# Healthy Gender Development and Young Children

A Guide for Early Childhood Programs and Professionals National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement This document was developed with funds from Grant #90HCO014 for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start (Difee of Child Care, and by the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. This resource may be duplicated for noncommercial uses without permission. Visit our PFCE web portal on the Office of Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hsi/clta-system/family | Contact us: PFCE@ecetta.info | 866-763-6481 The ability to recognize when things are the same or different is an important skill that children develop over time. It's only natural that they start asking questions to help them sort out the differences between boys and girls. It's easy to see how they may think that being a boy means doing some things and liking some things, and being a girl means doing and liking other things.



## Create a Learning Environment that Encourages Healthy Gender Development "Offer a wide range of toys, books, and games that expose children to diverse gender roles.

\*Provide dramatic play props that give children the freedom to explore and develop their own sense of gender and gender roles.

\*Avoid assumptions that girls or boys are not interested in an activity

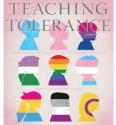
\*Use inclusive phrases to address your class as a whole, like "Good morning, everyone" instead of "Good morning, boys and girls

\*Help children expand their possibilities—academically, artistically, and emotionally develop classroom messages that emphasize gender-neutral language, like "All children can . . . " rather than "Boys don't . . . " or "Girls don't .



### Demonstrate Support for Children's Gender Expression

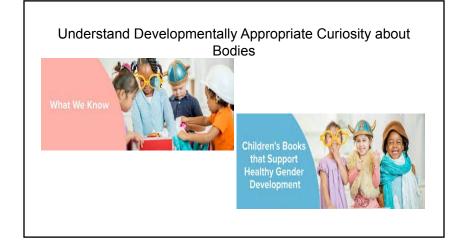
Research has shown that when girls and boys act assertively, girls tend to be criticized as "bossy," while boys are more likely to be praised for being leaders (Martin & Halverson, 1981; Theimer, Killen, & Stangorm, 2001; Martin & Ruble, 2004, 2009).



## Engage in Discussions about Healthy Gender Development

It can be helpful to remember that play is the way that children explore and make meaning of their world. Be prepared to have conversations that honor a range of feelings, make space for questions, address concerns, discuss varied points of view, and offer resources.





#### Understanding Differences Between Gender and Sexual Orientation

\*Gender expression, gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Gender identity is about who you feel you are as a person. Sexual orientation is about the gender of the people you are sexually attracted to.

\*The age at which gender identity becomes established varies. Gender identity for some children may be fairly firm when they are as young as two or three years oid (AAP, 2015; Balwin & Moses, 1996; Gender Spectrum, 2012; Zosuls et al., 2009). For others it may be fluid until adolescence and occasionally later.

"The age at which an individual becomes aware of their sexual orientation, that is, their feelings of attraction for one gender or the other or both, also varies. Such feelings may emerge during childhood, adolescence, or later in life (Campo-Arias, 2010; Gender Spectrum, 2012). At present, child development experts asy there is no way to predict what a <u>child's sexual orientation or gender</u> identity will be as an adult (Bryan, 2012).



Look for opportunities to help children practice positive language they can use with each other. Here are some examples that you can use to create your own:

- "Boys and girls can be good at sports/ writing/sitting still."
- "Girls and boys can be friends with each other."
- "Everybody can play in the kitchen/tool area/swing set."
- "Running games are for everyone."
- "Hair is hair. That is how she/he likes it."
- "Boys and girls can wear what they like at our school."
- "Colors are colors. There aren't boy colors or girl colors. All children like different colors."



