

# ALL ARE WELCOME!

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT  
A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND PRACTITIONERS IN SOUTH AFRICA



**basic education**  
Department:  
Basic Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



VVOB COMMISSIONED THE INSTITUTE FOR LIFE COURSE HEALTH RESEARCH (ILCHR)  
AT STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY TO CONTEXTUALISE THIS MATERIAL  
IN COLLABORATION WITH DBE AND VVOB



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# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

*THIS GUIDE SUPPORTS TEACHERS AND PRACTITIONERS WORKING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD) TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND PREVENT DISCRIMINATION BASED ON GENDER.*

The guide offers practical tips to equip teachers and practitioners working in ECD with the skills required to:

- become aware of gender biases in early learning environments and how they affect children's learning
- use early learning environments, activities and interactions to help children break free from traditional stereotypes about gender that may limit their growth and development



**WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?**

THE GUIDE PRIMARILY TARGETS EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD) TEACHERS AND PRACTITIONERS.

**EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT TEACHERS AND PRACTITIONERS:**

ANY PERSON WHO IS ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN THE EMOTIONAL, COGNITIVE, SENSORY, SPIRITUAL, MORAL, PHYSICAL, SOCIAL AND COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN AGED 0-9 YEARS.

This guide was developed by the Department of Basic Education, with support from VVOB and the Institute for Life Course Health Research (ILCHR) at Stellenbosch University. The guide is intended as a pilot document to be tested and refined through a series of consultative workshops and will ultimately be made accessible to all early childhood teachers and practitioners in South Africa.

# CONTENTS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| ABOUT THIS GUIDE                            | 1  |
| INTRODUCTION                                | 3  |
| Why gender matters                          | 4  |
| What do we mean when we talk about gender   | 5  |
| Key gender concepts                         | 6  |
| Gender and the South African context        | 7  |
| National commitments to gender equality     | 8  |
| Gender in early childhood development       | 9  |
| The benefits of supporting gender diversity | 10 |
| GENDER RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY IN ECD           | 11 |
| How to navigate this guide                  | 12 |
| Key messages for teachers and practitioners | 13 |
| Learning environment                        | 14 |
| Learning materials                          | 21 |
| Play materials                              | 21 |
| Pictures and stories                        | 25 |
| Learning activities                         | 29 |
| Classroom interactions and language use     | 35 |
| Teacher-learner interactions                | 36 |
| Learner-learner interactions                | 43 |
| Interactions beyond the classroom           | 47 |
| References                                  | 52 |

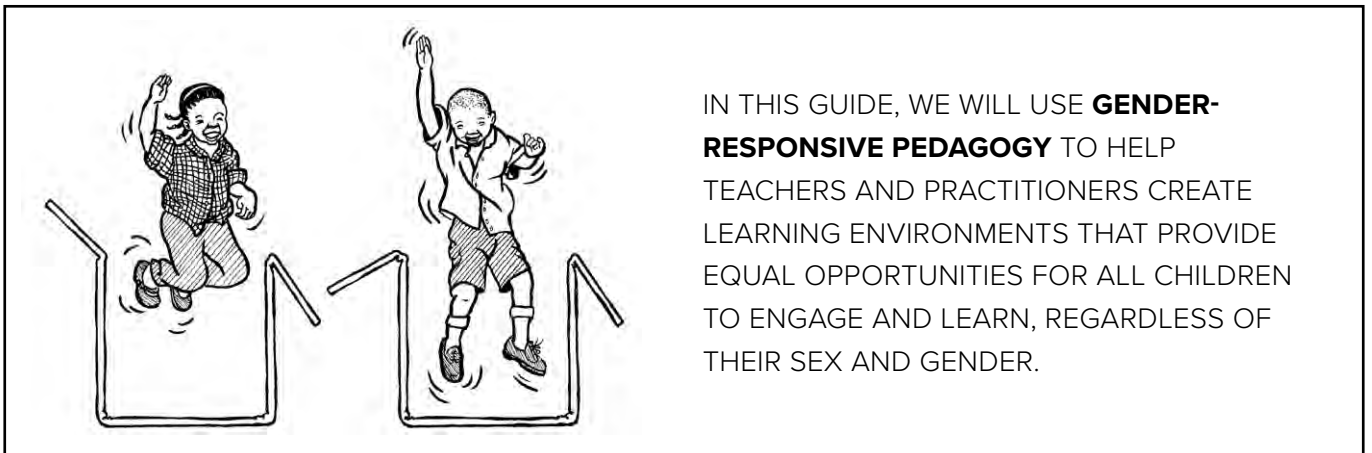
# INTRODUCTION

*GENDER IS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR THAT SHAPES THE WAY CHILDREN ARE TREATED AND WHAT IS EXPECTED OF THEM.*

Stereotypes or 'rules' about how children of a certain sex should look, speak and behave (for instance, girls should be kind and obedient; boys shouldn't wear dresses or cry) affect how children come to see themselves, their value and their own abilities. Access to opportunities and resources may also differ for children based on their sex. As a result, their development and learning can be negatively affected.

