

# Just like a child

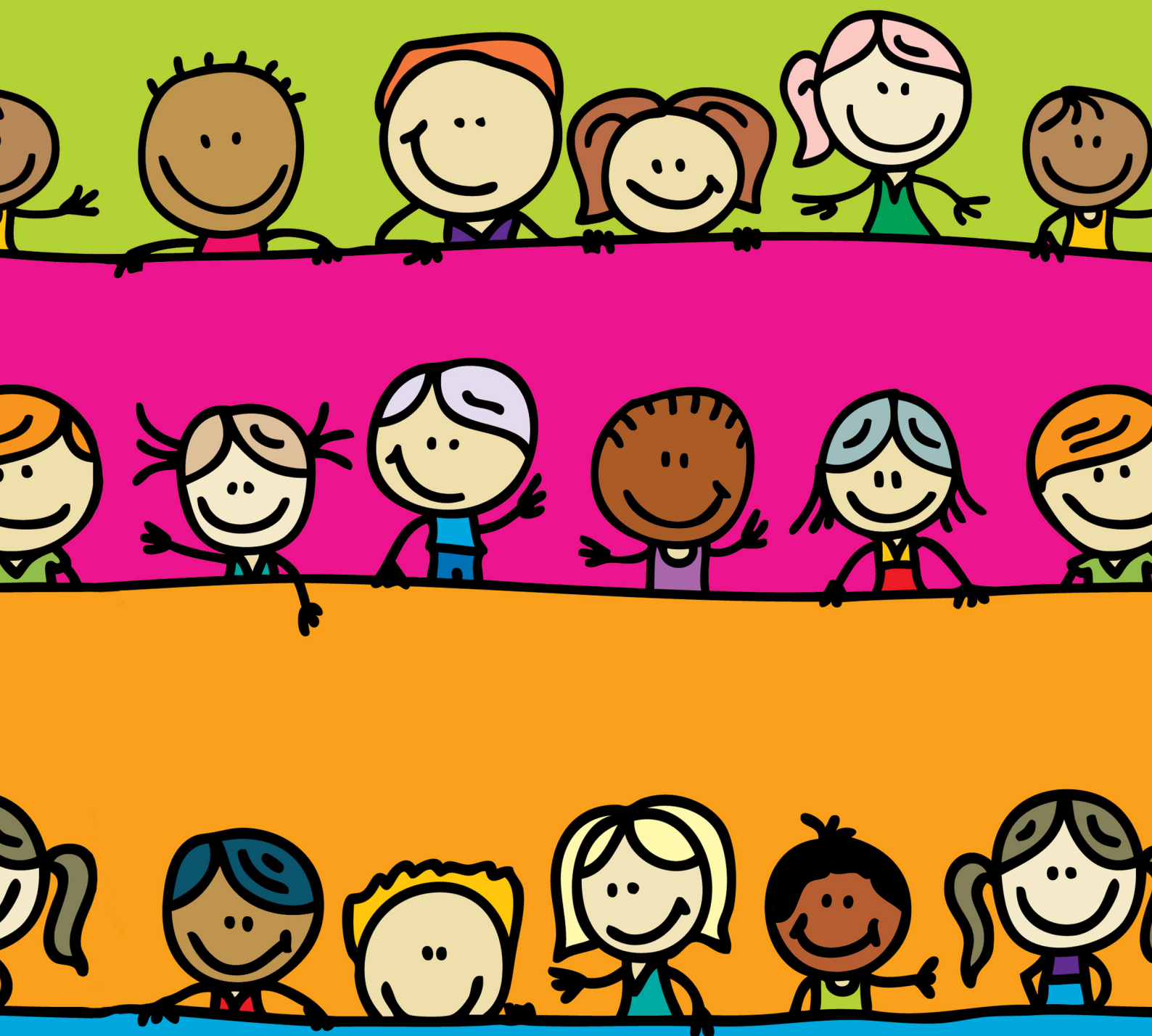
Respect gender equality in the early years

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A guide for childcare professionals

# Z

ZERO TOLERANCE



## **Zero Tolerance is a charity working to tackle the causes of men's violence against women**

Too many women in Scotland, and around the world, experience violence from men – most often men they are close to and/or who are in a position of power over them.

We believe that men's violence against women is caused by gender inequality and that it helps this inequality to continue.

It does not have to be this way. We work with individuals, communities, women's organisations, schools, the media and others to address the causes of violence against women, and bring about change.

**Change is possible. Make it happen.**



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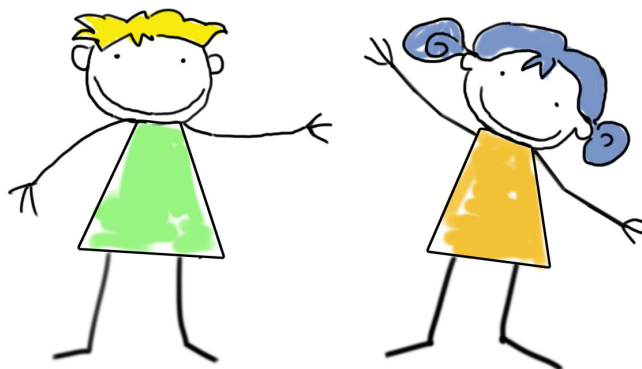
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# Foreword

It is vital that the children we care for, at work and at home, are happy and healthy and reach their potential. But sometimes society limits what children can do, be and become. Some limits are obvious and for good reason. Others are subtle and unjust, and may even mean children growing up less happy, confident and self-assured than they should be.

This guide to preventing gender stereotyping in the early years is aimed at childcare professionals who work directly with very young children, and who are in contact with their parents and carers. It provides resources to support professionals and parents to raise children who are not limited by outdated or restrictive ideas of what is suitable for boys and for girls.

Zero Tolerance is committed to promoting gender equality and tackling discrimination. We believe that it is never too early to question what is seen as 'normal' or what is traditionally expected of boys and girls in our society.

In fact, we believe that doing so from a very young age, helps to protect children from the negative consequences of inequality and discrimination as they grow into adults.

We hope the practical advice and information in this guide, gathered from childcare practitioners and research evidence, is helpful.

Please let us know if you have any comments or questions.



Jenny Kemp  
Coordinator, Zero Tolerance

# About this guide

This guide is aimed at childcare professionals who work with very young children in nurseries/educational settings. The information it contains is also helpful for parents and carers.

