



BUILDING RESPECT AND EQUITY AMONG YOUNG CHILDREN

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

City of Melbourne piloted an innovative program in one of its children's centres to examine age appropriate ways of fostering respectful relationships and gender equity among preschool children.

The program engaged educators in professional learning, mentoring and reflection on their own practices and biases. It also included a formal evaluation which highlighted the vital role educators play in promoting respect and gender equity with children and their families.

Challenging gender stereotypes and rigid norms is central to promoting respect and equity.

Where do gender stereotypes come from?

Gender stereotypes and norms are everywhere – they come from family members, teachers, friends, the media, toys and books. We even hear them in everyday conversations. When children see and hear the same messages about how they should behave as a boy or a girl it can shape who they think they should be and what they can and can't do.

Why should we challenge gender stereotypes?

1. As gender stereotypes and norms can restrict a child's idea of who they are and what's expected of them, challenging them **opens their world** up to far more options and opportunities.
2. Challenging gender stereotypes and norms helps us all live in a more equal world, where we can expect to be **heard, valued and respected** no matter our gender.

Top tips for early childhood educators

1. Think about your own assumptions and biases about gender stereotypes and norms – do you give certain activities to children according to whether they are boys or girls?
2. Conduct an audit of your play spaces and how they are used – do the books in your room promote respect and equity? What toys or equipment are boys and girls playing with? Can you be more 'intentional' in where you position yourself in the play area so that children are drawn to areas they don't normally play in?

3. When documenting children's social and emotional development, include your observations of how children enact their own gender and their expectations of other children.
4. Seek out professional learning on how to promote respectful and gender equitable relationships in children. Or access available resources and share them with your colleagues (See more information below for links).
5. Review your service's policies. Do they explicitly mention promoting respect and equity? Do you need a separate policy to make sure gender equity is a priority?

Some definitions

Gender stereotypes are assumptions and ideas about people based on their gender, for example 'boys are rough' and 'girls are caring'.

Gender norms are the behaviours, interests and roles expected of boys and girls, women and men based solely on their gender. For example, 'women do the cooking' and 'men are the main breadwinners'.

Find more information at:

- Read our full report and resources at melbourne.vic.gov.au/respectandequity
- The Level Playground levelplayground.org.au/learn (and search for early childhood educators)
- Women's Health East's *No limitations* report whe.org.au (and search 'gender stereotypes').