**All children, regardless of their sex and associated gender** should have equal access to opportunities to live a healthy and fulfilled life, accepted for who they are.

**Early learning environments** are important places to help children feel safe and accepted, where they can be encouraged to reach their full potential.



IN THIS GUIDE, WE WILL USE **GENDER-RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY** TO HELP TEACHERS AND PRACTITIONERS CREATE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS THAT PROVIDE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL CHILDREN TO ENGAGE AND LEARN, REGARDLESS OF THEIR SEX AND GENDER.

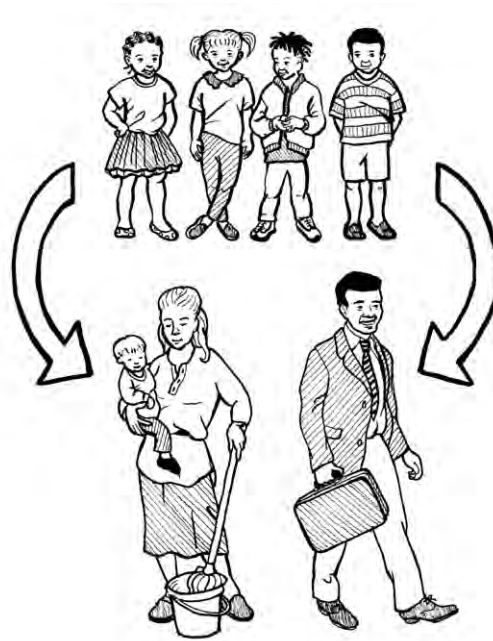
# WHY GENDER MATTERS

Gender is an important factor that shapes the way children are treated and what is expected of them. This is because society has traditionally taught us that there are two sexes (MALE/FEMALE), and that there are different gender rules and expectations for people based on these two sexes.

GENDER STEREOTYPES OR 'RULES' BEGIN IN CHILDHOOD AND CAN AFFECT CHILDREN'S SENSE OF SELF FROM A YOUNG AGE. THROUGH THEIR INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT, YOUNG CHILDREN RECEIVE MESSAGES ABOUT WHAT SOCIETY EXPECTS FROM THEM AND WHAT THEY CAN AND CANNOT DO.

## GIRLS

Girls are often given toys that encourage caring for others, like dolls. They are valued for being cooperative, kind and obedient. Girls are often socialised to become home keepers, responsible for the well-being, feeding and care of the family, placing less value on their educational attainment.



## BOYS

Boys are often given toys that encourage critical thinking, such as building blocks and are discouraged from playing with toys like cooking utensils or dolls. Boys are often prepared for their future role as provider and protector. Right from the earliest age boys are encouraged to lead and show authority, to be physically and emotionally strong.

Often children who do not conform to these traditional ideas about gender (for instance, girls thought to be too masculine and boys seen as feminine) face pressures to conform or experience mistreatment by peers in school, and condemnation by the broader society.

THESE RULES AND EXPECTATIONS ABOUT BEHAVIOR AND ROLES CAN BE LIMITING FOR ALL CHILDREN.

Gender equality – where all children regardless of their sex and associated gender have equal opportunities to live a healthy life – are important for all children to realise their full identity and potential.

# WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE TALK ABOUT GENDER?

Most of us have been raised with the idea that there are two sexes (male and female) and that they align with two genders (man and woman).

## **HOWEVER, BOTH SEX AND GENDER EXIST ACROSS A CONTINUUM OF POSSIBILITIES.**

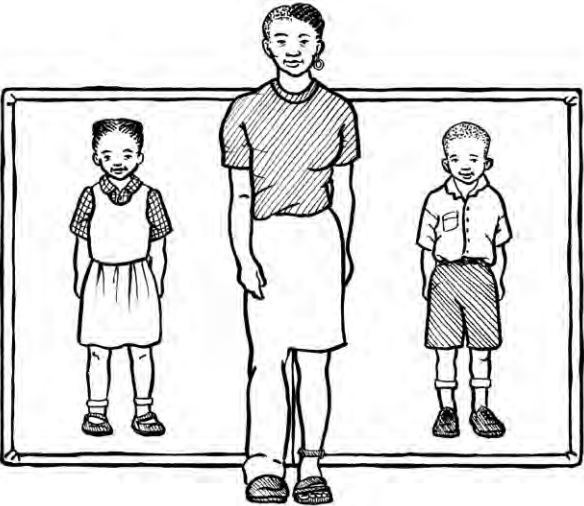
Generally, when a baby is born, we assign them a sex (male or female) based on their genitals. Once a sex is assigned, we presume the child's gender. We're told that those who are assigned male at birth are boys and those who are assigned female at birth are girls.

