



# no limitations

Breaking down  
gender stereotypes  
in the early years.

A resource guide for early years educators.



Women's Health East



MANNINGHAM

*This project is proudly supported  
by Manningham City Council's  
Community Grant Program*

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Women's Health East

[www.whe.org.au](http://www.whe.org.au)

[health@whe.org.au](mailto:health@whe.org.au)

+61 (03) 9851 3700



# About Women's Health East

Women's Health East is a regional women's health promotion agency working to improve the health and wellbeing of women living in the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne.

Our vision is equality, empowerment, health and wellbeing for all women. Working within a feminist framework, Women's Health East addresses the social, political and environmental factors impacting the health, safety and wellbeing of women. We do this through leading, partnering, shaping, informing and delivering responses that address the needs of women. We work to build the capacity of services and programs in the region to address issues affecting women.

Preventing violence against women is a core health promotion priority for Women's Health East. We work towards ending violence against women by addressing gender inequality - the underlying determinant of violence against women. This priority is shared by all nine regional and three state-wide Women's Health Services in Victoria.

## Acknowledgements

*The No Limitations Guide was developed by Women's Health East through funding from Manningham City Council's Community Development Grant Program. Many thanks to Access Health and Community for their contributions to the No Limitations Project. A specific acknowledgement to the many early years educators in Manningham who provided invaluable feedback and contributions to the project and to the No Limitations Guide.*

# imagine...

a future where every girl and boy grows up to be equally valued, heard and respected, and with equal access to opportunities.

*Shared vision of Together for Equality & Respect<sup>19</sup>*



# About the No Limitations Guide

*Children's understanding of gender is influenced and reinforced at a young age through interactions and experiences with family, culture, lifestyle, the media, education and childcare environments and the wider community.*

In the early years, the childcare environment is a primary source of information about gender roles and expectations, and what is valued in boys and girls. Preschools, kindergartens and childcare centres are environments where children pick up cues and understanding of how they are supposed to behave and talk, what they should be interested in and are expected to enjoy. In other words, it is a place where children's understanding of gender develops.

Early years educators are in a unique and important position to influence children's development. They also have the capacity to create environments that encourage equal and respectful relationships, break down harmful gender stereotypes and promote gender equality to ensure that children are not limited by gendered expectations.

The No Limitations Guide has been developed for early childhood educators, and is also useful for parents and families, and anyone working with young children.

The No Limitations Guide is about gender equality in early childhood settings, and provides practical tools, tips and resources for both an organisational focus and working with families. It also aligns with the *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework*.

By providing tailored information and resources for the early years setting, the No Limitations Guide will assist educators to deliver services in a non-gender stereotypical way in order to enable boys and girls to interact and learn without being constrained or limited by gendered expectations.

***We'll jump and dig and build and fly, there's nothing that we cannot try. We can do all these things, you see, Whether we are he OR she!***

*He Bear, She Bear (1974), Stan and Jan Berenstain*

**The No Limitations Guide is about gender equality in early childhood settings, and provides practical tools, tips and resources for both an organisational focus and working with families.**





# Glossary of terms

## GENDER

Socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for a person based on their sex. Gender defines masculinity and femininity.

## SEX

The biological and physical characteristics that define men and women, such as women can give birth. Sex roles are universal.

## GENDER EQUALITY

The result of the absence of discrimination on the basis of a person's sex in opportunities and the equal allocation of resources or benefits or in access to services. Gender equality is often used to describe the outcome being sought.

## GENDER EQUITY

Entails the provision of fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men. The concept recognises that women and men have different needs and power and that these differences should be identified and addressed in a manner that rectifies the imbalances between the sexes. It is used to describe the processes that will be adopted to achieve gender equality.

## GENDERED NORMS

Gender norms consist of a set of dominant beliefs and rules of conduct, which are determined by a society or social group in relation to the types of roles, interests, behaviours and contributions expected from boys and girls, men and women.

## GENDER ROLES

Gender roles are the functions and responsibilities expected to be fulfilled by women and men, girls and boys in a given society.

## GENDER STEREOTYPING

Gender stereotypes are the given societally derived characteristics of an entire group based on gender.

## UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Unconscious Biases are social stereotypes about specific groups of people that individuals form outside of their conscious awareness. Bias is a prejudice in favour of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another usually in a way that's considered to be unfair.<sup>1</sup>

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.<sup>2</sup>





# What is the issue?



# Gender stereotypes

Gender is... the socially constructed identity associated with the concepts of masculinity and femininity as distinct from solely relating to biological sex. Therefore, it can be understood as predominantly associated with learned characteristics defined by social and cultural norms and values.<sup>3</sup>

## Language matters

### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN 'SEX' AND 'GENDER':

**Sex: Biological & physical characteristics that define men & women.**

Example: Male and female genetic or hormonal differences including genitalia.

**Gender: Roles, behaviours, activities & attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men & women.**

Example: Girls: assumed to be more sensitive, passive and caring and a high value on appearance

Boys: assumed to be inherently strong, active, adventurous, boisterous and enjoy playing rough.

Though it is frequently misunderstood, gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for a person based on their sex.