It gives some policy context for tackling gender stereotyping within early years work; explains some common terminology (see glossary); and provides ideas and examples for work in nurseries, primary schools and other early years settings along with details of resources, contacts and further reading.

It is not a blueprint but offers some practical suggestions for you to use or to give to parents/carers. We hope you will be able to pick and choose whatever is useful for you.

We are keen to add to and develop work in this area, and we welcome your ideas, resources, and case studies.

## Nursery school in France challenges gender stereotyping

*Bourdarias nursery school in Paris was the first pre-school establishment in France to adopt an anti-sexism policy, and is now besieged with applications from parents who wish to send their children to the nursery. The policy is applied to every aspect: the children's activities, the relationship between adults and children, and even everyday words. Nursery head teacher, Haude Constantin-Bienaimé, comments, 'Our goal is to give children the fundamental skills that they will need growing up. Yet, we've observed that from a very young age, girls and boys do not have the same self-confidence.'*

*In Seine-Saint-Denis, where the nursery is based, and where there are 55 other nurseries, the municipal government has helped develop this initiative. 'The nursery is now part of a wider programme,' explains Stéphane Troussel, the region's president. 'We also have a programme to combat sexism in secondary schools and an observatory for violence against women.'*

Source: Le Monde 09.12.2012



# Context

“Our minds, society and neurosexism create difference. Together they wire gender. But the wiring is soft, not hard. It is flexible, malleable and changeable. And, if we only believe this, it will continue to unravel.”

**Delusions of Gender:** the real science behind sex differences, Cordelia Fine, Icon Books, 2011

It is never too early to promote equality, tackle stereotyping and discrimination, and raise children who can participate fully in the world. Indeed, this is central to any childcare professional’s relationships with children and their families.

There is a wealth of evidence indicating that the earliest years of life are crucial to a child’s development and future life chances. This is central to Scottish Government early years and education policy, see for example:

- *Pre-birth to Three: positive outcomes for Scotland’s children and families.*
- *Early Years Framework*
- *Curriculum for Excellence*

What happens to children when they are very young influences how they are as adults: early influences shape how people treat themselves, their children and other people and affect the opportunities they have throughout their lives.

## Why tackling gender stereotypes matters

Children learn from the world around them. Gender stereotypes perpetuate inequality and reinforce difference between men and women, rather than individuals being people first and equals.

This can affect many aspects of life such as jobs, income, self-esteem and self-belief. Gender stereotypes encourage ideas of what it means to be a boy or a girl; man or woman, which limit men and women alike.

Although there has been enormous change in recent decades, inequalities persist. For example, men are less likely than women to take on caring roles within the family or workplace. Although women dominate certain professions<sup>1</sup> (such as education), their male colleagues are more likely to be promoted to senior positions.<sup>2</sup>

The stereotypes are persistent. Generally speaking, boys are encouraged to be active and adventurous in their play, they are expected to behave more aggressively; whereas girls are expected to be and to look ‘nice’ and to take on caring and nurturing roles from a very young age.

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<sup>1</sup>Women were 98% of the childcare and early years workforce in 2005 and 97% in 2007. Women were also 98% of classroom assistants.

<sup>2</sup>In secondary schools ... women are the majority in the overall teaching workforce (60%), but are much less likely than men to be head teachers (26%). (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/236539/0064855.pdf>)



This is mirrored, for example, in toys which are often presented and promoted to children on the basis of their sex.

Many toys are gender neutral but companies often work hard to make their toys gender-specific. Lego has recently been criticised for its new 'Friends' range which features slim-line dolls which spend their time on shopping and their appearance. Another recent arrival is the Monopoly Pink Edition, described as 'an ideal gift item for girls aged 8 years+'. It comes in a beautiful pink box and all of the new movers can be attached to a charm bracelet! Play around the board buying and building salons, boutiques and malls.'

Toys aimed specifically at boys are often based on engines and motors, construction and physical activity. At their worst, some 'boys' toys' encourage a particular kind of aggressive masculinity, based on fighting and war. These include toys such as the ever-popular Nerf guns.

How children are dressed can limit what they do, how they see themselves and how other people see them. For example, girls wearing short skirts may be discouraged from certain types of rough play for modesty reasons. Shoe styles might stop them running around or being active. And boys may find themselves being teased if they wear certain colours or styles.

There are also concerns about the sexualisation of very young girls through clothes. For example, a recent campaign by Mumsnet aimed to challenge retailers, whilst a recent 'beauty pageant for girls' had a 20-month old girl in a bikini.<sup>3</sup> Clothes aimed at boys are often dark and may have 'tough man' slogans and images.<sup>4</sup>

*A survey by the Guardian found an array of items available in major chains, from a T-shirt for a three-year-old bearing the slogan 'Future WAG' to a top for a toddler with a pink bikini appliqued on the front. New Look sells a range of high heels starting at size one – about the shoe size of an average eight-year-old – including a pair of £16 dark blue platforms with a 3.5 inch heel, pointed toe and four straps.*

Source: The Guardian 16.4.2010

People are all different. That is something to celebrate! But not if it means inequality as, fundamentally, this creates vulnerabilities in some people and gives too much power to others. At the extreme, gender inequality is linked to domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence which are internationally recognised as being overwhelmingly committed by men against women (see glossary).

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<sup>3</sup> [www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2197518/Pouting-posing-growing-soon-beauty-pageant-princess-aged-And-US-UK.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2197518/Pouting-posing-growing-soon-beauty-pageant-princess-aged-And-US-UK.html)

<sup>4</sup> See for example [www.achilleseffect.com/2012/03/never-too-early-for-sexism-stereotypes-chicks-tough-guys-in-preschool-boys-clothing/](http://www.achilleseffect.com/2012/03/never-too-early-for-sexism-stereotypes-chicks-tough-guys-in-preschool-boys-clothing/)



## It is national policy

The focus on equality in the context of children and young people is enshrined in the Scottish Government's National Outcomes.