While we are often taught that bodies have one of two forms of genitalia, which are classified as "female" or "male," there are naturally occurring intersex conditions (associated with genitals,

sex chromosomes, gonads, hormones, reproductive structures).

**Similarly, gender isn't an either/or scenario but a spectrum. There is a wide range of gender identities and expressions.** Every person has a gender identity – their personal understanding of their gender and how they want the world to see them.

The two gender identities most people are familiar with are boy and girl (or man and woman), and often people think these are the only two gender identities. **Although many people in our society identify as men or women, there is a wider range of gender possibilities between and beyond the two.**



**TRANSGENDER IS A TERM THAT INCLUDES THE MANY WAYS THAT PEOPLE'S GENDER IDENTITIES CAN BE DIFFERENT FROM THE SEX THEY WERE ASSIGNED AT BIRTH**

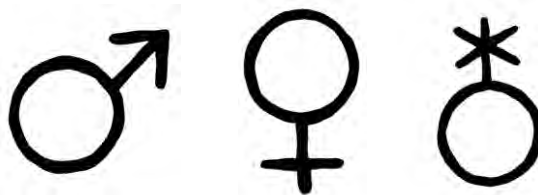
People who identify as transgender have a gender that is different from the gender associated with their sex. It also includes people who identify with a gender outside the man/woman binary. This means that the person identifies as neither man nor woman, but somewhere in between, or that the person identifies as a mix of both man and woman.

# KEY GENDER CONCEPTS

## SEX

The assignment and classification of people as male, female or intersex, based on biological differences at birth.

**INTERSEX:** a variety of conditions where a person's anatomy does not fit the typical definition of male and female.



## GENDER

THE PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED WITH BEING MALE, FEMALE, A COMBINATION OR NEITHER.

## GENDER IDENTITY

A person's internal sense of being male, female, a combination or neither.

## GENDER ROLES

Activities, tasks and responsibilities ascribed to a group of people based on their sex.

**GENDER NON-CONFORMING:** When someone does not conform to typical gender roles.

## TRANSGENDER

When a person's gender identity or expression is different from the gender associated with their sex assigned at birth (for instance, a person born with male genitals but who identifies as female). Transgender also includes people who identify with a gender outside the man/woman binary (e.g. having no gender or multiple genders).

## GENDER NON-BINARY

Some people do not fit into the traditional binary gender divide (boy/girl, man/woman) and identify as neither man nor woman, but somewhere in between. Some may also identify as a mix of man and woman.

## HARMFUL GENDER PRACTICES:

Harmful practices such as 'gender bias', 'gender stereotypes' and 'gender discrimination', negatively affect a person's sense of identity and ability.

## GENDER BIAS

An unfair difference in the way people of different sexes and associated genders are treated.

## GENDER STEREOTYPES

Biased beliefs about the personal attributes, behaviours and roles of a specific social group (for example women should take care of babies while men need to provide for the family).

## GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION

Exclusion of a person from educational opportunities, meaningful careers, political influence or opportunities for economic advancement based on their sex.

## HELPFUL GENDER PRACTICES:

'Gender equality', 'gender responsiveness' and 'gender-responsive pedagogy' can be used to promote a person's sense of identity and ability.

## GENDER EQUALITY

The absence of discrimination based on a person's sex and associated gender. It implies that society sees everyone as equal, regardless of their sex.

## GENDER RESPONSIVENESS

Plans and actions that address the different needs and aspirations of people of different sexes and associated genders or taking actions to correct or prevent gender bias and discrimination to ensure gender equality and equity.

## GENDER-RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

Teaching and learning processes that pay attention to the specific needs of children of different sexes.

# GENDER AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

South African society is to a large extent patriarchal. This means that men are seen to have the authority in society, and that women are seen as subordinate to men. The high levels of gender-based violence and the higher HIV infection rates among girls and women in South Africa are tragic consequences of sustained gender inequalities, related to prevailing harmful gender norms in our society such as female disempowerment and harmful ideas about masculinity.

## THESE HARMFUL IDEAS ABOUT GENDER ROLES ARE INTRODUCED TO CHILDREN WHEN THEY ARE STILL SMALL.

Boys may be expected to be tough and there may be less room for their emotions. Often, girls are brought up to believe that they should be submissive and that they cannot lead and speak out. Children who do not conform to these typical gender expectations often face ridicule, exclusion or violence.