'Sex', on the other hand, refers to the biological determinants – chromosomes and genitalia – that distinguish males and females. When we talk about gender stereotypes, we are referring to the socially accepted ideas of what is appropriate for a boy or a girl based on their sex.

While gender is often discussed as exclusively masculine or feminine, it should be recognised that gender identity exists across a continuum.

Although it may seem harmless, labelling attributes and behaviours as inherently masculine or feminine can flow on to influence the work and roles that are considered to be 'normal' for each gender. Examples of socialised gender roles are that women are assumed to be better suited to carer roles, such as nurses and teachers, and are expected to take on domestic duties, and that men are believed to make better leaders and often seen as the natural 'breadwinners'.

These gender roles and stereotypes are reinforced through a number of societal channels – toys, sports and games, clothes, books, the media, education, teachers and families.

### UNCONSCIOUS GENDER BIAS

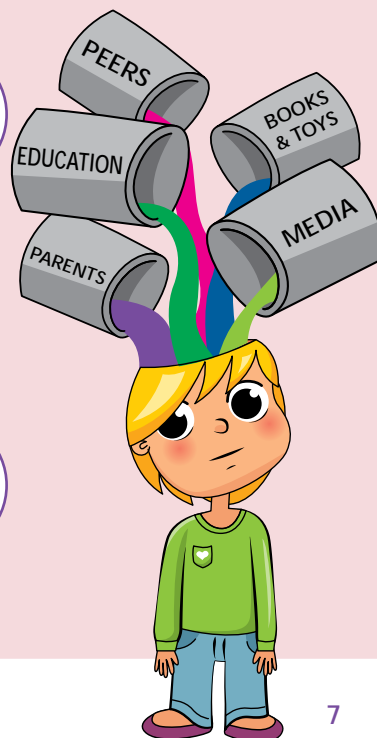
Each one of us holds unconscious beliefs / bias about gender. Being aware of our own biases, how these might have been formed and how they influence our behaviour is an important step to challenging gender stereotypes. For more information on unconscious gender bias follow the link.

[CLICK HERE TO SEE THE ARTICLE](#)



### GENDER STEREOTYPES IN ADVERTISING

Example of stereotypes in advertising - Huggies ad - [CLICK HERE TO WATCH THE VIDEO](#)



# Gender and culture

Family background and culture can have a strong influence on gender expectations. Parents can have very specific notions of what is expected of children according to their sex, which can often be based on hundreds or even thousands of years of tradition. This provides an opportunity for educators to further engage with these families in a collaborative manner and foster a better understanding of the child's cultural background.<sup>3</sup>



# Gender inequality in Australia

Despite significant progress, women and girls in Australia continue to experience gender inequality and discrimination in many important parts of their lives. This limits the choices and opportunities available to them.

For more information on gender inequality, please see the Women's Health East Gender Equity for Health Outcomes fact sheet.<sup>8</sup>

## Gender inequality in Australia: A Snapshot

*The gender pay gap - women are paid 16% less than men (as at February 2017). The average weekly earnings of women working full time is \$1,369.70 per week, \$261.30 per week less than men working full-time.<sup>6</sup>*

# gender inequality

Women only hold 23.4% of Board Directorships in the ASX 200 companies and 10% of ASX 200 companies have no women on their board.<sup>4</sup>

Only 31% of federal parliamentarians are women.<sup>5</sup>



Women are much more likely to have primary responsibility to care for children and spend almost twice as much time on unpaid work as men.<sup>7</sup>



# why does it matter?

# Why do gender stereotypes matter?

*“Gender stereotypes perpetuate inequality and reinforce difference between men and women, rather than viewing individuals as people first and equals. Stereotypes put pressure on boys and girls to conform to certain notions of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ which can really limit and restrict young children. Stereotypes influence the activities children engage in, their interests and skills and ultimately the roles they take in society as adults.”<sup>13</sup>*

Children learn from a very young age that their behaviours, likes, dislikes and expectations should follow ‘rules’ about male and female roles.<sup>9</sup> This can mean identifying with certain toys, activities and role models, which can be very limiting to children’s experiences. For example, action, construction and technology toys are mainly marketed at boys, whilst baby dolls, cooking and crafts are mainly marketed at girls.

The truth is nobody is born with specific likes or dislikes that are based on their sex; these are learnt. It is important that girls and boys are given equal opportunities to develop their full potential and have options to choose their future path based on their individual interests and skills, not on the expectations for their sex.

## Girls

### EXPECTATION

Sensitive, emotional & physical fragility, carer, focus on appearance, gentle and “proper”.

### SOCIALISATION

Toys focused on: baby dolls, cooking, princesses, art and craft.

Social reinforcement through: social media, TV, authority figures.

### GENDER ROLES

High value on appearance (being pretty),  
Being compliant (nice, sweet, gentle),  
Submissive roles (mummies / princesses).

## Boys

### EXPECTATION

Strong, adventurous, practical, rough, leader, non-emotional “boys don’t cry”, like to get dirty.

### SOCIALISATION

Toys focused on: action, construction, technology, fighting & conquering.

Social reinforcement through: social media, TV, authority figures (parents and carers).

