

Tips for Gender Inclusive Parenting

- Treat children as individuals.
- Tell your child explicitly that not all boys or all girls are the same – that everyone is unique in their own way. Do this more than once if you want it to sink in.
- Emphasize that differences are positive. Encourage children to recognize that what is “weird, silly, yucky, strange” to them, is really just different.
- Notice “all or nothing” language. Help children understand the difference between *patterns*: “some people, more common/less common, typical, sometimes” and *rules*: “all people, natural, normal, always/never.” Avoid using “normal” to define people or behaviors.
- Think about when it is relevant or necessary to identify someone’s gender (it rarely is). Try using inclusive terms like “kids,” “children,” or “friends,” instead of “boys” or “girls.” Your child will learn from your example. And you will probably encourage more gender expansive friendships to boot.
- Try using inclusive pronouns like “they/them/their” instead of gendered pronouns (“she, her, he, his”). Even for singular. Really, this is ok, and with practice you can get used to it.
- Not all children have one mom and one dad. Rather than making that assumption, say “parents” or “families” instead “moms and dads.” This will help all children feel that their family is included and remind them that every family is different.
- Review media (books, videos, tv, games, music) for gender-alizations and stereotypes, and talk with your child about what you notice. Ask them what they notice.
- Ingest media that offers a counter-message to stereotypes to provide balance.
- There are no “boys’ books” or “girls’ toys.” All children benefit from stories with characters who defy stereotypes, regardless of the gender of the character or the gender of the child.
- When deciding whether to utilize gender to divide a group, determine who to invite, or what gift to give, etc., try substituting another identity like ethnicity or religion. If you realize this is obviously racist/discriminatory/socially unacceptable/absurd, then you have your answer.
- Pay attention to subtle policing of gender – how you encourage or ignore your child’s interests based on gender (e.g. encouraging boys playing with trucks, ignoring boys playing with dolls.)
- Correct the stereotypes you hear from your children.
- Children are noticing that most of their teachers are women, that the most discussed people in our history are men. They will come up with their own explanations for why this is the case, and the ideas they come up with may be wrong or may not reflect your values. Be honest with kids about issues like sexism. This will help them understand, and help them make change.
- Talk to your kids about the stereotypes they hear from other adults. Sometimes adults make mistakes, too. You can do this in private if you don’t want to offend grandma.
- Pay attention to how often you comment, for example, on girls’ appearance (hair style, clothing, beauty) and how often you comment on boys’ physicality (strength, speed, competitiveness). Stop yourself and say something else. Ask any child about a book they recently read. Notice girls’ strength. Notice boys’ compassion.
- If your child often receives comments about their appearance, have a “go-to” response you can say immediately that acknowledges something else about the child besides appearance. This affirms for your child what you think is important to notice about them and counters the appearance value message they are getting from others.
- Don’t allow your kids to disparage others or talk about children who have a different gender from their own in negative or inappropriate ways.

- Be easy on yourself. This work is hard, and you are trying, and that is awesome!
- Don't excuse behavior that is inappropriate with "boys will be boys." At some point those boys will probably be men.
- Pay attention to behavioral expectations you have of girls. Are girls reprimanded more harshly for types of behavior that is considered tolerable or acceptable for boys? That's sexist!
- Ask questions when you don't understand. Use resources to find information. Model these two ways of learning for your child.
- Teach your child that bodies are private. We don't know what other people's bodies look like under their clothes, nor do we need to. Other people tell us what their gender is, and we respect and honor what they tell us.
- Enforce respect of people's bodies and personal space – your own, your child's, and the people your child interacts with. This is an important, early lesson about consent.
- Always respond to your child's questions. Answer matter-of-factly and simply, and use language appropriate to the child's developmental understanding. If you do not know what to say, appreciate the question and explain that you have to think about it first. Get back to your child with your response.
- It's never too late to revisit a topic, change your mind, or tell your child, "I know I said ___ (or I used to think ___), but then I thought about it (or I learned something new), and now I _____."
- If you see something, say something. Not speaking up about something tells your child it is ok. Parents can and do make a difference. Your impact on your own child (and the greater child world) is immeasurable and invaluable!
- Find a support system where you can explore your own emotions and ask your own questions. Don't go it alone. There are tons of resources and people who are willing to help!

Questions to further your own learning about gender and children

- What are the qualities I hope for my children to possess as an adult? How can I cultivate these qualities in my children regardless of their gender?
- What is my role in creating a school community that feels welcoming to all students and families?
- What do I notice about how girls and boys are different from each other? Where do these differences come from?
- What do I notice about children who seem to defy gendered stereotypes? How would I explain these differences to my child?
- How can I help my child feel comfortable expressing a wide range of emotions, interests, and behaviors which may or may not be typical for their gender?
- In what ways is my child different from their best friend? [Although the two children probably have some social identities in common, like gender, ethnicity, socio-economic class, or going to the same school, they are still each unique. There is as much diversity within identity groups as there is between identity groups.]
- How do I teach my children notions of gender equality? What topics from my own experience can I share to increase their understanding?
- How can I model openness to differences so my children understand this as a value of mine?
- What are questions or topics about which I need more information? Where can I find the information?