## THERE IS NO WINNER FROM GENDER STEREOTYPES AND INEQUALITY. THE NEGATIVE RAMIFICATIONS AFFECT EVERYONE IN SOUTH AFRICA:

GIRLS ARE MORE LIKELY TO DROP OUT OF SCHOOL AND HAVE LOWER PASS RATES FOR MATHEMATICS AND PHYSICAL SCIENCE SUBJECTS <sup>1,2</sup>

BOYS HAVE HIGHER EXPULSION RATES AND ARE MORE LIKELY TO REPEAT PRIMARY SCHOOL GRADES <sup>3</sup>

MORE THAN HALF OF LGBTI\* PEOPLE REPORT THAT THEY EXPERIENCED VICTIMISATION AT SCHOOL BASED ON THEIR LGBTI STATUS <sup>4</sup>

\*LGBTI: LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER AND INTERSEX

TRADITIONAL STEREOTYPES – ESPECIALLY PRESSURE TO PROVIDE FOR THEIR FAMILIES – ARE DIFFICULT FOR MANY SOUTH AFRICAN MEN TO LIVE UP TO <sup>5</sup>

BECAUSE OF HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY (A LEGACY OF THE APARTHEID ERA), MANY MEN STRUGGLE TO SUPPORT THEIR FAMILIES FINANCIALLY, CAUSING FEELINGS OF HELPLESSNESS AND SHAME.

ONLY 10% OF CEOs IN SOUTH AFRICA ARE WOMEN

WOMEN AND LGBTI PERSONS ARE AT HIGHER RISK OF SEXUAL AND PHYSICAL VIOLENCE <sup>7,8</sup>

GENDER NON-CONFORMING INDIVIDUALS ARE LESS LIKELY TO BE EMPLOYED <sup>9</sup>

MEN ARE MORE LIKELY TO DRINK ALCOHOL, TAKE UNHEALTHY RISKS AND ENGAGE IN VIOLENCE 10. THEY ARE LESS LIKELY TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP OR TALK ABOUT THEIR PROBLEMS WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY <sup>11</sup>

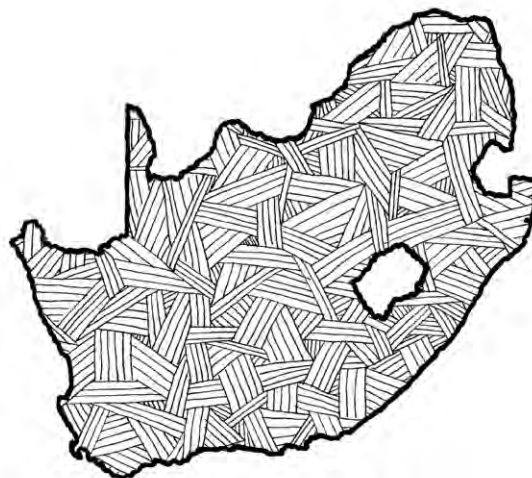
FOR EACH HOUR THAT A MAN SPENDS ON UNPAID CARE WORK, WOMEN SPEND EIGHT HOURS OF EQUIVALENT WORK <sup>12</sup>

# NATIONAL COMMITMENTS TO GENDER EQUALITY

South Africa is the only African country to offer constitutional protection against discrimination based on sex, gender and sexual orientation.

The Constitution and the Bill of Rights supports all people's right to:

- A NAME AND IDENTITY
- LIFE
- EQUALITY
- A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT
- SOCIAL ASSISTANCE
- FOOD
- CLEAN WATER
- SHELTER
- HEALTH CARE
- SCHOOLING



## SOUTH AFRICAN POLICIES AND LEGISLATION THAT SUPPORT GENDER EQUALITY:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA</b>                               | Protects the rights of all people and promotes freedom from unfair discrimination based on gender, sex, pregnancy and marital status  |
| <b>SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS ACT (SASA), 1996</b>                                     | The right to education for all, promoting equity, eliminating discrimination, ensuring gender parity (learners indiscriminately receive quality basic education)  |
| <b>EMPLOYMENT OF EDUCATORS ACT, 1998</b>  | Seeks to address the issue of sexual abuse of learners by teachers by making it unlawful to employ a teacher who has been engaged in sexual abuse of a learner.   |
| <b>EMPLOYMENT EQUITY ACT, 1998</b>  | Promotes equity in the workplace, protects against discrimination (including those based on gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, family responsibility)  |
| <b>NATIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND FEMICIDE, 2020 - 2030</b> | A multi-sectoral, coherent strategic policy and programming framework to ensure a coordinated national response to the crisis of gender-based violence and femicide by the government of South Africa and the country as a whole. |

**The South African Department of Basic Education is committed to protecting the rights of all children.** The South African government recognises the importance of reducing gender biases and stereotypes, and supporting gender equality in education:

- The **Ministerial Task Team on Evaluation of Textbooks and Learning and Teaching Support Material (LTSM)** ensures that gender discrimination and bias is not evidenced within prescribed text for learners so that all texts, graphics and language are suitable to all learners and avoid gender stereotypes
- **The Directorate: Social Cohesion and Equity in Education** oversees social cohesion, nation building and gender empowerment in schools, where the **Gender Equity sub-directorate** coordinates and monitors gender empowerment and equity issues in schools.
- The **Protocol for the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment in Schools** aims at standardizing how schools must respond to reports of sexual abuse and harassment in schools.
- The introduction of a **Life Skills Programme in Primary schools** that deals with gender issues such as gender violence, teenage pregnancy and discrimination, among other concerns, is considered a key contributor to minimising gender inequalities in schools. The programme aims to promote personal development, self-esteem and self-confidence among learners.