### GENDER ROLES

Men must be physically strong, aggression is an acceptable part of male behaviour, a willingness to put themselves in harm’s way (superheroes / action figures).



## The 'box' of gender stereotypes

Latest research by Our Watch, reveals that parents of children aged 0-3 years are worried about restrictive gender stereotypes.<sup>10</sup> The national study, entitled *The Power of Parents*, shows that 79% of parents of children aged 0-3 years want their children to be able to explore interests free from limiting gender stereotypes.<sup>10</sup>

Our Watch<sup>20</sup> notes that popular culture, marketing and long held assumptions about the place of men, women, boys and girls in society, create stereotypes that box children in. These notions are reinforced and absorbed from an early age and can shape attitudes and expectations into adulthood. Popular expressions such as "boys don't cry" or calling girls "bossy" when they assert themselves are simple examples of how gender stereotypes are reinforced. These stereotypes can reinforce the idea that men naturally make better leaders and should hold positions of power because they are more rational and less emotional. Research by Bian, Leslie and Cimpian<sup>11</sup> found that by age 6 girls were less likely than boys to associate being "really, really smart" with their own gender, and in turn, limited their views and expectations around career aspirations.



# Health & wellbeing

Gender stereotypes can have a direct impact on children's development, health and wellbeing. For example, the encouragement of boys to participate in more active, gross motor skills activities, certain sports, or problem solving activities can allow them to develop their muscle power, but also learn skills like negotiation and decision making. It is vital to also ensure that girls are as actively encouraged to participate in similar activities so that they are also able to fully develop these skills. Likewise, it is important to encourage boys to participate in diverse activities that develop skills in areas like arts/craft, and caring and nurturing.

Pressures to conform to what is considered 'normal' for one's gender can also have wider health implications, particularly for young girls. The societal importance that is put on women and girl's looks and appearance can lead to concerns over body image, and the potential development of eating disorders.<sup>12</sup>

For both boys and girls, there may be confusion regarding gender identity if a child doesn't fit into the gender mould that society has created for them, and bullying of those children who don't conform to what society says it means to be a boy or a girl.

Gender expectations and socialisation contribute to and reinforce gender roles in society. These stereotypes that children absorb can shape attitudes and expectations into adulthood.

## OUR WATCH



Our Watch has been established to drive nationwide change in the culture, behaviours and power imbalances that lead to violence against women and their children. In 2015, Our Watch released Change the Story, a national framework to prevent violence against women. Change the Story provides the international evidence about the causes of violence against women, and helps us to understand what we need to do to prevent violence from happening in the first place. See the link for more information and resources.

**CLICK HERE TO VISIT** [www.ourwatch.org.au](http://www.ourwatch.org.au)

## Preventing violence against women

Gender inequality can have a profound impact on the mental and physical health of women and girls, and has been identified through international research as the underlying cause of violence against women.<sup>13</sup> Evidence shows that levels of violence against women are significantly and consistently higher in societies, communities and relationships where there are more rigid distinctions between the roles of men and women.<sup>13</sup>

Parents and educators play a powerful role in shaping our understanding of gender norms, power and respect. By challenging rigid gender stereotypes and instilling respect from an early age, parents and educators effectively become front-line workers in the work to end violence against women.

**The prevalence of violence in Australia experienced by women is high. A national survey of 17,000 adults by the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that since the age of 15...**



**1 in 4 Australian women had experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner.**

**1 in 5 Australian women had experienced sexual violence.**



**1 in 3 Australian women had experienced physical violence.**

# Policy and education context

*Breaking down rigid gender stereotypes in order to promote gender equality and prevent violence against women has been prioritised by the Australian and Victorian Governments, the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne and by Manningham City Council.*

## National

At a National level, **Our Watch** was established to drive nationwide change in the culture, behaviours, societal structures and power imbalances that lead to violence against women and their children. Their vision is an Australia where women and their children live free from all forms of violence.<sup>13</sup>

## Local

Addressing gender equity in the early childhood setting also aligns with a number of **Manningham Council plans and strategies** which have prioritised the prevention of violence against women and the promotion of gender equity and respectful and positive relationships in the Manningham community. These include the Council Plan 2017-21, Healthy City Strategy 2017-21, Access, Equity and Diversity Strategy 2014-17, Preventing Violence against Women Strategy and Action Plan 2013-17, Generation 2030 Community Plan, Manningham Cultural Strategy and the Early Years Plan 2012-2018.

At a regional level, the **Together for Equality & Respect** Partnership in Melbourne's East<sup>19</sup>, provides partner organisations with the opportunity to work together to prioritise, coordinate and integrate our efforts to prevent men's violence against women across the East. Manningham Council is a partner and has committed to a number of initiatives.

## State

In 2016, the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV) delivered to the Victorian Government their report and recommendations to address family violence.<sup>15</sup> Included in these recommendations was the expansion of the **Respectful Relationships in Schools Program** to the early childhood services setting. Currently, the Victorian Government is making an unprecedented investment in Respectful Relationships Education across schools and early childhood services.

