation-wide victory for marriage equality, other rights for LGBTQ+ people are suddenly being stripped away. Trans people, specifically, are being scapegoated in this process, and the impact on the lives and spirits of trans and gender non-conforming people should not be underestimated. This is a spiritual issue for all families who are concerned with social justice.

As a partner text to this guide, we recommend the CLGS publication *Transitioning to Inclusion: A guide to welcoming transgender children and their families to your community of faith* by Kelsey Pacha, Available for download at CLGS.org.



You may have heard trans people in the news regarding the rights to use public restrooms. Policing restrooms has long been a tradition in the United States for perpetuating discrimination against disenfranchised people. Legislation that seeks to prevent trans people from using restrooms is not really about restrooms. We will discuss this further in the “Standing with Trans People” section on pages 13 - 17.

Trans inclusion in families and faith communities impacts all persons who are affected by social justice. Now is the time to stand together to protect family and community members who are vulnerable and in need of support. This guide will provide your family with some more information about the transgender community and help your family become more fluent in the language of inclusion, helping families to build an environment of welcome and support.

Oftentimes fear of saying the wrong thing keeps family members from engaging in discussions that would make our families more welcoming. In this guide your family will find helpful tools for creating inclusive spaces. Please know that the journey to acceptance is not going to be perfect, especially not in the early stages. There might be moments that conversations are awkward and words may cause us to stumble. Discomfort and uncertainty are parts of the growing process.

Section 1: Becoming a Trans Inclusive Family

Families are bonded by history, culture, traditions and faith.

Trans family members experience unique challenges when they feel discriminated against within their own family. Although these challenges shift from person to person and families to families, there are obstacles that trans people face socially when attending family gatherings and celebrations, social events, and any other gatherings, regardless of whether they are newly identifying as trans or has been fully transitioned to openly and publicly identify as trans or they keep that information private.

Diversity of Trans Experiences

In recent years the topic of transgenderism has emerged in popular culture in a far more comprehensive way than ever before. Celebrities who transitioned publicly, such as Laverne Cox, Caitlyn Jenner, and Chaz Bono, Bambie Salcedo, Morganna Love, have added trans people to the popular culture milieu in a new way. With this new acknowledgement of trans lives in the media we also see a particular narrative of trans identity emerge. While the visibility of specific trans people can help shift social consciousness about trans people, it is important to understand that not all trans people identify in the same way.

Trans people reflect the full cultural diversity we see in this country and come from every walk of life. The relatively recent mainstream visibility has certainly enabled many trans people to live as their authentic selves in new ways. Yet, trans identities are also being discussed, critiqued, and regulated in politics, social media, and on television in new ways. It is important to understand that not all trans people live or transition in the same ways or come from the same cultural contexts. It is also important to understand there is a wide range of ways that people transition, which means to live in a gender(s) different than the one on someone's birth certificate.

Many trans people never feel the need to medically transition at all, living as neither male or female. Others take hormones or have

surgery to change their bodies to become comfortable in their own gender presentations. Accessibility to medically necessary care is limited for many trans people. There is often a lack of access to knowledgeable medical staff. Financial constraints and a lack of adequate emotional support can make transition and basic medical care prohibitive. This is changing but not fast enough to provide equal access for all trans people. Ideally, all trans people should have access to doctors and other providers who understand the needs of transgender people and can work with their patients who develop a plan of medical care that best meets that person's needs.

As the visibility of trans identity expands, unfortunately so does the backlash against trans people. Political commentary about trans people has a lasting impact beyond the politics and policies themselves. Faith communities play an important role in helping trans people understand that they are loved and valued, even when the media paints a different picture. Faith leaders and families can help reshape the narrative of trans exclusion and challenge culture bias that erroneously teaches that trans people are different and do not belong.

Gender identity is an inward and subjective experience, lived out in the individual person. Many trans people utilize hormone and surgical interventions to align their bodies with their inward sense of self, but many do not. It is important to honor a person's identity, regardless of their access to, or need for, medical intervention.

The Language of Inclusion

Before we can explore the topic of inclusion in a comprehensive way, we acknowledge that it is difficult to engage in this conversation if you feel you do not have the right words to use. Terminology and definitions are often a challenge because language is not a static entity, it moves, shifts and grows with the family who use it.