- *'We have tackled the significant inequalities in Scottish society'*
- *'Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed'*
- *'Our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens'*

It is also implicit in the Scottish Government's Getting it right for every child policy to give children and young people the best possible start in life. More about this at [www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright)

## It is education strategy

The Scottish Government education strategy recognises that learning begins at birth and continues throughout life and aims to help learners develop the skills they need for learning, life and work. This is set out in the Early Years Framework and the Curriculum for Excellence. For example, the Curriculum for Excellence expects all staff to understand anti-discriminatory, anti-bullying and child protection policies. The learning environment should support children to:

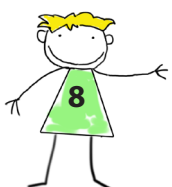
- *Develop self-awareness, self-worth and respect for others*
- *Build resilience and confidence*
- *Participate in a wide range of activities which promote a healthy lifestyle*
- *Acknowledge diversity and understand that it is everyone's responsibility to challenge discrimination*

It focuses on children learning values of respect and equality including, for example:

- *'I know that friendship, caring, sharing, fairness, equality and love are important in building positive relationships. As I develop and value relationships, I care and show respect for myself and others'*
- *'I recognise that each individual has a unique blend of abilities and needs. I contribute to making my school community one which values individuals equally and is a welcoming place for all'*

More information at: [www.educationscotland.gov.uk](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk)

The ideas and examples in this guide are consistent with the above policy and strategy and they aim to help you to fulfil your policy and practice obligations within your professional setting.





## In the playground

Helen Donaldson, acting head teacher of Trinity Primary in Edinburgh, comments on the school's work to promote gender equality:

*'...pupils have taken part in a range of activities, such as designing a gender-neutral toy and talking about stereotypes. One of the aims of this work is to try to break down gender barriers, so we also make sure that children are not separated into boy/girl groups for sports, lining up in the playground or for competitions. The response from children so far has been excellent and the message of respecting others and understanding differences is definitely getting through.'*

*She added that by P7, children in the school have a 'firm understanding' of why everyone should have equal access to toys, pastimes, sports and jobs, regardless of their gender.*

Source: The Scotsman 5.2.2012

## Children have a right to this

Children have rights to equality and an enriched life free of discrimination. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the UK government sets out what a child needs to survive, grow, participate and fulfil their potential.

More information available at the **UN Convention on the rights of the child**

## How equal is Scotland?

Much has changed but there is some way to go:

- **Power:** only one in four MPs in Westminster are women<sup>5</sup>; women are better represented in the Scottish Parliament, but still only one in three MSPs is a woman.<sup>6</sup>
- **Wealth:** on average, women earn 11.7% less than men increasing to 32.1% less when taking part-time work into consideration.<sup>7</sup>
- **Paid work:** women are more likely to work in the public service sector (65% of employees are women), and are more likely to use services in the poorest areas for themselves, their children, or for people that they care for. When these services and jobs are cut, this affects women disproportionately.
- **Unpaid work:** women spend an average of four hours and 40 minutes each day on domestic chores and childcare duties, compared with two hours and 28 minutes for men.<sup>8</sup>
- **Health:** women are more than twice as likely to suffer depression than men.<sup>9</sup>
- **Discrimination:** 30,000 women a year (UK figure) lose their jobs as a result of becoming pregnant, despite this being against the law.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <http://fawcettsociety.org.uk/stats-and-facts-on-women-in-power/>

<sup>6</sup> [www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/may/09/action-increase-women-devolved-parliaments](http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/may/09/action-increase-women-devolved-parliaments)

<sup>7</sup> [www.closesthegap.org.uk/statistics.html](http://www.closesthegap.org.uk/statistics.html)

<sup>8</sup> [www.telegraph.co.uk/women/mother-tongue/8526413/Research-women-will-be-doing-the-housework-util-2050.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/mother-tongue/8526413/Research-women-will-be-doing-the-housework-util-2050.html)

<sup>9</sup> [www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/76169/0019049.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/76169/0019049.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> [www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=647](http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=647)



According to the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child, all children should be born into a world where being a boy or a girl does not restrict their life chances. This means thinking about how we treat children from the earliest age; what we can do to change cultural assumptions and expectations; and how we can enrich all children's lives.

## Discrimination, stereotyping and the early years

Children do not exclude or devalue each other or set limits upon themselves until they learn to do so from adults. Children learn from a very young age that their behaviour, likes, dislikes and expectations should follow 'rules' about male and female roles. However, these 'rules' are really only assumptions.

These assumptions may mean identifying with certain toys, activities and role models, and this can limit children. For example, action, construction and technology toys are mainly marketed at boys; social role play and arts and crafts toys are mainly marketed at girls. Marketing toys in this way is problematic because play is crucial to how children develop and learn about the world. Boys need the chance to practise social skills; and girls need to be active and learn spatial and problem-solving skills.

## Short-term effects of stereotyping

The damaging effects of these early gender stereotypes are experienced by children from a young age. This includes young girls being overly concerned with body image; bullying of children who do not meet stereotypical ideas of what it means to be a boy or a girl; and children who do not conform to gender stereotypes experiencing negative feelings about themselves. One study found that girls as young as 12 had experienced pressure from their peers to send topless pictures of themselves by text and instant messaging services.<sup>11</sup>

Gender-based violence also begins at a much earlier age than once assumed. According to a study by NSPCC<sup>12</sup> a quarter of teenage girls have experienced physical violence in their intimate relationships: For more information about gender-based violence see glossary.

## Long-term effects of stereotyping

It matters if we treat boys and girls differently from a young age because it sets up a pattern for life, based on difference. Although there is nothing wrong with difference in itself, when it leads to limitations and discrimination it is problematic as it can affect long-term confidence, opportunity, achievement, health, relationships and more.

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<sup>11</sup> [www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/resourcesforprofessionals/sexualabuse/sexting-research-summary\\_wdf89270.pdf](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/resourcesforprofessionals/sexualabuse/sexting-research-summary_wdf89270.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> [www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/findings/partner\\_exploitation\\_and\\_violence\\_summary\\_wdf68093.pdf](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/findings/partner_exploitation_and_violence_summary_wdf68093.pdf)



## Changing cultural expectations

We are all socialised according to our sex (male or female) at birth, whether we like it or not. The influence of culture is huge. And because marketing and money are often involved, the messages are very powerful and very successful.

Many parents and childcare professionals have the best of intentions that they will not limit children according to assumptions about what makes a girl and what makes a boy (gender stereotypes). And then, as they watch pink-clad girls playing with dolls or boys in superhero costumes fighting 'baddies', wonder what they can do about it.