*The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework acknowledges gender equality under the Equity and Diversity practice principle and states the expectation that early childhood educators are "committed to equity and avoid practices that directly or indirectly contribute to gender inequality, prejudice and discrimination".*

The **Early Childhood Australia** submission<sup>16</sup> to the Royal Commission into Family Violence highlighted the role that the early childhood sector has to play in preventing violence against women through building awareness of gender stereotyping and encouraging respectful relationships in young people.

Another actioned recommendation that came out of the RCFV was the development of a **Victorian Gender Equality Strategy, Safe and Strong**,<sup>17</sup> which was released in 2016. The Strategy sets out a framework for "...enduring and sustained action over time...to build the attitudinal and behavioural change required to reduce violence against women and deliver gender equality." The Strategy identifies six settings for state-wide action, one of which is education and training. Early childhood is identified here as a vital setting to address rigid gender ideas held by children.

The **Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework** clearly supports work around gender equality. Specifically, the revised *Framework* now acknowledges gender equality under the Equity and Diversity practice principle and states the expectation that early childhood educators are "committed to equity and avoid practices that directly or indirectly contribute to gender inequality, prejudice and discrimination."<sup>18</sup>



# Benefits of a gender equality approach

## Helping children reach their potential

Breaking down gender stereotypes from a young age helps to stop the negative consequences of inequality and discrimination as children grow into adults, and means that children aren't limited by expectations based on their sex. By providing children with environments that encourage non gendered norms and expectations, children can feel more accepted and celebrated for their individuality. They can broaden their aspirations and be more likely to reach their potential.



*A future where every girl and boy grows up to be equally valued, heard and respected, and with equal access to opportunities.*

*Boys and girls are encouraged to explore, create and develop diverse interests.*

*Children reach full potential beyond gender limitations.*

*Children feel more accepted and celebrated for their individuality.*

**“Children can be whoever they want to be – they feel equally comfortable playing football or taking dance classes; aspiring to a career as a nurse, or as a scientist.”**

*Future aspiration of the Victorian Gender Equality Strategy<sup>21</sup>*

Challenging pervasive gender stereotypes would promote a future with more girls in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and more men feeling comfortable about being stay-at-home dads.<sup>20</sup> Authority figures and leaders would be drawn from a more diverse pool, benefiting us all.<sup>20</sup>



**what you  
can do.**

# Ideas for practice

Early years educators have a key role in promoting a gender equitable environment for children. This section provides practical tools, resources and tips for educators to assist them in breaking down gender stereotypes in their services.

## Self-reflection

It is important to be aware of the ways in which gender may create unfair opportunities or experiences for children in your care. Personal reflection is a great start in identifying ways in which you can begin to break down stereotypes in your service.

Spend 10 minutes reflecting on the questions below by yourself or with a co-worker – you may want to record your reflections in the space provided.<sup>22</sup>

### SELF-REFLECTION

What are some of my own biases, values and belief systems in relation to gender?

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How might these gender values / beliefs influence the way I interact with children? Do I engage differently with boys and girls?

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### LOOKING FORWARD

How can I model a positive attitude to gender equality in my everyday activities, actions and conversations with children? What am I already doing?

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How can I promote and strengthen gender equality in my practice?

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# Fostering an inclusive environment: practical tips for early childhood services

This page provides an overview of important tips to consider in promoting inclusive practice.



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## FOSTERING AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

No Limitations – Breaking Down Gender Stereotypes in the Early Years

Practical tips for early childhood services

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS



PERSONAL REFLECTION IS A GREAT START IN IDENTIFYING WAYS IN WHICH YOU CAN BEGIN TO BREAK DOWN STEREOTYPES & FOSTER AN INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICE

- What are your gender biases?
- How might your own gender/sexuality influence your interactions with children?
- How might your everyday 'good' practice reinforce sexism/inequality?
- Reflect on the way that you engage with girls and boys – is it different?
- Do you model a positive attitude to gender equality in your everyday actions and conversations with children?
- How much time do you spend communicating with boys and girls? Do you interact with them in the same way? Talk to them in the same voice?

### Look at your surroundings

Do a 'gender audit of your centre/classroom - is there an equal representation of girls and boys, men and women in the books, posters, songs and activities you use?

Display posters depicting men and women in non-traditional roles around the classroom. **Ensure that you have posters that depict women in leadership positions and positions of power.**

Have more than one 'male' and 'female' doll in the play space or dolls house, as well as dolls of different ages and ethnicities.

Review materials and images used with children to make sure they include gender diversity, non-stereotypical images and non-traditional lifestyles, such as single or same sex parents.

**BE A ROLE MODEL!** WHEN POSSIBLE, GIVE EXAMPLES OF HOW YOU OR PEOPLE YOU KNOW LIKE TO DO THINGS OUTSIDE OF GENDER STEREOTYPES. FOR EXAMPLE, IF YOU'RE A WOMAN WHO LIKES CARPENTRY, TELL YOUR STUDENTS ABOUT IT. IF YOU'RE A MAN WHO LIKES TO COOK, MEASURE OUT SOME RECIPE INGREDIENTS WITH THE CHILDREN.

CAREFULLY CONSIDER THE KINDS OF BOOKS YOU INTRODUCE TO CHILDREN.