# GENDER IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

## **CHILDREN LEARN AND DEVELOP OPTIMALLY WHEN:**

- THEY PARTICIPATE IN A VARIETY OF LEARNING AND PLAY ACTIVITIES
- THEIR TEACHERS MAKE THEM FEEL SAFE AND SUPPORTED
- THEY RECEIVE ENCOURAGEMENT TO TRY DIFFERENT THINGS AND INTERACT WITH OTHERS

**Gender stereotypes and biases negatively affect how children participate in activities, and what they are able to gain from their education.** When children are treated differently because of their sex, it can hold them back from participation, interaction and learning, and from realising their full identity and potential.

Based on how the learning environment is set up and what teachers say/do or do not say/do, children 'learn', for example, whether their voices matter, who gets to lead in school or be a leader in future, or who gets to engage in particular activities.

**LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS OFTEN PASS ON POWERFUL GENDER MESSAGES THROUGH WHAT IS DESCRIBED AS THE 'HIDDEN CURRICULUM' – WHAT CHILDREN LEARN FROM OBSERVING HOW THINGS ARE DONE IN THE CLASSROOM AND BY SCHOOL STAFF.**

## **EXAMPLES OF GENDER BIASES IN EARLY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS:**

- Dividing groups by sex and only assigning certain tasks to girls (e.g. tidying) and other tasks to boys (e.g. moving furniture)
- Discouraging girls from participating in activities considered rough, and boys from playing with dolls
- Gently patting a girl who hurts herself and is crying, while a boy in the same situation is told, 'Get up, boys don't cry.'

As leaders of the classroom and change agents in the community, ECD teachers and practitioners play a central role in providing **equal opportunities for all young children to engage and learn and help them break free from harmful gender stereotypes that hold them back in life.**

# THE BENEFITS OF SUPPORTING GENDER DIVERSITY

When early learning environments support gender diversity and give attention to gender issues, both children and teachers benefit.

## **GENDER DIVERSITY HELPS CHILDREN:**

### **DEVELOP GOOD SOCIAL SKILLS**

When learning environments support children to interact constructively and respectfully with children of diverse abilities and backgrounds, children learn to enjoy being with others who are different from themselves, including how to be sensitive to and adapt to these differences. This helps to improve communication skills and prepare children for healthy social interactions in future.

### **DEVELOP CRITICAL THINKING**

Being exposed to different viewpoints, opinions and experiences gives children the opportunity to think critically about their own beliefs and examine the world in fresh ways.

### **PRACTICE CREATIVITY**

Creativity is all about bringing together different ideas and transforming them to make something new. The more ideas and experiences children are exposed to, the more creative they can be.

### **DEVELOP A HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM**

When children's individual abilities are recognised and supported, they feel worthy and capable. This helps them cope with making mistakes and encourages them to try again. Children with healthy self-esteem are less likely to fear differences or put other children down to feel better about themselves.

## **SUPPORT FOR GENDER DIVERSITY HELPS TEACHERS:**

- gain new knowledge about the different ways that children learn
- develop more positive attitudes and approaches towards people, children and situations
- experience greater job satisfaction and a higher sense of accomplishment when all children's learning is supported
- have a meaningful and long-lasting impact on children's development, sense of identity and future success

# GENDER RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY IN ECD

***GENDER-RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY (GRP) ENABLES TEACHERS AND PRACTITIONERS TO GIVE ADEQUATE ATTENTION TO GENDER ISSUES IN TEACHING AND INTERACTING WITH ALL CHILDREN.***

As an ECD teacher or practitioner, you can use GRP to support positive gender relations among children in your care and provide them with equal opportunities for learning.