There is a lot you can do. Take your inspiration from the changes that you can make in your own workplace or family. Remember that gender and socialisation are learned. And what can be learned, can also be unlearned. Society can and does change over time. Pink used to be for boys!

### Pink for a boy?

*'An article in the trade publication, Earnshaw's Infants' Department, in June 1918 said: 'The generally accepted rule is pink for the boys, and blue for the girls. The reason is that pink, being a more decided and stronger colour, is more suitable for the boy, while blue, which is more delicate and dainty, is prettier for the girl.' From then until the 1940s, pink was considered appropriate for boys because being related to red it was the more masculine and decided colour, while blue was considered appropriate for girls because it was the more delicate and dainty colour, or related to the Virgin Mary. Since the 1940s, the societal norm was inverted; pink became considered appropriate for girls and blue appropriate for boys, a practice that has continued into the 21st century.'*

Source: The Smithsonian Magazine 8.4.2011

### Step one: awareness

The first step in changing cultural expectations is awareness. You cannot avoid gender stereotypes around you and the children in your life, they are ingrained and often unconscious. They affect how you are, what you believe, your values, your work practice and how you go about your life.

But this does not mean that you cannot question or change these stereotypes. As soon as you begin to notice gender stereotypes around you and your children it is possible to challenge them. This guide will help you become more aware of gender stereotypes and the limitations these impose.

### Step two: changing practice

Changing gender stereotypes goes beyond encouraging boys to play in the home corner. Indeed, research indicates that it is easier to encourage girls to be active and adventurous than boys to be gentle and passive. There are powerful pressures, not least of which is peer pressure. But, the more aware you are of gender stereotypes, the more you can try to mediate their effects. This guide gives you some ideas about how you can do that. You can try out some of the ideas in your work setting and with other children in your life.



## Providing role models

*In the last 25 years, men and women have increasingly been moving away from stereotypical roles. More women are returning to work after having children, and many men are choosing to work part-time or be responsible for childcare. However, inequalities still exist, such as lower pay for women despite girls surpassing boys in attainment through school and university. Practitioners should be encouraged to provide alternative role models and to support young children to explore through play-based learning what it means to be: a boy or a girl, mother or father, brother or sister.*

Celebrating Difference, NCB Early Childhood Unit, 2010

## Step three: changing society

Tackling gender stereotyping goes beyond the nursery or school gate. Parents and other concerned individuals are challenging companies which perpetuate gender stereotypes to ensure that future generations of children are protected from such pressures and limitations. This guide includes links to groups campaigning for change. Whether letter writing, signing online petitions or speaking to shops and suppliers, there are many ways to make changes.

## Speaking up for change

*After discussions on the parenting website 'Mumsnet', a group of parents formed the 'Let Toys Be Toys' campaign, calling on toy shops to stop promoting certain toys as only suitable for girls, and others only for boys.*

*Surveying shops, they found that ten times as many shops promoted DIY and toolkits to boys rather than girls, and promoted cleaning sets, cooking sets and beauty kits to girls. The group uses Facebook and Twitter to promote change.*

*The campaign was partly inspired by two major toyshops, Hamleys and Harrods, re-organising their toy departments by interest rather than gender; a change sparked by letters from parents. Concerned that Hamleys contributed to gender stereotypes and inequality by organising toys in separate departments for boys and girls, Laura Nelson successfully campaigned to get the shop to change its policy in 2011.*

*'...I spoke to Hamleys's PR office and sent a letter to the chief executive...I also called up the PR office at Landsbanki, the nationalised Icelandic bank that controls Hamleys. Iceland is very progressive on equal gender rights and opportunities; they rightly took notice. Gender stereotyping of toys restricts the choices of children and their parents; it influences the activities children engage in, their interests and skills and ultimately the roles they take in society. Until all toys and the shop layouts are completely gender-neutral, there will always be pressure on girls and boys to pursue the route in life consistent with their stereotype.'*

*Following in Hamleys' footsteps, in 2012 Harrods organised its new multi-sensory toy zone by theme rather than gender. Though there is still work to be done here, it shows change is possible.*



Ideas for  
Practice

# Ideas for Practice



# Some ideas for practice

The following two sections suggest ideas and resources to help childcare professionals develop 'non-gendered' practice. This includes:

- Thinking about how you speak to children and using inclusive language
- Talking about gender roles and providing a variety of role models for all children
- Using 'unisex' toys, games and activities
- Using pictures and stories which depict men and women in a variety of and non-traditional roles
- Encouraging all children to use all toys and areas
- Having books and other resources which are 'non-sexist' and which challenge some of the unwritten rules
- Using 'persona dolls' to 'unlearn' prejudices (see page 22)

## Language and communication

Think about how you speak to children. Often people compliment girls on what they look like and boys on what they are doing, or tell boys not to cry, and girls to 'smile' and be 'nice'. Research indicates that adults are more likely to engage in conversation with girls than boys. They may even use a different tone of voice. It's good to speak to all children in the same way and about the same things. You could practise the following:

1. *Tell a girl she's great because of what she does and not because of how she looks; try, 'I like your skipping' not 'I like your hair'*
2. *Praise a boy when he shares and displays co-operative behaviour with other children*
3. *Tell a girl it's OK to say if there's something she's good at*
4. *Encourage girls to play in the mud or get sweaty*
5. *Encourage boys to play in the home corner, or with dolls*
6. *Tell girls it's OK to get angry and to express this in a healthy way*
7. *Tell boys it's OK to be scared, upset or emotional*
8. *Tell a boy that it's OK to dress up as a nurse or butterfly and a girl that it's OK to dress up as a fire-fighter or pirate*
9. *Tell a boy that being called a girl isn't an insult, because boys and girls are equally important*
10. *Encourage all children to think about things that they have in common with each other, and emphasise their similarities over differences*

Challenge behaviour which shows signs of sex discrimination. Examples are; children referring to a boy as a 'girl' as an insult; or children ostracising or laughing at others because of their choice of toy or clothes. Turn the challenge into a discussion and not a criticism!