Stories that depict males and females in traditional stereotypical roles may perpetuate gender biases. It's perfectly ok to use traditional stories, it is just important to consider a balance. Make a point of drawing children's attention to it whenever books and stories challenge – or affirm – stereotypes.

### USE of LANGUAGE

Be mindful of the language used when addressing children

For example the use of 'honey' and 'sweetie' to address girls, and 'you guys' when speaking to the entire class

Make a conscious effort to comment on what the girls in your class are good at, rather than what they look like.

For example, 'That's some great skipping!' rather than 'Your hair looks lovely today'.



### Play and role modelling

Encourage children to play in different ways that aren't constricted by gender.

Make recipe books with the children, encouraging everyone to take turns 'shopping' for the ingredients, doing the 'cooking' and cleaning up the kitchen.

Practice role modelling diverse gender roles.

Use 'he' and 'she' interchangeably in conversation, particularly when describing professionals or animals i.e. Purposely referring to the bear as she or flight attendant as he.

Encourage children to feel equally free to use the different spaces in the classroom.

Encourage wooden, neutral toys for children to play with that aren't just pink and blue



This project is proudly supported by Manningham City Council's Community Grant Program

# Tips for engaging in conversations with children about gender stereotyping

Children are often very keen to 'police' one another and make sure their peers follow the gender 'rules' they've learned. You can set the example by questioning them, and offering counter-examples from your own knowledge or experience.<sup>23</sup> You can intervene when you hear children talking about gender stereotypes in a number of ways and encourage children to question and reflect on gender roles and values by asking simple questions.

A child may say "girls can't do that!" You can say, actually they can... and give examples of females doing it. Link characters in books to real life role models.<sup>24</sup>

## REDRAW THE BALANCE



Check out this powerful short clip video that demonstrates how early on how children define professions as male or female, and an inspiring example of how this classroom redraws the balance.

[CLICK HERE TO WATCH THE VIDEO](#)

## Tips and questions

As a teacher, show an interest in non-traditional activities. Be seen to be doing some 'boy stuff' or 'girl stuff' yourself!<sup>23</sup>

What do individual children like to do? Do they like these things because they are a girl/boy?

*Can girls be fire fighters? Can Dad's do the washing up?*

*Can you be a boy and wear a dress/play with dolls?*

*Can you be a girl and play with trucks/wear trousers?*

What do boys and girls often like to do? Are these the same for every one? What things are the same/different?

Do boys like dolls? Why not?

## BE PREPARED FOR QUESTIONS AND PUT DOWNS ON GENDER



Practicing answering questions related to gender or interrupting hurtful teasing based on gender will help you respond more easily when the situation arises. Follow the link for possible phrases and answers to challenge hurtful gendered comments and jokes.

[CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD THE RESOURCE](#)

# Children's book selection checklist

Free to be me



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## Book Selection Checklist

### This checklist will help you select books that challenge gender stereotypes.

Stereotypes are generalisations about a particular group that are applied to everyone in the group. Examples include: all girls like playing with dolls and all boys like playing with trucks. Stereotypes can be harmful, as they can impact on the way children think and feel about themselves, and how they interact with others.

This checklist can also help you to select books for your room that embrace diversity beyond gender. These can include race, culture and ethnicity, sexual orientation and ability.

As a general guide, an appropriate book will include characters that challenge or break traditional ideas about gender roles and femininity/masculinity. Characters will be positively portrayed and celebrated for their uniqueness. Ideally, these characters and their attributes are seen as being 'normal' rather than 'different but okay'. This helps to normalise people who do not conform to stereotypes and expectations relating to gender, culture, disability etc.

It's important to consider all aspects of the book, when using the checklist. Look at the storyline, the characters and the illustrations.

### How to use this checklist:

1. Look through the checklist before reading the book. This will help you identify what to look for when you analyse the book.
2. Read the book.
3. Complete the checklist by placing a tick in the 'yes' or 'no' column for each question. Some questions might be best answered with a tick in both boxes. This is completely fine; just write a note to explain your decision.
4. Some questions might not fit with or apply to the book. In this case, just write an 'N/A' next to the criteria.
5. If a book is **appropriate**, it will have more 'yes' ticks than 'no' ticks in the Gender table.
6. A book is **not appropriate** if it has more than two 'no' ticks in the Gender table.
7. A book may pass the gender check but not the diversity check. You may decide that the book is still okay to share, as long as it does not exclude or make fun of people from diverse backgrounds.
8. Make a simple note of whether the book is appropriate or not. Consider how you could use this book in your room to promote the message of challenging gender stereotypes, embracing diversity and celebrating individuality.

For more information, contact the Health Promotion Team at  
Access Health & Community on 03 9810 3000





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**Book title**

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**Author**

---

**Illustrator**

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## Gender

Criteria	Yes	No	Comments
Does the story challenge gender roles? <i>Examples of stereotypical gender roles: women looking after the children; men as the family breadwinner or 'Mr Fix-It'.</i>			
Do female and male characters in the story have the same opportunities?			
Is it clear that female characters are not restricted to traditionally 'feminine' qualities and interests? <i>Traditional 'feminine' qualities include: caring, passive, beautiful, image-conscious, emotional, vulnerable, dependent.</i>			
Is it clear that male characters are not restricted to traditionally 'masculine' qualities and interests? <i>Traditional 'masculine' qualities include: strong, physical, aggressive, tough, protective, controlling, independent, unemotional.</i>			
Are female characters who have 'masculine' qualities or interests portrayed as normal? Are they welcomed and included?			
Are male characters who have more 'feminine' qualities or interests portrayed as normal? Are they welcomed and included?			
Are there both female and male characters in prominent or important roles?			
Does the book show that people who don't conform to gender stereotypes can be great friends with people who do?			



