



BUILDING RESPECT AND EQUITY AMONG YOUNG CHILDREN

PARENTS AND CARERS

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 revealed parents were very interested in ensuring their children felt equal in terms of experiences, opportunities, learning and play – no matter if they were boys or girls.

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, calling them out **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 parents

1. Make sure both parents role model respect and equality, for example sharing household chores, making joint decisions and complimenting each other's work.
2. Encourage outdoor play. Not only is it healthy but it gets all children to explore and develop without the influence of 'boy' or 'girl' toys.
3. Use story time or bedtime reading to promote discussion when gender stereotypes or norms are presented in books. Get children to apply the fairness test – children are very keen on things being 'fair'.
4. Be aware of how media, advertising and popular culture reinforce stereotypes and norms. Think about how you can question the images and assumptions your children are exposed to.
5. Encourage children to treat their friends and peers fairly and equally and call them out when they make assumptions (for example 'she can't play football, she's a girl').

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 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 should be the main breadwinner'.

Further reading

- Read our full report and resources at melbourne.vic.gov.au/respectandequity
- Our Watch's #becausewhy campaign ourwatch.org.au/because-why
- Women's Health East's No limitations report whe.org.au (and search 'gender stereotypes').