LGBTQ+ communities have seen such major growth and

transformation in recent decades, it is hard to pin down universally accepted definitions for how our people describe themselves. Our recommendation is that families do not get too caught up in definitions, but rather focus on the larger issues of inclusion and social justice. It is important to keep in mind that the only way to understand an individual's identity is to ask that person for clarification.

The word "passing" is a term that is often used in the trans community to denote whether one is successfully able to live unquestioned as a man or as a woman. While "passing" as a non-trans man or a non-trans woman is a goal for many trans people, it can be problematic because some people see the phrase itself as implying dishonesty, as if trans people are only able to pass as something they are not or are only valued if they pass. Instead of focusing on how well a trans person can blend in among non-trans people, it is important to honor gender identity, regardless of appearance. The purpose of transition is not necessarily to fit in but to feel that what a person feels inside matches what they express on the outside.

Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

The term transgender refers to gender identity, that is, how a person understands their own subjective experience of gender and selfhood. Heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality refer to sexual orientation, which is attraction, the people to whom one is romantically and sexually inclined. Trans people experience romantic and sexual attraction that is not necessarily connected to their trans identities. Just like non-trans people, trans people can be gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, straight, queer, and questioning.

Oftentimes families assume that trans people will automatically feel welcome within their families if that family is already welcoming to

lesbian, gay, and bisexual members and people. This is not always the case. Although there are many similarities between these communities, it is important to note that the issues trans and gender non-conforming people face are not identical to those of LGB persons.

Inclusion of Identities

A family that is truly inclusive encourages its members to live and grow in their own identities. Gender expression for many people is a long process of searching for wholeness. It is a beautiful gift to support family members while they are in the process of becoming themselves. People often seek when they are vulnerable. It is the family's responsibility to nurture its member seeking support and acceptance. There is no one magic formula that creates inclusion. Families must follow the lead of those we seek to be included and allow them to define the level of importance that gender identity has in their own place in their families.

The Bible, in fact, offers strong support for the inclusion of those whose gender falls between male and female. This may be very surprising to you since often the Bible is not considered from this perspective or you may have been told that differences in gender are a very recent phenomenon, but that isn't true. The Bible includes the stories of eunuchs (persons who were castrated for various reasons) and tells the story of their rejection from religious practices to their complete acceptance. We believe that we, as people of faith and families, are called to follow this same path.

Let's examine the Bible passages that address this more closely.

Genesis

According to the book of Genesis, the first human being God created did not have a specific gender. While the text calls this person Adam, the Hebrew word actually isn't a name but a noun for this unique first being; it only becomes a name later in the story. We were probably taught that it is a man's name in the same way it is today. But this ancient story is much more complex than that. "Adam" literally translates into something like "earth person." When this being, the adam, becomes lonely because none of the other creatures—the animals, birds, plants and so on—are of the same kind, God separates this person into female and male, Eve and Adam.

Some people argue that the creation of Adam and Eve means that God only intends for people to be either male or female, with nothing in between. But this fails to take into account that God first created a being without gender and only later created two sexes. It also doesn't acknowledge the great biological diversity of sex that occurs in nature, and in human beings, including those who are born intersex. The book of Genesis shows us a creator who is imaginative and celebrates an incredible range of beings, such as coral that is both plant and animal, or the startling array of ways that life manifests on our planet. Rather than an argument for limitations, Genesis speaks to us of possibilities.

Deuteronomy

There are two passages in Deuteronomy which are negative, one which prohibits cross dressing (Deuteronomy 22:5) and the other which bars men from full participation in ritual life if they have lost their penis or testicles (Deuteronomy 23:1). Both of these occur in sections of the Bible that are concerned with distinguishing Israel from its neighbors and set out codes of behaviors that the Jewish people were to follow. If you read what falls before and after these single verses, you'll find many prohibitions against mixing things (like more than one kind of seed in a field) or excluding those who have

physical blemishes, like skin diseases.

It is important to remember that Christians do not follow these ritual laws of ancient Israel, a question that was resolved in the earliest days of the church. To simply pick out some verses while ignoring others is not an accurate or faithful use of the text, particularly when the verses being selected are only the ones used to condemn others. More importantly, even while the Bible was being written, God was already contradicting these passages to embrace those who lived outside of the binaries of male and female.