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## Diversity

Criteria	Yes	No	Comments
Is diversity represented through any of the characters in the story?			
Cultural backgrounds?			
Family types?			
Age ranges?			
Ability/disability?			
Variety of different body shapes and sizes?			
Other?			
Was this diversity promoted in a positive way?			

## Reflection

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Is this book appropriate for your service? Why/why not?

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How could you use this book in your room to promote the message of embracing diversity and celebrating individuality?

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# Children's book list: challenging gender stereotypes and embracing diversity

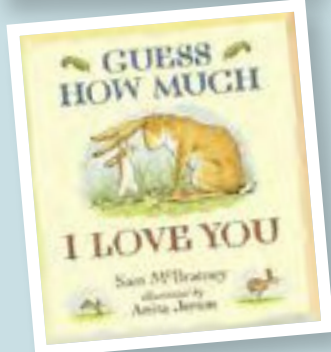
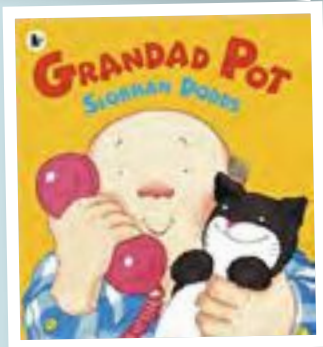
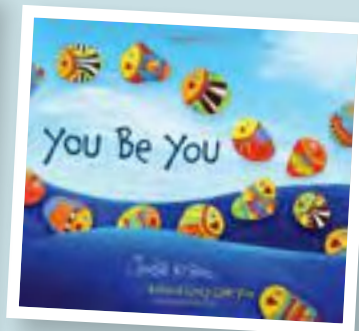
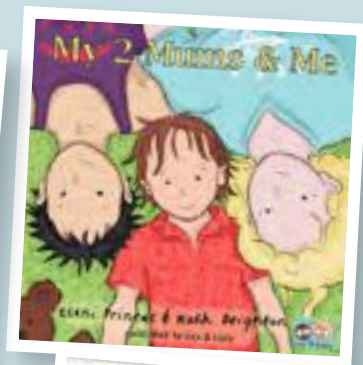
## BOOKS THAT MODEL EQUALITY



Check out [www.letterboxlibrary.com](http://www.letterboxlibrary.com) for more ideas on books and resources that celebrate gender equality and diversity.

[CLICK HERE TO VISIT THE WEBSITE](#)

The following books are available from Whitehorse Manningham Libraries and have been tested using the 'Free to Be Me' book selection criteria above, which was developed in partnership with Access Health and Community (previously Manningham Community Health Service).



*"[Promoting gender equality] can mean ensuring our children see a diverse range of role models, as well as championing both female and male leaders in books, television, movies, arts and sport. We can't be what we can't see!"*

*Natasha Stott Despoja 2017*

1. The Worst Princess, Anna Kemp; 2. My 2 Mums and Me, Eleni Prineas; 3. You Be You, Linda Kranz; 4. Dogs Don't Do Ballet, Anna Kemp; 5. Grandad Pot, Siobhan Dodds; 6. The Great Big Book of Families, Mary Hoffman; 7. Guess How Much I Love You, Sam McBratney; 8. We Are Different, Jodie McMahon.



# Actively promoting gender equality in your service

*A gender equality policy makes a statement to parents and potential parents around what your centre is about – its values and commitments.*

What does a Gender Equality Policy look like?

- A statement that says that you are an inclusive service
- A statement that makes clear your commitment to gender equality and boys and girls having the same opportunities
- Examples of the ways in which your staff interact with children

Below are two policy examples. Organisations can adapt and tailor policy examples to your individual service, or can strengthen current and existing policy by adding a few additional sentences. For example an Equality and Diversity/Inclusion policy could be strengthened by adding a sentence about actively promoting positive attitudes and practices that support gender equality. You may also want to add a paragraph/point to articulate your commitment under your centre philosophy.

You will also need to consider what approach you will take to ensuring that staff and parents are involved in the process and any relevant training required.

## Example policy from Brine Street Childcare and Kindergarten<sup>25</sup>

Gender Equity Policy (Updated June 2015)

### RATIONALE

In order to promote confidence and self-esteem in children it is important to provide access to, and participation in, the same experiences and activities irrespective of gender.

### PURPOSE

- To acknowledge the uniqueness and potential of each child.
- To ensure that children are not discriminated against on the basis of gender.
- To ensure that positive attitudes towards gender equity are encouraged and supported.
- To free children from constraining, stereotypic definitions of gender role so that no aspects of development will be closed off simply because of a child's sex.