**THIS GUIDE OFFERS KEY MESSAGES, ACTIONABLE TIPS AND EXAMPLES THAT CAN HELP YOU IMPLEMENT GRP IN ALL ASPECTS OF YOUR ECD WORK, INCLUDING:**

## **LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

HOW YOU ORGANISE YOUR CLASSROOM AND OUTDOOR AREA

## **LEARNING MATERIALS**

HOW YOU EQUIP YOUR CLASSROOM WITH PLAY AND LEARNING MATERIALS

## **LEARNING ACTIVITIES**

HOW YOU PLAN YOUR LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND ORGANISE YOUR TIME WITH YOUR LEARNERS

## **INTERACTIONS AND LANGUAGE USE IN THE CLASSROOM**

HOW YOU ENGAGE WITH CHILDREN IN YOUR CARE

HOW YOU FACILITATE ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN YOUR LEARNERS

## **INTERACTIONS BEYOND THE CLASSROOM**

HOW YOU INTERACT WITH OTHER TEACHERS AND SCHOOL STAFF

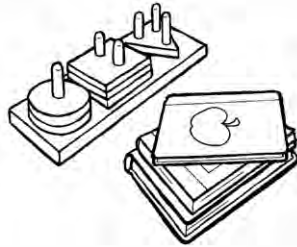
HOW YOU WORK WITH PARENTS TO INVOLVE THEM IN THEIR CHILD'S LEARNING

# HOW TO NAVIGATE THIS GUIDE

THERE ARE 5 UNITS IN THIS GUIDE



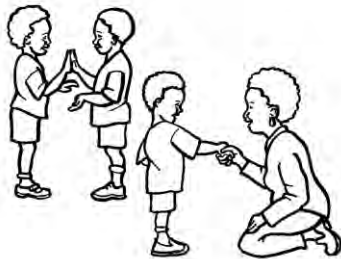
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT



LEARNING MATERIALS



LEARNING ACTIVITIES



CLASSROOM INTERACTIONS AND LANGUAGE USE



INTERACTIONS BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

IN EACH UNIT, YOU WILL SEE:

KEY MESSAGES



**1** DIFFERENT WAYS TO PUT THIS MESSAGE INTO ACTION



PRACTICAL TIPS and illustrative examples

# KEY MESSAGES FOR TEACHERS AND PRACTITIONERS

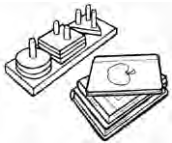


**LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

## **CREATE A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT THAT ENCOURAGES PARTICIPATION OF ALL CHILDREN**

### **HOW?**

1. Set up learning areas to attract diverse children to play or work together
2. Arrange seating to encourage all children to participate fully
3. Prevent children from taking up all the space or excluding others



**LEARNING MATERIALS**

## **ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO EXPLORE ALL TYPES OF TOYS AND PLAY MATERIALS**

### **HOW?**

1. Offer toys and play materials in a way that appeals to different children
2. Encourage children to explore play materials that are typically “meant” for a specific sex

## **USE PICTURES AND STORIES TO TALK ABOUT GENDER ROLES AND PROMOTE GENDER DIVERSITY**

### **HOW?**

1. Be aware of the gender sensitivity of books and pictures that you use
2. Draw attention to stereotypes and role models to help children reflect on gender roles



**LEARNING ACTIVITIES**

## **USE LEARNING ACTIVITIES TO BREAK DOWN STEREOTYPICAL IDEAS ABOUT GENDER**

### **HOW?**

1. Avoid making activities sex-specific
2. Create opportunities for children to engage in a variety of of play and learning activities
3. Use activities to question gender roles and stereotypes to promote gender equality



**CLASSROOM INTERACTIONS & LANGUAGE USE**

## **USE YOUR INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN TO BUILD THEIR SELF-ESTEEM AND PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY**

### **HOW?**

1. Respect and praise children for their individuality
2. Treat children equally, regardless of their sex
3. Use language that supports gender diversity and equality

## **SUPPORT CHILDREN TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES FREELY AND ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER**

### **HOW?**

1. Help children to treat one another with respect
2. Encourage children equally to express emotions
3. Help children develop empathy and appreciate diversity



**INTERACTIONS BEYOND THE CLASSROOM**

## **USE YOUR INTERACTIONS WITH SCHOOL STAFF, PARENTS AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY TO PROMOTE AND ENCOURAGE GENDER EQUALITY**

### **HOW?**

1. Promote gender equality and model an anti-bias approach in your interactions with other adults
2. Help parents support their child’s holistic development

# LEARNING ENVIRONMENT



THE WAY IN WHICH YOUR CLASSROOM AND LEARNING AREAS ARE ARRANGED INFLUENCES CHILDREN'S INVOLVEMENT AND LEARNING.

Depending on their personality and interests, children participate in their learning environment in different ways. Some children like to speak in front of their peers while other children are more reserved and prefer to follow the lead of others. Some children easily explore different activities and roles, whereas others need more encouragement and support.