#### Related Resources

American Academy of Pediatrics' Healthy Children.org: Gender Identity in School https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ ages-stages/gradeschool/Pages/GenderIdentity-and-Gender-Confusion-In-Children.aspx Eight (8) Positive Ways to Address Children's Gender Identity Issues

http://www.parents.com/toddlers-preschoolers/development/behavioral/gender-identity-issues-children/?slideld=46660 Gender Spectrum: Resources for Gender Inclusive Schools https://www.genderspectrum.org/resources/education-2/#cuatro

Southern Poverty Law Center—Teaching Tolerance: Not True! Gender Doesn't Limit You!

http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-32-fall-2007/ feature/not-true-gender-doesnt-limit-you We Are Different, We Are the Same: Teaching Young Children about Diversity

http://extension.psu.edu/youth/betterki/dcare/knowledge-areas/environment-curriculum/activities/all-activities/we-are-different-we-are-th e-same-teaching-youngchildren-about-diversity Welcoming Schools: Developing a Gender Inclusive School







#### Selected References

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2015, November 11). Gender identity development in children. Retrieved from https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/

gradeschool/Pages/Gender-Identity-and-Gender-Confusion-In-Children.aspx American Psychological Association. (n.d.) Definitions Related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity in APA Guidelines and Policy Documents. American Psychological Association. (2015). Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People. American Psychologist, 70(9), 832–864. American Psychological Association. (2012). Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients. American Psychologist, 67(1), 10–42. American Psychological Association & National Association of School Psychologists. (2015). Resolution on gender and sexual orientation diversity in children and adolescents in schools.

Antill, J. K., Cunningham, J. D., Cotton, S. (2003). Gender-role attitudes in middle school: In what ways do parents influence their children? Australian Journal of Psychology, 55, 148–153. Baldwin, D., & Moses, L. (1996). The ontogeny of social information gathering. Child Development, 67(5), 1915–1939. Bem, S.L. (1981). Gender schema theory: A cognitive account of sex typing. Psychological Review, 88(4), 354–364. Bryan, J. (2012). From the dress-up corner to the senior prom: Navigating gender and sexuality diversity in preK12 schools. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education. Bussey, K. & Bandura, A. (1999). Social cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation. Psychological Review, 106(4):876–713.



From Heather Bomsta MA MBA Michigan State University: Just a few places you might look ... GLSEN and Ready, Set, Respect! had ready-to-teach curriculum/ideas (in bold below):

- Healthy Gender Development and Young Children, A Guide for Early Childhood Programs and Professionals, National Center on Parent, Family & Community Engagement: <u>https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/healthy-gender-development.pdf</u>
- The importance of gender in early childhood education policy (The Brookings Institute):
- https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2018/11/05/the-importance-of-gender-in-early-childhood-education-policy/ GLSEN - national education organization focused on ensuring safe and affirming schools for LGBTQ students:
  - https://www.glsen.org/educate/resources Lesson plan for elementary students on gender stereotypes: https://www.glsen.org/article/thats-gender-stereotype
  - Beyond the gender binary and First Nations' Two-spirit identities (upper elementary):
  - https://www.glsen.org/article/beyond-gender-binary
  - Anti-bullying lessons:
    - Garden of kindness <u>https://www.glsen.org/article/garden-kindness</u>
    - Bullying based on appearance "Beauty is Skin Deep" (grades 3-5): https://www.glsen.org/article/beauty-skin-deep-grades-3-5
- Ready, Set, Respect! Developed in partnership with the National Association of Elementary School Principals, and the National Association for the Education of Young Children. This kit provides a set of tools that will help you prepare to teach about respect and includes lesson plans that can help you setze teachable moments. The lessons focus on name-calling, bullying and bias, LGBT-inclusive family diversity and gender roles and diversity and are designed to be used as either standalone lessons or as part of a school-wide anti-bias or bullying prevention program. <u>Hussi/www.clasen.org/readysetrespect</u>
- GenderSpectrum: https://www.genderspectrum.org/resources/education-2/
- National Association of School Psychologists on gender inclusive schools (includes the District and SchoolTransgender and Gender Diverse Readiness Assessment Form & "Supporting LGBTQ Youth During Troubled
- Times"):http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/diversity/lgbtq-vouth/gender-inclusive-schools-fags Welcoming Schools: http://www.welcomingschools.org/resources/

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