



## GENDER & CHILDREN: A PLACE TO BEGIN

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Creating schools that nurture academic achievement, provide physical and emotional safety and welcome all students are common goals for all educators. As educators, one can create gender-expansive environments that affirm all children and allow them to express their interests and find confidence in their strengths.

### IDEAS FOR EDUCATORS IN THE CLASSROOM

- Help students expand their possibilities – academically, artistically, emotionally – and see that there are many ways to be a boy or a girl.
- Use inclusive phrases to address your class as a whole like “Good morning, everyone” or “Good morning, scholars” instead of “Good morning, boys and girls.” You could also choose and use a name for your class that brings to mind positive attributes — like the Dolphins or the Owls.
- Group students in ways that do not rely on gender such as: students whose last names begin with A-H or I-Z, or students who are sitting in a particular part of the room, etc. Avoid situations that force children to make gendered choices, such as boys line up here and girls line up there.
- Develop classroom messages that emphasize “All children can...” rather than “Boys don’t..., Girls don’t...” Increasingly put more emphasis on the inclusive term “children.”
- Provide role models for all children that show a wide range of achievements and emotions for all people. Review the books in your classroom to ensure inclusion of good role models. Read books that encourage discussion of gender assumptions. Have students write biographies or create posters for hallway displays featuring people who have moved beyond traditional roles and have excelled in their chosen fields.
- Be a role model! When possible, give examples of how you or people you know like to do things outside of gender stereotypes. For example, if you’re a woman who likes carpentry, do a math problems related to woodworking. If you’re a man who likes to cook, create a math problem measuring recipe ingredients.
- Use lesson plans designed to expand understanding of gender. Provide opportunities for students to look at the qualities all children share. Help them to become see the limitations of stereotyping.
- Work with the students in your classroom to help them think of ways to be allies when someone is teased or bullied for any reason. Can they try to stop it directly? Should they talk with an adult? Can they talk with the student who has been harassed? Explore with students different options and actions.
- Be an upstander yourself. Stop hurtful teasing or name-calling based on gender and other bias. Interrupt student comments based on gender stereotypes. Engage in discussion with students. Use these times as teachable moments.



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- Encourage students to find activities that they enjoy and that respect their interests. This will help them connect to other students with similar interests and fit in socially.
  - Be aware of whether your students feel safe both inside and outside of the classroom. In the lunchroom? Recess? P.E? Special education classes? In the bathroom? On the school bus? Use the *Name-calling and Feeling Safe at School* lesson to engage students on where they feel safe and what makes them feel safe.
  - Be ready to support families whose children expand gender norms. Help parents/guardians see their child's strengths – academic, artistic, athletic, dramatic or interpersonal.

## STEPS FOR SCHOOL-WIDE ACTION

- Professional development is key. Provide training for all school personnel—from teachers, aides and counselors to administrative staff, bus drivers, recess aides, and cafeteria workers. Adults in the school need time to practice and be prepared with simple phrases to stop gendered teasing and bullying; they need practice intervening when students are limiting each other based on gender; and they need to be ready to educate students on why it is wrong or hurtful.
- Form a committee of staff or staff and parents/caregivers to oversee development of a caring, respectful community in your school. This group could assess your school's current climate and practices, arrange for professional development, organize family education events, or develop affirming hallway displays.
- Work to ensure that educators feel supported by the administration and others in the school in their efforts to help create welcoming learning environments.
- Agree on professional and developmentally appropriate language when discussing children's gender expression. Model inclusive, expansive language for other parents who comment about a particular child.
- Hold an evening event for parents and caregivers in your school community to help people understand the importance and complexity of gender for children. Share with families how to talk about this topic in ways that are affirming, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate.
- Ensure good supervision of hallways, playgrounds, and cafeterias to increase safety and reduce name-calling and bullying. Provide some structured or adult coached activities during recess to engage more students. Encourage and teach inclusive and cooperative games. Develop a playground norm of "You can't say, you can't play."
- Reframe dress codes to describe what the school considers appropriate clothing without assigning clothing options to particular genders. For example, for a chorus concert, you could ask students to wear a white top and dark or black on the bottom.
- Ensure anti-bullying policies specifically name groups more frequently targeted for harassment. Include actual or perceived gender identity and sexual orientation. Naming it, helps stop it.