Isaiah

One of the most beautiful passages of God's love and welcome for all people occurs in the book of Isaiah. Through the prophet, God tells the people what God wants: "to maintain justice, and do what is right." Then God does something radical—God says that these promises extend to unlikely people, foreigners, eunuchs, and barren women. Eunuchs are an ancient parallel to transgender and gender variant people; they were men who can be castrated and were therefore no longer considered male but neither were they female. As we considered earlier, this would have meant that they were excluded from the temple and other aspects of ritual life.

But here is what is important: the prophet says in Isaiah 56:3b-5,

... do not let the eunuch say, "I am just a dry tree." For thus says God: To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

That is, those who were previously separated from the community by the laws in Deuteronomy will now be given a special place if they keep the covenant with God. In God's way of thinking, those who have been separated from their families and communities will be brought to the center, within God's own house, and given a cherished name that will never be forgotten.

Here God focuses on the faithfulness of each person and the call to justice. We are not to be excluded based on physical characteristics but uplifted when we are committed to doing what is right and establishing justice in the land. This reverses the commandments in Deuteronomy and puts a new standard before us, telling us to focus on the impact of a person's life first.

Matthew

The Bible tells us that Jesus was aware that there are different kinds of genders, demonstrating both God's knowledge of the natural and human made variations in gender as well as the fact that those in the ancient world were aware of this. Jesus states quite clearly in Matthew 19:11-12 that

For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuch who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the dominion of heave. Let anyone accept this who can.

People who have been eunuchs from birth probably refers to those with intersex conditions, that is, with biological characteristics of both male and female bodies. Ancient peoples were aware that some babies are born this way. Jesus also talks here about those who have been created to be eunuchs, by the hand of others or by their own choice.

Jesus doesn't make any judgments or even offer any commentary, other than noting that some people have trouble accepting this. But for himself, he matter-of-factly states these conditions as different ways of being human. We can follow his lead by accepting those who live in gender diverse ways as part of our communities.

Acts

In Acts 8:25-39 we find one of the most complete accounts of baptism in the early church and a clear sign of how we are to treat people who may be different from ourselves. A eunuch from Ethiopia is on his way home after visiting the temple in Jerusalem to worship; he follows Jewish practices but is not a Jew. He is traveling between cities in the

wilderness, neither at home or at his destination. He is of a different ethnic background that most of the people in that place. And he is set apart because of his gender as a eunuch. The text tells us many ways in which he is between things—race, nationality, gender, location, and religion.

And to this person and this situation, an angel of God sends Philip, one of the apostles, to go meet with him. They get to talking about the book of Isaiah and Philip tells the eunuch the story of Jesus, which immediately draws him in. The eunuch spots a body of water and asks Philip if there is anything that would prevent him from being baptized. Apparently, it is a question that doesn't even need a response because they immediately go together to the water and Philip baptizes the eunuch, who then goes on his way rejoicing.

Just as Jesus simply and without comment recognized differences in gender, Philip also did not see any need to speak about or create barriers to the eunuch's full participation in the community of faith. Again, this overthrows what is said in the book of Deuteronomy and follows with what God says through the prophet Isaiah. This story from the very early church tells us that baptism into the Christian community has been and should remain fully open to people of all genders. More than that, this passage reminds us that that welcome leads to celebration; just as the eunuch continued his journey rejoicing, so too can full inclusion lead to joy in the lives of those who seek to be fully included in families and communities of faith.

Faithfully Reading the Bible

As we read through the Bible, we see stronger and stronger messages of support for the full inclusion of transgender and gender different people. Where once there was condemnation, the Bible itself tears down that wall and shows that in God's realm, such barriers do not matter. Just as there was nothing to prevent the baptism of the eunuch in the book of Acts, neither is there anything to block Christians and other people of faith from welcoming transgender people in community or insisting on their full dignity in our world.

Where transgender and gender variant people have faced rejection,

violence, and discrimination, people of faith can reverse that, following the Biblical example to move to a place of understanding, welcome, and justice. Moreover, we can apply what the Bible teaches us about who is our neighbor and how we are to treat other people—treating all as we wish to be treated by them.

Discussion

1. What passage in the Bible most guides you about how to treat transgender people?
2. If a member of your community has a transgender family member, and is worried about what the Bible says, what words of hope could you offer them?
3. What other passages in the Bible do you think are helpful in considering how to treat and include transgender people in families and faith communities?