### PROCEDURES

When planning experiences for children educators should consider the following:

- Encourage all children to participate in a variety of activities, both indoors and outdoors.
- Provide a variety of resources and materials which give a balance of gender roles, attitudes and expectations.
- Encourage respectful relationships between children by using non-sexist language.
- Offer all children the opportunity to participate in day-to-day tasks e.g. setting the table, sweeping the path and raking the leaves.
- Encourage all children to participate in a variety of experiences and use a variety of resources, to express their emotions and to display affection and empathy.
- Recognise and respond to all children's individual needs, abilities and interests.

# Example policy from Dawson Street Childcare Cooperative<sup>26</sup>

## 6.1 GENDER EQUITY

### VALUES

DSCCC is committed to developing the full potential of all children irrespective of gender. It affirms that females and males are treated equally in regard to ability, personality and behaviour. It further affirms the right of all children to:

- a) Develop without the limitations of stereotypes based on gender;
- b) Develop a sense of pride in oneself and one's accomplishments, so enhancing feelings of positive self-esteem and self-worth; and
- c) Develop respect for each other's rights and responsibilities.

### GUIDELINES AND STRATEGIES

The following strategies assume shared understandings about issues of sexism. In order to assist this, in-service activities of staff and parents should be encouraged.

To further the aims set out in the policy, DSCCC will endeavour to:

- a) Ensure that both boys and girls are equally encouraged to participate in all activities with due consideration for individual needs and interests. For example, encourage both girls and boys to use home corner, outdoor playing equipment and toys such as cars and dolls.
- b) Encourage non-sexist behaviour by children and staff by purchasing counter sexism resource materials for staff use and by supplying staff development programs focused "around issues of sexism and education";

For example, if a child behaves in a sexist manner, a staff member should make him/her aware of other modes of behaviour (e.g. roles associated with cleaning up and housework) or encouraging all children to express emotions and display affection (e.g. it is alright for boys to cry or need a hug).

- c) Ensure that all language used within DSCCC, both verbal and written, is gender inclusive.
- d) Encourage use of materials which portray females and males in roles, situations and jobs which are not stereotyped.

For example, borrowing and purchasing children's literature, posters and toys which reflect this (e.g. Sugar and Snails).

- e) Select resources where both girls and boys are seen both as initiators and nurturers. For example, borrowing and purchasing children's literature, posters and toys.
- f) Ensure that both girls and boys equally share staff time, indoor/outdoor playing space and equipment with due regard to individual needs and interests. For example, staff development program regarding research and strategies developed elsewhere around such concerns (e.g. Equal Opportunity Resource Centres).
- g) Encourage the employment of both female and male staff and ensure that jobs carried out by staff are not related to gender.

Encourage educational or information projects that further the aims of this policy. For example, hold parent information nights on general topics of child development, including issues of socialisation.

# Working with families

## Families in your centre

*Children's understanding of gender is influenced and reinforced at a young age through interactions and experiences with family, culture, lifestyle and more broadly the media, education/childcare environment and the wider community. Engaging and informing families and carers about inclusive practices at your service is vital so that messages promoted in your early years' centre can be reinforced and strengthened in the home.*

- Keep families/carers informed about the work that your centre is doing around gender equality, and explain why equality is an issue that your centre feels passionate about. The poster on the following page can be a great resource for you to print out and display, or as a resource for children to take home to parents.
- Involve parents/carers in the developing your equality policy pledge.
- Promote and share your equality or inclusion policy/pledge with families/carers when they come to look around your service or to enrol their child. Use this visit as an opportunity to engage the family around gender equality and explain your service's commitment to fostering inclusiveness and diversity. Give some examples of how this is done.

- Use opportunities to encourage parents/carers of both sexes to be as involved as possible in their children's education. Make sure to invite both mums and dads along to help in the centre, or to be a special visitor<sup>24</sup>
- Hold a parent information session or workshop to engage them in gender equality, and bring them on board. This is an opportunity to talk about the impact of stereotypes and to do an activity with their children that promotes gender equality. For example, you might get them to talk about how all children can be leaders in our community – police, doctors, paramedics – and encourage them to draw what they would like to be when they grow up.
- Have additional resources ready to give parents who might want to learn more about stereotypes and gender equality, or who may want to know what books or movies are appropriate for their child to watch (see Resources section)

### MAKING A DIFFERENCE AT HOME

Children model a lot of their behaviour and develop their understanding of acceptable masculine or feminine qualities from their parents. Parents can influence how their children view gender and how they decide what it means to be a girl, boy, woman or man. Children are influenced by their parents through the roles they take on inside and outside the home and through the language used with children themselves. Furthermore, how parents interact with other adults and family members can impact on children's expectations of personal relationships.<sup>27</sup>



### EQUALITY IN THE HOME



You can find some great resources to support families to promote gender equality in the home. These can be found at [www.theline.org.au](http://www.theline.org.au)

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# Gender stereotypes: the what, how and why for families



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## Gender Stereotypes

### The What, How and Why for Families



#### What Are Gender Stereotypes?

Gender stereotypes are generalisations about the characteristics of an entire group based on gender. Gender stereotypes dictate behaviours that are considered acceptable or desirable for males and females. For example, boys are naturally rough and aggressive and girls are nurturing.