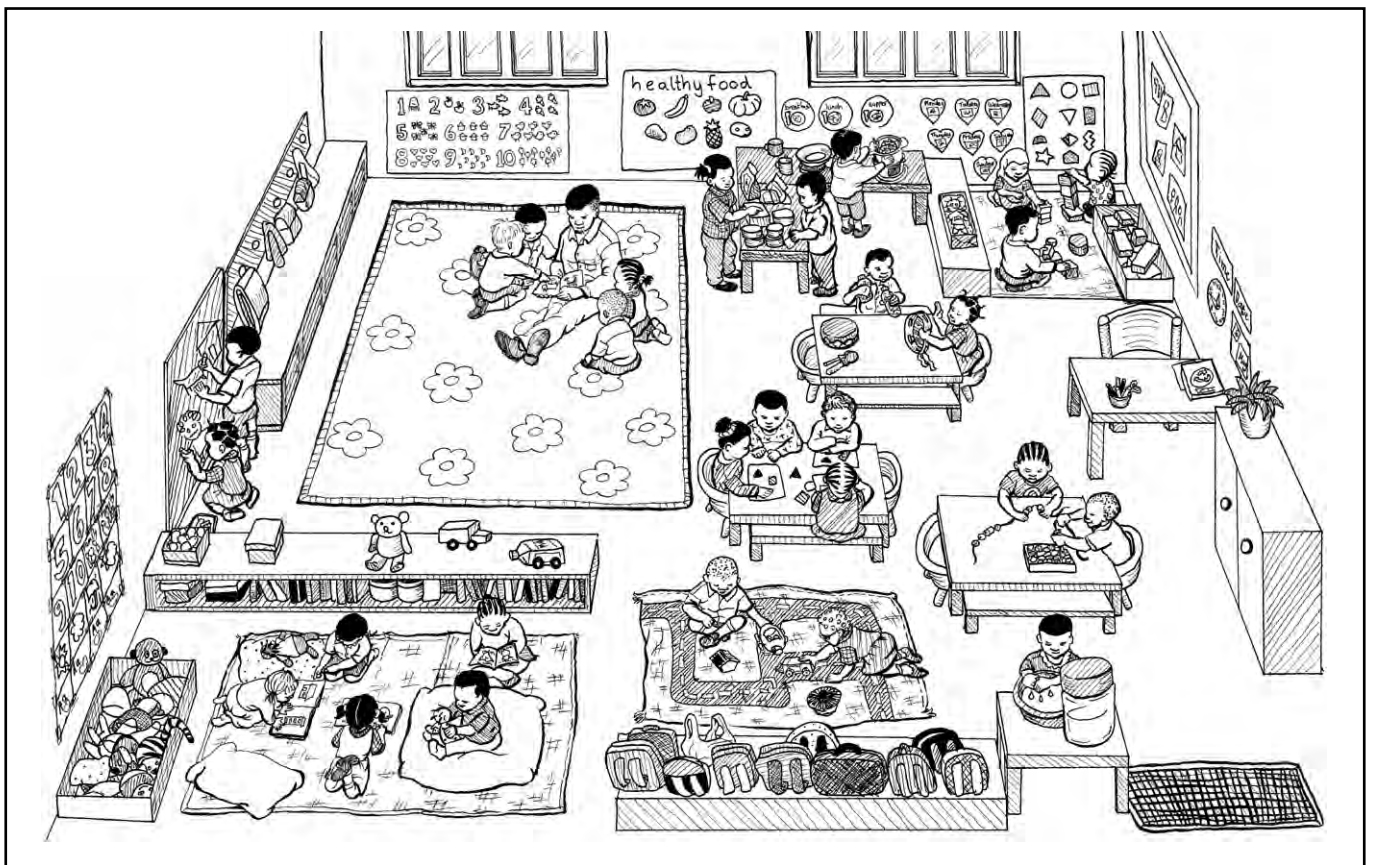
By organising your classroom space differently, you can change children's play behaviours.

**CREATE A  
LEARNING  
ENVIRONMENT  
THAT ENCOURAGES  
PARTICIPATION  
OF ALL CHILDREN**

## HOW?

- 1 SET UP LEARNING AREAS TO ATTRACT DIVERSE CHILDREN TO PLAY OR WORK TOGETHER**
- 2 ARRANGE SEATING TO ENCOURAGE ALL CHILDREN TO PARTICIPATE FULLY**
- 3 PREVENT CHILDREN FROM TAKING UP ALL THE SPACE OR EXCLUDING OTHERS**

**NOTE:** Many schools are limited in their infrastructure and furniture. Overcrowded classrooms are more difficult to set up for effective learning. Regardless of this, children should not be divided into groups by sex, all children's participation should be encouraged, and their specific needs and interests should be considered.



## CREATE A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT THAT ENCOURAGES PARTICIPATION OF ALL CHILDREN



### 1 SET UP LEARNING AREAS TO ATTRACT DIVERSE CHILDREN TO PLAY OR WORK TOGETHER

The set-up of learning areas can influence the variety of play materials, who plays with them and which activities children engage in.