Identity is not “preference”

It is important to pay attention to how this question is presented. Asking what pronouns a person uses is more helpful than the commonly asked question “What pronouns do you prefer.” For most people identity speaks to the core of being, it is not a simple preference, but a fundamental aspect of identity, which is why we ask what pronouns people use.

Keeping Previous Names in the Past

If a person chooses to change their name as part of their transition, it is up to them whether other people find out what their former name was. Although some people are comfortable with their former name being common knowledge, many others find it important to leave their old name behind. Some trans people even refer to their previous name as their “dead name”. Statements such as “I knew Caroline back when she was Carlos ” can be invalidating to a person’s identity and a violation of their privacy.

Curiosity and Appropriate Boundaries

It is normal for people to be curious about bodies that are different from their own. However, asking questions about people's bodies makes them feel uncomfortable and unwelcome. Families can support trans people by creating a culture that acknowledges that curiosity is valid, but that not all questions are appropriate. For trans people, some may feel hostile when they are confronted with questions about their bodies, surgeries, medical treatments, or previous name. Or a trans person may wish to share this information and make others feel uncomfortable

When people ask "Have you had the surgery?" they bring up a highly personal reference to a trans person's most intimate body parts. This question also erroneously assumes that transitioning is a simple 1-step process. The reality is that everyone's transition is different and not all trans people transition medically. Those who do transition go through a lengthy process of evaluation, hormones, and surgeries—generally topics far too personal to be casually brought up at coffee hour.

A Culture of Welcome

A welcoming family allows for the acknowledgement that people will naturally be curious about what they do not know, and at the same time asserts that those who are different are not obliged to constantly fill the role of educator. Some people experience discomfort when they have questions they are not permitted to ask. It is okay to be curious, it is okay to be uncomfortable. It is not okay to violate a person's privacy with inappropriate questions.

A spirit of acceptance is not only about extending an invitation, it is about creating a supportive atmosphere of comfort and safety once those in a for trans people by widening the breadth of inclusion, welcoming trans identity in all areas of the community, and avoiding the questions that make people feel unsafe and objectified.

Standing with Transgender People

The good news is that more and more people are learning about gender identity and transgender people through the media, resources like this, and from personal experiences with a transgender person. Despite all of this, transgender people continue to face extraordinarily high levels of discrimination and violence in our society, although many groups and individuals are working hard to change that. In this final section, we will detail some of the experiences that transgender people face and talk about how, as people of faith, we can take concrete steps to make the world safer and more equitable for people of all genders.

You may also be aware of legislation that has been introduced in the United States, maybe even in your state, which seeks to roll back protections against discrimination and to prevent transgender people from safely using appropriate restrooms. These efforts stem from a lack of knowledge and distort the truth to mistakenly say that transgender people are a threat to public safety, when, in reality, transgender people are often in danger in public places.

Violence

Every few weeks a transgender person is murdered in the United States because of their gender identity; the vast majority of the victims are young transgender women of color. Often these crimes go unsolved. We recognize that both racism and anti-transgender prejudice play critical roles in the death of these women. All transgender people—of all races, ages, and identities—face heightened levels of violence. Sometimes the attackers are strangers but they also include teachers, medical personnel, store clerks, intimate partners, government officials and others who should be protecting people from assault.

By contrast, the Department of Justice has recorded zero cases in which transgender people have assaulted others in the restroom. To ban transgender people from certain public spaces, such as restrooms, exposes them to increased levels of violence while doing nothing at all to protect other vulnerable people.

Discrimination

Transgender and gender non-conforming people face unemployment levels more than twice that of the general population, with transgender people of color facing almost triple the national unemployment rate. People also face significant barriers to housing, public accommodations (like hotels, restaurants, gyms and other public spaces), medical care and more. In fact, there is no area of public life where transgender people do not face overt discrimination. People are turned away from doctor's offices, government services, education and more. Young transgender people drop out of school at alarming rates because of bullying and discrimination.

Occasionally people argue that making life very difficult for the transgender community will somehow discourage people from transitioning. This is simply not true and creates needless suffering for others.

Discrimination can range from large actions—like firing a person simply because of their gender identity or refusing to provide a transgender person with needed health care—to small things, like refusing to address the person by the names and pronouns that are right for them. Studies have shown that higher levels of discrimination lead to greater negative impacts on the person's wellbeing, increasing rates of homelessness, suicide attempts, and substance abuse. The good news is that family acceptance and a supportive community lead to much higher levels of health and positive outcomes.