#### How Are Gender Stereotypes Reinforced?

Gender Stereotypes are reinforced to children through toys, sports, games, clothes, books, the media, advertising/marketing and sometimes through messages from teachers, families and friends.

#### Why Avoid Gender Stereotypes?

Gender stereotypes have a major influence on children's interests and skill development. Stereotyping in the early years can limit children's choices and aspirations. This impacts on the roles that they take on as adults, leading to gender inequality.

By breaking down gender stereotypes, girls and boys are able to 'dream big'. They are able to develop and learn based on personal skills and interests, unhindered by society's expectations.





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## What Can Families Do?

### Are Girls and Boys In Your Family:



- Offered toys & books based on their interests and skills?
- Provided with play equipment that includes cooking utensils, action figures, dolls, trucks and lego?
- Encouraged to explore a range of situations and role play?
- Provided with books & activities that depict women and men in diverse roles?

### Other Considerations:

- When talking to girls & boys, does language and tone of voice vary according to gender?
- Are boys sometimes excused for aggressive behaviour because "boys will be boys"?
- Are a variety of roles modelled by parents and other family members e.g. cooking, cleaning, caring for children, paid employment, mowing lawns?

Look for opportunities to have conversations with children about gender stereotypes. Use books, movies, media etc to stimulate discussion.



### Ideas for books

Provide books & stories that depict men & women, boys & girls in a variety of roles. Contact your childcare centre/kinder for a suggested reading list.



Women's Health East

Any questions?  
For further information, contact  
Women's Health East - 9851 3700

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# Resources and where to find them

## **Rainbow Families**

<http://www.glhv.org.au/fact-sheet/%E2%80%9Cwho-your-family%E2%80%9D-resource-kit-rainbow-families-council>

<http://www.rainbowfamilies.org.au/resources/whos-in-your-family/>

The 'Who is in your family' resource kit is a great resource for early childhood services, primary schools and the rainbow families who use them. This resource kit aims to help families and early childhood educators start discussions about the diversity of families – including same-sex parented families – who are part of their communities. The kit includes some great posters and information sheets.

## **Respect – Australian Government**

[www.respect.gov.au](http://www.respect.gov.au)

A national campaign which aims to help break the cycle of violence by encouraging adults to reflect on their attitudes and the things they say to boys and girls, and have conversations about respect with young people.

## **Creating Gender Equity in the Early Years Guide: A Resource for Local Government**

<http://bit.ly/2wn5Rlr>

Creating Gender Equity in the Early Years Guide provides a range of tools and resources to support local government and early years sectors across Victoria to have a positive influence on gender.

## **Play Unlimited**

<http://www.playunlimited.org.au/>

Play Unlimited is an organisation/campaign working to eliminate the gendered marketing of children's toys and to promote the idea that children should be encouraged to learn through the widest possible range of play experiences. The website includes some great articles about gendered marketing and its impacts, and how this can be addressed. A list of retailers 'doing it right' is also supplied.

## **No Gender December - #GiveGiftsNotStereotypes**

<http://www.nogenderdecember.com/>

The campaign, run by advocacy group Play Unlimited, seeks to make consumers more aware about the impacts gendered marketing has on children, and encourages non gendered gifts.

## **The Line**

<http://www.theline.org.au/>

The Line is a national youth campaign aimed at addressing the attitudes and behaviours that contribute to violence. This campaign is aimed at conversations with a slightly older audience, but is a great resource for initiating discussion on gender, respect and relationships with children of all ages.

## A Mighty Girl

<https://www.amightygirl.com/>

A Mighty Girl is the world's largest collection of books, toys, movies, and music for parents, teachers, and others dedicated to raising smart, confident, and courageous girls. The site was founded on the belief that all children should have the opportunity to read books, play with toys, listen to music, and watch movies that offer positive messages about girls and honour their diverse capabilities.

## Welcoming Schools

<http://www.welcomingschools.org/>

A U.S. developed comprehensive website that provides numerous resources, information and lesson plans which encourage educators and families to embrace family diversity, prevent bias-based bullying and gender stereotyping and support transgender students.

## Breaking the Mould

<https://www.teachers.org.uk/equality/equality-matters/breaking-mould>

A UK based educational project which provides resources and ideas on how gender stereotypes can be challenged in kindergartens and primary school classrooms.

## Let Toys be Toys

<http://www.lettoysbetoys.org.uk/>

A UK campaign and website which advocates for toy and publishing industries to stop limiting children's interests by promoting some toys and books as only suitable for girls, and others only for boys. The website houses resources for educators and parents about gender stereotypes, and gives a list of recommended retailers and books that challenge stereotypes.

## Safe schools

<http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org.au/>

Safe Schools Coalition Australia is a national coalition of organisations and schools working together to create safe and inclusive school environments for same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse students, staff and families.

## Videos

### OUR WATCH

<https://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do/National-Primary-Prevention-Framework>

### RILEY RANT

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CU040Hqbas>

### REDRAW THE BALANCE

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qv8VZVP5csA>

### HUGGIES AD

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z76EPVnuOkA>

### LIKE A GIRL

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

### PANTENE BOSSY AD

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8gz-jxjCmg>



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