## Just friends in Sweden

*At Stockholm's Nikolaigården nursery school, children are encouraged to think of themselves as people first, boys or girls second.*

*Lotta Rajalin, the head-teacher at the school, explained: 'My colleagues and I developed our methods of working with equality and democracy in order to give the children a whole life experience. They should have every opportunity to try new activities, experience emotions, take every opportunity, try everything they want, follow every dream.'*

*To avoid gender stereotyping, the children are not called boys or girls but friends and are equally encouraged to play with racing cars or dressing up clothes. The dolls, for example, have no obvious gender, but they do express emotions.*

*Lotta Rajalin said: 'There is nothing wrong with the words 'she' or 'he' but we, the adults that use them, are filled with old stereotypes, old traditions, and we are burdened because we classify boys and girls and women and men. Here we want to change that. We don't want to change the children, they don't need correction. We adults need to correct our thinking.'*

Source: BBC News Europe 8.7.2011

## Surroundings

Think about how the space and the children are organised. Suggestions are:

1. When lining up children, going out on trips or sitting down for snack, avoid dividing children into groups by sex. Think of other ways of doing this, such as the month they were born, or assigning different colours to different groups.
2. Think about colours and decoration. For example, a pink or pastel 'home corner' gives a strong message that this area is for girls only. You could decorate the home corner in greens, reds, yellows, blues and oranges.
3. Think about how you organise the space. The presence of a 'home corner' and a block area can unconsciously segregate girls and boys. Think about how the home corner is used. You could place the toys which are often seen as 'boys' toys' in the home corner and put dolls amongst the blocks. This may encourage different kinds of play and attract children into different parts of the nursery.
4. Many activities and toys are 'gender neutral' such as blocks, paints and crafts. You'll still have to work at how children use them – but they are a better starting point than dolls and cars!
5. Check through the resources in your nursery. Do they promote particular ways of being girls or boys/men or women? [www.letterboxlibrary.com](http://www.letterboxlibrary.com) has a fantastic collection of books and other materials which portray positive images of girls and boys and men and women and challenge gender and other stereotypes. These are available singly and in packs and there is an approval service.



## Intervening in free play and imaginative play

1. Suggest alternative storylines and ideas for children's play. The rigidly-defined gender roles in many children's TV programmes and films are very influential. You could suggest new storylines with heroic princesses who rescue princes, or cast girls as builders or dragons and boys in caring, mediating and domestic roles.
2. Shape the play by joining in and use your role to challenge children's assumptions. If you are a woman, you could take on the role of a scientist or explorer or astronaut or even the local doctor. If you are a man you could encourage boys to try co-operative games, or take on the role of father or nurse.
3. Talk to children about how they understand gender and sexism. Young children may have strong ideas that a particular toy or behaviour is not appropriate for their gender. When a child says that something is 'not for girls' or 'not for boys' ask them why not and explore this with them.
4. For dressing-up games, make it clear that all the children can dress up in whatever clothes they choose and avoid assuming that boys want to be pirates and girls princesses.

## Roles and role play

Simply talking about how people live and the jobs they do can help children keep their horizons wide and their options open.

Role-playing games are good for exploring gender stereotypes with young children and encouraging them to participate in a wide range of activities.

Try assigning roles at random, or use a 'magic sorting hat' or a bag containing different role cards.

One idea is to help the children plan a building, kitchen or garden on paper and then use the building blocks to construct the design. They could make and wear badges with an E for 'engineer', C for 'cook' and so on to affirm their roles.

You can also encourage children to explore roles and try out different activities by having a time when only girls can play with blocks or only boys can use the home corner. BUT make sure you explain that 'girls only' or 'boys only' time is necessary because you have noticed that they do not play in certain areas often.

## Creating spaces

*In a project to allow boys more access to home corner play the children were first asked for their views. One five-year-old girl said: 'The boys can't come in here (the house) 'cos they make a noise and they mess it up, and they act like dogs and angry husbands'. Another said: 'Sometimes I put the ironing board across the doorway so the boys can't get in... 'cos there's no door and you need one'. As well as maintaining the usual home play space, staff encouraged children to suggest other role-play areas. Over the weeks, they established a garage, a tropical fish shop, a hairdressing salon, a chip shop and an office, which gave rise to fewer instances of gender-dominated play and created spaces for boys to engage in more positive role-play activities which were not heavily dominated by the girls.*

Source: Nutbrown and Clough, 2009





Resources

# Resources



# Resources

This section includes suggestions for workers but they are also useful to give to parents/carers.

## Books and stories

Make sure that children's books and stories show the full range of possibilities for boys and girls. There are many excellent books around – although there is a strong focus on alternative/positive heroines aimed at girls rather than boys.

Some suggestions are:

- **Colouring books**

The lively and engaging 'Radical Colouring Books' by Jacinta Bunnell challenge gender and other norms with titles such as 'Girls will be boys will be girls' and 'Sometimes the spoon runs away with another spoon'. See more at [www.girlsnotchicks.com](http://www.girlsnotchicks.com) or go to her shop at [www.etsy.com](http://www.etsy.com) (search for Jacinta Bunnell).

Anorak magazine: <http://anorakmagazine.com> is a magazine for children aged 6-12 filled with stories and colouring in. It is beautifully drawn with themes such as 'friends', 'birds' and 'chocolate'.

- **Letterbox Library: [www.letterboxlibrary.com](http://www.letterboxlibrary.com)**

Letterbox Library was set up by parents concerned about the content of the books available for children. It sells a wide variety of books by topic, including packs by theme ideal for a nursery, or to start a collection.

- **Bookbugs: Scottish Book Trust: [www.scottishbooktrust.com/babies-early-years](http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/babies-early-years)**

The Bookbugs scheme, funded by the Scottish Government, is for children aged 0-5 and their families. These packs are available free in libraries across Scotland; the Pirate Pack is aimed at children aged 3.

[www.scottishbooktrust.com/babies-early-years/professionals/packs/pirate](http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/babies-early-years/professionals/packs/pirate)

- **A Mighty Girl: [www.amightygirl.com](http://www.amightygirl.com)**

This website suggests books, films and clothes which portray female characters in a strong active light.

- **List of alternative books for children: <http://bit.ly/K5hmpY> by tweeting parents @genderdiary**

- **Amelia Bloomer list: <http://ameliabloomer.wordpress.com>**

Comprehensive list of books which challenge stereotypes. Amelia Bloomer updates the list every year.

A few recommendations from this list (many more online) are:

**Lola at the Library by Anna McQuinn**

Age 0-3

Simple text and large bright colourful illustration of an African-American child making a trip to her local library.