What can people within their family or community of faith do?

You have already taken one of the most important steps—learning about transgender people and our lives. Being aware of the gifts and blessings that transgender people bring as well as knowing about the discrimination we face is vital to building a healthy community and family. Thank you for taking the time to gain this information and consider it.

Our family values and faith already teach us the most important way to respond: treating others as we would want to be treated by them.

Treating transgender people with respect and compassion, just as you would any other person or family member, is incredibly important. When other people see you act this way, it sends an important message about what you believe and how you feel people should be treated. Regardless of how you feel about someone, the bottom line of our faith says that we should treat others fairly and kindly.

Other vital steps you can take:

Stand up and speak out if you see a transgender person being subjected to bullying, harassment, violence or discrimination. No one should be targeted because of who they are. If needed, enlist the help of others. Your voice can make a crucial difference in stopping acts of abuse or harm; you could even save a life.

If people around you express fear or other negative emotions about transgender people, let them know that you've learned the facts that transgender people present no danger to you or your family. Make it clear that you think all people should be treated with respect and, when appropriate, let them know that this is an important aspect of your faith.

Support laws nationally that work to end discrimination against transgender people, including children and youth. Wherever there are anti-discrimination protections based on gender identity, it is vital that we resist efforts to erode or overturn these laws. These laws provide a clear path for employers and educators to follow in treating everyone fairly and make it possible for those who have experienced discrimination to address it.

Work to end racial injustice and inequity. Transgender people of color face higher levels of discrimination and violence when they are targeted for their race and their gender identity. Efforts to end racism will benefit those who experience the highest levels of discrimination, including transgender people.

Address violence. Transgender people, particularly transgender women of color, continue to be murdered at an alarming rate. Work with community leaders and public officials to decrease violence in your area. Be willing to offer space for survivors of violence, including

holding vigils and memorials for those who have been killed. Sometimes victims' families have difficulty finding a religious space in which to hold a funeral; offer comfort at this most painful time by stepping up.

Continue to improve your family's and faith community's understanding of the trans community and work to include transgender people in your advocacy for fairer housing, quality education, safe shelters and other needs that people have. Knowing that transgender people experience discrimination in housing, consider how they might be affected by a lack of affordable housing in your neighborhood. Because transgender people face high rates of poverty, ask if transgender people feel comfortable coming to your food pantry. If your community supports programs for the homeless, ask if transgender people are welcomed and safe at the facility. This awareness can transform the effectiveness of your programs and provide access for some of the people in greatest need who are often excluded from other places that might help them.

Trans* people and bathroom use:

Laws which seek to limit transgender people's access to public facilities or force them to use a restroom which is different from their gender presentation have been proposed—and in some cases passed—in states around the country. You can learn more about this from the National Center for Transgender Equality: <http://www.transequality.org/issues/resources/transgender-people-and-bathroom-access>

It is most important to recognize that:

- Safety and privacy in restrooms is important to all of us. In the more than 200 cities and 18 states that have laws protecting LGBTQ+ people from discrimination, including allowing transgender people to use the restroom which fits the gender they live every day. There has been no increase in public safety incidents in any of those places, including where there have been non-discrimination laws for a long time.

- Transgender people regularly face harassment and violence in restrooms and can suffer negative health impacts when unable to find a safe place to relieve themselves. You can read more about this in the results of the US Trans Survey: <http://www.ustranssurvey.org/preliminary-findings>.
- Targeting transgender people and their bathroom use only distracts lawmakers from addressing the real problems girls and women face. Efforts to address violence against women should focus on preventing actual dangers; blaming a minority group does nothing to help.

Attempts to prevent any one group of people from accessing public spaces is a dangerous precedent. All people should have equal access to public spaces.

Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to read this resource. We hope that the information and the discussion questions have given you new insight into trans people as well as new ways to support and welcome them into your community. We hope that this is just the first step of many that you will take.

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Faith, Family, Equality: The Latinx Roundtable produces materials that aim to increase the understanding, acceptance, and affirmation of LGBTQ+ Latino/a/x persons by their families and faith communities. We believe that LGBTQ+ persons often look for affirmation from their families and faith communities, but do not always receive those affirmations. We also believe that with the right resources families and churches will become more inclusive of their LGBTQ+ members.