

Gender neutral play opportunities

It is important to observe and challenge any stereotypical gender role play in children at your setting to create an environment in which all children feel accepted and can have a full breadth of learning experiences.

This is very important as the messages and learning that occur in children's earliest years inform their thinking and opinions, and have implications for their future achievements.

Background information

Whilst it is accepted that gender can often shape our interests - and the choices made in play - children can miss out on important play experiences if their play is limited to specific areas.

Children will naturally migrate to the play that attracts their interests however, if the reasons behind their play choices are to conform to gender stereotypes as opposed to their interests, we can challenge these messages and make a difference.



Activity ideas to promote gender neutral play:

- Invite parents/family members in to your setting, who have a variety of job roles and lifestyles, to speak about themselves
 - Do you have any parents/family members that challenge the old stereotypes in their line of work?
 - Can you invite parents/family members in to tell a story or spend time with the children in the different areas of provision
- If the children are taking part in activities due to gender stereotypes as opposed to their interests e.g. 'I can't do that because I'm a girl/boy', think about how you can help with this
 - Ensure you have both genders represented in your setting team e.g. practitioners, cooks, chefs
- Promote and talk to the children about activities that are traditionally gender stereotypical e.g. caring roles. After all, some of the children at your setting will grow up to have children of their own, so accessing this type of learning will provide them with some useful opportunities to practice these skills
- Have books that present both genders in various roles
- If certain areas are typically used by mainly one gender, think about what you can do to attract both genders to some of these opportunities.

Supporting children with gender identity issues:

More UK children than ever are being referred for support with gender issues, including under 5s. So what should your setting be doing to foster the right attitude and environment? Download and read our article below.