**Peekaboo Morning by Rachel Isadora**

Age 0-3

A simple book for the very young featuring a young BME girl and her family.



**And Me! by Karen King and Lynne Wiley**

Age 0-5

Maya spends the day with her grandfather and wants to do everything he does. A lovely story of an irrepressible girl and her patient grandfather.

**The Daddy Book by Todd Parr**

Age 0-5

Celebrates different kinds of fathers and shows men in a caring roles.

**Katie's Farm by James Robertson, Matthew Fitt, Karen Sutherland**

Age 0-5

Just one of the popular series by Itchy-Coo of engaging colourful books in Scots for younger readers. See [www.itchy-coo.com](http://www.itchy-coo.com)

**Mommy, Mama and Me / Daddy, Papa and Me by Leslea Newman and Carol Thompson**

Age 0-5

Two books in the same series which show that families don't always consist of a mum and a dad. Rhythmic text and beautiful illustrations.

**Baby Ruby Bawled by Malaika Rose Stanley**

Age 2-7

Baby Ruby cries and cries. All of her family try to help her to stop, but only her brother has the magic touch. Charming story which shows boys in a caring role.

**Princess Smartypants by Babette Cole**

Age 3-7

Princess Smartypants does not want to get married. She enjoys being a Ms. But being a rich and pretty princess means that all the princes want her to be their Mrs. Find out how Princess Smartypants fights to preserve her independence in this hilarious fairy-tale-with-a-difference.

**The Pirate Girl by Cornelia Funke**

Age 3-7

A group of ferocious pirates meet their match when they capture a little girl called Molly. Molly refuses to tell the pirates where her parents are no matter how many times they make her scrub the deck.

**And Tango Makes Three by Justin Richardson**

Age 4-8

Roy and Silo are just like the other penguin couples at the zoo - they bow to each other, walk together and swim together. But Roy and Silo are a little bit different – they are both boys. Lovely tale based on a real life story.

**Bridget's Beret by Tom Lichtenheld**

Age 4-8

Bridget loves to draw, but feels lost without her beret, will she be able to get her creativity back? A funny colourful book about an active creative girl.

**The Name Jar by Yansook Choi**

Age 4-8

Unhei has just moved to America, but she is worried about whether the students in the class will like her so she chooses a series of new names from a jar. When one of her new friends visits her neighbourhood and finds out the special meaning of her name, Unhei gets the support she needs to be herself.

**Megan's Year: An Irish Traveller's Story by Gloria Whelan**

Age 5-9

Ten-year-old Megan describes her life, her summers on the road and her life at school, beautifully depicted with broad brush illustrations.



## Films and TV

Though there is a wide range of roles for boys in children's media, representations of women and girls in family films as a whole have changed very little in the last 20 years. A recent study by the Geena Davis Institute [www.seejane.org/downloads/FullStudy\\_GenderDisparityFamilyFilms.pdf](http://www.seejane.org/downloads/FullStudy_GenderDisparityFamilyFilms.pdf) found that men outnumber women in family films by three to one, and women are more likely to be represented as 'eye candy', and much less likely to be shown in work-based roles.

The films and TV programmes below depict positive and diverse male and female roles, including strong female characters.

You can find other ideas at 'A Mighty Girl' website which lists films and TV programmes by age. It is American but most of the titles are available in the UK.

**Brave:** Pixar animation (set in Scotland) about Princess Merida who, determined to live her own life, defies a custom that brings chaos to her kingdom. Granted one wish, Merida must rely on her bravery and her archery skills to undo a beastly curse.

**Frozen:** A hugely popular Disney musical about the relationship between two sisters. Princess Elsa has an incredible secret power she must learn to control while she struggles with the responsibilities of leadership. Meanwhile her sister Annabelle is a fearless optimist who refuses to let her sister retreat into her own ice Kingdom. This movie challenges gender stereotypes and puts female characters front and centre.

**My Neighbor Totoro:** a magical story of two girls befriending a mysterious creature which lives in their garden, whilst their mother is in hospital. The focus on father/daughter relationships includes a father in a domestic caring role. It is produced by Studio Ghibli: Japanese Animation Company whose films regularly feature strong female characters and complex moral situations. These include **Spirited Away, Ponyo, Howl's Moving Castle** and **The Cat Returns** most of which are easily available, and are dubbed in English.

**Mulan:** Disney classic with a female heroine.

**Charlie and Lola:** Cbeebies animated and fun TV programme with a well-rounded central female character. Lola is active, feisty and eager to learn.

**Rastamouse:** Cbeebies animated children's TV series containing positive messages about male characters co-operating. Rastamouse, the patois-speaking musician, wants to make 'bad things good' and is interested in people working together and getting along.

**Dora the Explorer:** American animated television series. Despite becoming more sexualised when developed for the 'tween' market, the original Dora the Explorer has lots of adventures and loves travelling.

**Nina and the Neurons:** Cbeebies programme. From her lab at the Glasgow Science Centre, Nina the neuroscientist explores basic science with the help of her friends, the neurons. Excellent show with a female scientist leading the way.



**Abney and Teal:** Cbeebies programme about two friends who live on an island in the middle of a lake in the middle of a park. Abney (girl) is bold and often instigates adventures; Teal (boy) is found in domestic settings making porridge: [www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/abney-and-teal](http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/abney-and-teal)

**Arthur:** longstanding children's favourite 'Arthur' is a Canadian animated series with a focus on co-operation and learning. It has a good mix of male and female characters who often have to deal with social issues such as loss of a pet or illness.

## Toys

Below are a few suggestions for toys which are unisex and which encourage young children to think beyond stereotypes of what it means to be a boy or a girl.

Popular toys change over time, with new arrivals every year it is impossible to provide an exhaustive list. So, we have included a few timeless examples that you may want to consider alongside children's wish lists!

These sorts of toys also make financial sense because all children can enjoy them. (Parents/carers might appreciate knowing about them too.)

**Go Go Sports Dolls:** [www.gogosportsgirls.com](http://www.gogosportsgirls.com)

Promote self-appreciation and the benefits of daily exercise, healthy eating and sleeping habits, self-esteem and overall healthy life-skills for girls aged 3-12.

**Community Playthings:** [www.communityplaythings.co.uk](http://www.communityplaythings.co.uk)

Small wooden people from Community Playthings are good because they look as if they have no gender and can be used in an open-ended way.

Duplo people: usually the kind you order from an educational catalogue like Hope [www.hope-education.co.uk](http://www.hope-education.co.uk) or Galt [www.galt.co.uk](http://www.galt.co.uk) are good for women/men in non-stereotyped jobs and even grey hair!

**The Creativity Hub:** [www.thecreativityhub.com](http://www.thecreativityhub.com)

Makes toys that encourage story telling. This includes wonderful pocket-sized story generator cubes which allow almost infinite combinations of castles, houses, animals and other images.

**Orchard Toys:** [www.orchardtoys.com](http://www.orchardtoys.com)

Makes various different board games aimed at a very young audience. They are not 'gendered' and often have black-minority ethnic characters too. Games included 'Tummy Ache', 'Pop to the Shops', 'Dotty Dinosaurs' and 'The Magic Cauldron'.



## Crafts

These enable all children to practise fine motor skills and perseverance. All you need are some old yoghurt pots, pipe cleaners and some imagination. The following are a good starting point:

- 365 Things to Make and Do (Usborne): something different to do every day of the year
- 100 Science Experiments (Usborne): combines crafts with basic science, and is brightly-coloured and fun
- Kidz Labs make fun educational sets, such as making a T. Rex or volcano or exploring the solar system! These sets are sometimes labelled as 'boys' toys' in certain shops but they offer creative fun for all children
- Grafix sets include making balloon animals and a spy box: [www.grafix.co.uk](http://www.grafix.co.uk)
- SES Creative makes various sets including 'eco', clay and painting: [www.ses-creative.com/en/](http://www.ses-creative.com/en/)

## Persona dolls

*Persona dolls are used in many childcare settings to encourage children to develop empathy and challenge discrimination and unfairness. You can use them to tell stories, discuss feelings and answer questions and to introduce difference e.g. gender, culture, skin and disability. More information and ideas about using the dolls in your setting at: <http://www.persona-doll-training.org/>*

*See also: 'Equality in Action: a way forward with Persona Dolls', Babette Brown, Trentham Books, 2008. Ruth Moran at Abbey Green Nursery School and Children's Centre uses Persona Dolls to develop children's empathy, their acceptance of difference, their understanding of fairness and their willingness to actively respond to unfairness. For example one of the dolls, 'Polly', was used to discuss the toys one little girl had received as Christmas presents: a train set and remote control car which she loved and a Barbie doll which she hated 'because it doesn't do anything'. This led to discussion about why some people think certain toys are for boys and some for girls, and what toys the children enjoy.*

## Clothes

Clothes which are unisex are hard to find and, generally, at the more expensive end of the market. This is a shame because it's easier to pass such clothes on to younger siblings. But, if parents/carers are looking for ideas check out:

[www.heimoose.co.uk](http://www.heimoose.co.uk) unisex and brightly coloured clothing; site is divided into separate sections for boys and girls but many items are interchangeable

<http://tootsamacginty.com> unisex clothes - expensive but hard-wearing

<http://polarnopyret.co.uk> clothes that children can play in - brightly coloured clothing and lots of unisex styles

[www.pigtails.com](http://www.pigtails.com) US-based company selling non-stereotyped clothing for girls and boys



# Further reading

There is a vast amount of literature about early years, education, gender and equalities. This section provides a starting point for further study and includes some recent publications and useful websites.

**Are we fair to boys?** J Lindon, Practical Pre-School, no.110 (Mar 2010), pp12-13

**Breaking-down stereotypes and engaging fathers in services for children and families**, Children in Scotland, 2010: [www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/GEDNEWSLETTEROCT2010v4.pdf](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/GEDNEWSLETTEROCT2010v4.pdf)

**Children at Play:** learning gender in the early years, Barbara Martin, Trentham Books, 2011

**Cinderella Ate My Daughter:** dispatches from the front lines of the new girlie-girl culture, Peggy Orenstein, Harper Paperbacks, reprint edition, 2012

**Citizenship and Inclusion in the Early Years:** understanding and responding to children's perspectives on 'belonging', C Nutbrown and P Clough, International Journal of Early Years Education 17, 2009

**Contemporary Issues in the Early Years**, B Duffy and G Pugh, Sage, 2009

**Delusions of Gender:** the real science behind sex differences, Cordelia Fine, Icon Books, 2011

**Early years, life chances and equality:** a literature review, Paul Johnson and Yulia Kossykh, EHRC, 2008 [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

**Embracing Equality:** promoting equality and inclusion in early years, Pre-school Learning Alliance, 2007 [www.pre-school.org.uk](http://www.pre-school.org.uk)

**Frogs and snails, sugar and spice**, Cathy Nutbrown, [www.teachnursery.com/images/uploads/article/gender-stereotyping-in-the-early-years.pdf](http://www.teachnursery.com/images/uploads/article/gender-stereotyping-in-the-early-years.pdf)

**Gender Equality:** a toolkit for education staff, Scottish Government, 2007: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/08/30161011/1](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/08/30161011/1)

**Gender Equity in the Early Years**, Naima Browne, Open University Press, 2004

**Making the Gender Equality Duty real for children, young people and their fathers**, Children in Scotland, 2008: [www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/pubs//GenderEqualityV2.pdf](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/pubs//GenderEqualityV2.pdf)





**Pink Brain, Blue Brain:** how small differences grow into troublesome gaps and what we can do about it, Lise Eliot, Oneworld Publications, 2010

**The Cleverness of Boys:** understanding what boys do well and helping them to succeed, S Featherstone, R Bayley and C Black, 2010

**The realism and sex type of four- to five-year-old children's occupational aspirations,** E Care, J Deans and R Brown, Journal of Early Childhood Research, vol.5, no.2 (June 2007) pp155-168

**The Social Psychology of Gender: how power and intimacy shape gender relations,** Laurie Rudman and Peter Glick, Guilford Press, 2010

**The Spirit Level:** why more equal societies almost always do better, Equality Trust 2009

**The XY Factor: addressing gender issues in the early years,** Pre-school Learning Alliance, 2011 [www.pre-school.org.uk](http://www.pre-school.org.uk)

**Your Essential Guide to Inclusive Practice.** National Day Nurseries Association, 2009 [www.ndna.org.uk/advice-information/publications/inclusive-practice](http://www.ndna.org.uk/advice-information/publications/inclusive-practice)

## Websites

Breakthrough Gender Stereotypes Project: <http://breakthrough-stereotypes.org.uk>

Children in Scotland: [www.childreninscotland.org.uk](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk)

Education Scotland: [www.educationscotland.gov.uk](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk)

Equality and Human Rights Commission: [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

Gender and Education Association: [www.genderandeducation.com](http://www.genderandeducation.com)

Let Toys Be Toys campaign: [www.lettoysbetoys.org.uk](http://www.lettoysbetoys.org.uk)

Mumsnet: pools information and advice by parents for parents (see for example its Let Girls Be Girls campaign): [www.mumsnet.com](http://www.mumsnet.com)

National Children's Bureau: [www.ncb.org.uk](http://www.ncb.org.uk)

NUT: [www.teachers.org.uk/node/12981](http://www.teachers.org.uk/node/12981)

Pink Stinks Campaign: [www.pinkstinks.org.uk](http://www.pinkstinks.org.uk)

See Jane - US campaign to increase and improve the representation of girls in children's media: [www.seejane.org](http://www.seejane.org)





# Glossary

**Children's rights:** in 1989 governments worldwide, including the UK, promised all children the same rights by adopting the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. These rights are based on what a child needs to survive, grow, participate and fulfil their potential. They apply equally to every child, regardless of who they are, or where they are from. See: [www.unicef.org.uk/UNICEFs-Work/Our-mission/UN-Convention](http://www.unicef.org.uk/UNICEFs-Work/Our-mission/UN-Convention)

**Discrimination:** is treating people differently and unfairly for no good reason because they belong to a certain group (for example saying a girl cannot join a football game because she is female). There are laws which tackle direct and indirect discrimination in all its forms, particularly in employment but also other aspects of life, for example the Equality Act 2010 [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/equalities/equality-act](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/equalities/equality-act) and the associated Public Sector Equality Duty [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/equalities/equality-act/equality-duty](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/equalities/equality-act/equality-duty)

**Early Years Guidance:** the national guidance, Pre-Birth to Three: positive outcomes for Scotland's children and families, supports and informs practice and aims to 'facilitate students and staff working with and on behalf of our youngest children and their families. It includes important information on pre-birth and brain development and it reflects the principles and philosophy which underpin the Early Years Framework and Curriculum for Excellence. It highlights practical case studies and makes reference to current research to support improved evidence-based practice' [www.educationscotland.gov.uk/earlyyears/prebirthtothree/index.asp](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/earlyyears/prebirthtothree/index.asp)

**Gender:** refers to the quality of being male or female and what is expected of women and men.

**Gender-based violence:** is the general term used for violence that occurs as a result of unequal power relations between people of different genders. It is widely accepted that these forms of violence are disproportionately committed by men against women.

See also **violence against women**

See also What does gender have to do with violence against women?, Scottish Government 2010: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/02/05102715/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/02/05102715/0)

**Gender discrimination:** treating people unfavourably on the basis of their sex, and discriminating on the bases of assumptions associated with gender stereotyping.

**Gender equality:** means that women and men, and girls and boys, enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and protections. It does not require that girls and boys, or women and men, be the same, or that they be treated exactly alike. Gender equality exists when both sexes are able to share equally in the distribution of power and influence; have equal opportunities for financial independence; enjoy equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions, interests and talents; share domestic responsibilities; and are free from coercion, intimidation and gender based violence at work and at home. See more at: [www.unicef.org/gender/files/Overarching\\_2Pager\\_Web.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/gender/files/Overarching_2Pager_Web.pdf) and [www.peacewomen.org/pages/about-1325/key-gender-terms](http://www.peacewomen.org/pages/about-1325/key-gender-terms)



**Gender identity:** refers to a person's own understanding of feeling as if they are male or female. The sex a person is assigned at birth affects what society expects from them in terms of their gender. For example, if a baby has the biological characteristics associated with being with female, they are expected to grow up identifying as a woman. If a child's gender identity, or the way they express their gender, does not fit with the sex assigned at birth, they may be transgender.

**Gender role:** a set of social and behavioural norms generally considered appropriate for either a man or a woman.

**Gender stereotyping:** making assumptions about a person's appropriate characteristics, traits and activities on the basis of their sex.

**GIRFEC:** Getting it right for every child, Scottish Government. 'The Getting it right for every child approach ensures that anyone providing that support puts the child or young person – and their family – at the centre. Getting it right for every child is important for everyone who works with children and young people – as well as many people who work with adults who look after children. Practitioners need to work together to support families, and where appropriate, take early action at the first signs of any difficulty – rather than only getting involved when a situation has already reached crisis point. This means working across organisational boundaries and putting children and their families at the heart of decision making – and giving all our children and young people the best possible start in life.' See: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/introduction](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/introduction)

**Sex:** refers to the biological characteristics which (usually) distinguish people as male or female. These mainly relate to the reproductive system, for example testicles or ovaries.

**Sexism:** prejudice or discrimination based on a person's sex.

**Stereotyping:** is making assumptions about people based on certain characteristics; thinking all people who belong to a certain group are the same and labelling them (e.g. all young people who wear hoodies are badly behaved). Stereotypes are often based on old fashioned ideas or are deliberately untrue and designed to hurt people. The Equality Act 2010 specifies nine protected characteristics of which 'sex' is one. The others are: age, disability, gender identity and gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership (in employment only), pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation.



**Transgender:** is an umbrella term used by people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from their birth sex. The term includes, but is not limited to, transsexual people and others who define as 'gender-variant' (individual who deviates from the expected characteristics of their sexual gender).

**Violence against women:** 'actions which harm or cause suffering or indignity to women and children, where those carrying out the actions are mainly men and where women and children are predominantly the victims. The different forms of violence against women - including emotional, psychological, sexual and physical abuse, coercion and constraints - are interlinked. They have their roots in gender inequality and are therefore understood as gender-based violence.' Safer Lives, Changed Lives: a shared approach to tackling violence against women in Scotland, Scottish Government, 2009: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/06/02153519/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/06/02153519/0)

See also *What does gender have to do with violence against women?*, Scottish Government 2010: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/02/05102715/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/02/05102715/0)



# Z

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