#### REGULARLY REORGANISE YOUR LEARNING AREAS TO INSPIRE NEW GAMES AND ENCOURAGE DIFFERENT CHILDREN TO MINGLE.

Bringing the fantasy and construction areas closer together can encourage cross-play between the two areas. This encourages elements of fantasy and construction play in both areas, and can encourage different children to play together.



#### REGULARLY CHANGE THE PLACEMENT AND COMBINATION OF MATERIALS IN YOUR LEARNING AREAS.

This helps inspire children to use materials that they would usually be less interested in playing with during free play.

Moving blocks into the fantasy area could inspire children to build a house for the dolls and include play with dolls in building activities.



#### ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO TRY OUT ALL THE LEARNING AREAS.

Observe how children move between different learning areas, what and who they play with. Gently encourage them to try out a new toy or activity, or play with someone that they might not have played with before. You can role-model for children to inspire them.

**NOTE:** The objective is not to force children to do things they usually do not want to, but rather to help them explore and expand their learning through trying different things. Creating opportunities for children to participate in a variety of activities will help them grow, learn and develop.

## 2 ARRANGE SEATING TO ENCOURAGE ALL CHILDREN TO PARTICIPATE FULLY



### SEATING:

Seating and group arrangements can influence how children participate, especially children who need more encouragement to speak in group contexts, such as shy children or those who are not used to being the focus of attention.



**FOR A WHOLE-CLASS ACTIVITY, LET EVERYONE SIT IN A CIRCLE ON THE GROUND WITH YOU, THE TEACHER, AS PART OF THE CIRCLE, TO CREATE MORE EQUAL INVOLVEMENT.**



**ARRANGE CHILDREN IN SMALL GROUPS AROUND A LARGE TABLE OR ON THE CARPET TO IMPROVE THE PARTICIPATION OF SHYER OR LESS ACTIVE CHILDREN.**



**DURING TEACHER-GUIDED ACTIVITIES, MOVE AROUND THE ROOM AND SIT IN DIFFERENT PLACES TO MAKE SURE EVERYONE IS INVOLVED AND FEELS ENCOURAGED TO PARTICIPATE.**

### 3 PREVENT CHILDREN FROM TAKING UP ALL THE SPACE OR EXCLUDING OTHERS



**PHYSICALLY DIVIDE THE PLAYGROUND AND LEARNING AREAS INTO DIFFERENT SPACES TO ALLOW DIFFERENT GROUPS TO PLAY AT THE SAME TIME.**

Use furniture to divide areas into different spaces, such as a carpet, storage boxes and shelving (inside) or plants and low hedges (outside)



**TRY TO INTERVENE WHEN A GROUP OF CHILDREN TAKE UP ALL THE PLAY SPACE OR CHASE OTHERS AWAY.**

A group of girls playing house might not welcome a boy into their game, or a group of boys playing outside may be using all the balls, not allowing girls to play along.

IF A CHILD SAYS:

***“YOU CAN’T PLAY IN THE KITCHEN AREA, YOU ARE A BOY!”***

YOU CAN RESPOND BY SAYING:

***“WE CAN ALL LEARN TOGETHER HOW TO MAKE A RECIPE AND COOK FOOD TOGETHER”***



## TOILET FACILITIES AND ROUTINES

Many schools and centres have separate toilet routines and/or ablution facilities for children of different sexes. A potential problem with dividing facilities and routines by sex is that it implicitly creates opportunities to “police” the gender identity of others (“you are not allowed to use the girls’ bathroom because you are not a girl!”).

Trans and non-binary children may not feel comfortable using sex-segregated facilities due to others’ reactions and because these facilities may not meet their needs. Similarly, separating toilet routines for boys and girls places trans and non-binary children in a difficult position.

**Teachers can reduce children’s fears about toilet routines by creating a positive, supportive climate, and supervising it appropriately.**

Every child needs to be safe during toilet routines. It can be emotionally harmful for children to be questioned or interrogated about their sex or gender identity when using toilet facilities. As a result, some children might avoid going to the toilet which has negative consequences for their health, wellbeing and ability to concentrate on learning.

**NOTE:** Much of the fear about transgender learners in bathrooms rests on the false notion that a transgender learner wants access for an improper purpose, namely to leer at other learners. Research has shown this is not an issue in schools with policies that ensure that transgender learners can use the bathroom aligned with their gender identity.



### **TO ENABLE TOILET ROUTINES THAT SUPPORT GENDER DIVERSITY:**

- Children should have access to toilet facilities that correspond with their gender identity.
- Children should not be forced to use toilet facilities with which they do not identify.
- Children who identify as gender non-binary should be granted access to the facility that they feel most comfortable using.
- Children who are uncomfortable using a sex-segregated bathroom or who indicate the need for increased privacy should be provided with a safe and adequate alternative (e.g. a single “unisex” bathroom or a single-user restroom such as a staff bathroom)
- While a private bathroom space should be available to children as an option, no child should be required or forced to use such a space.

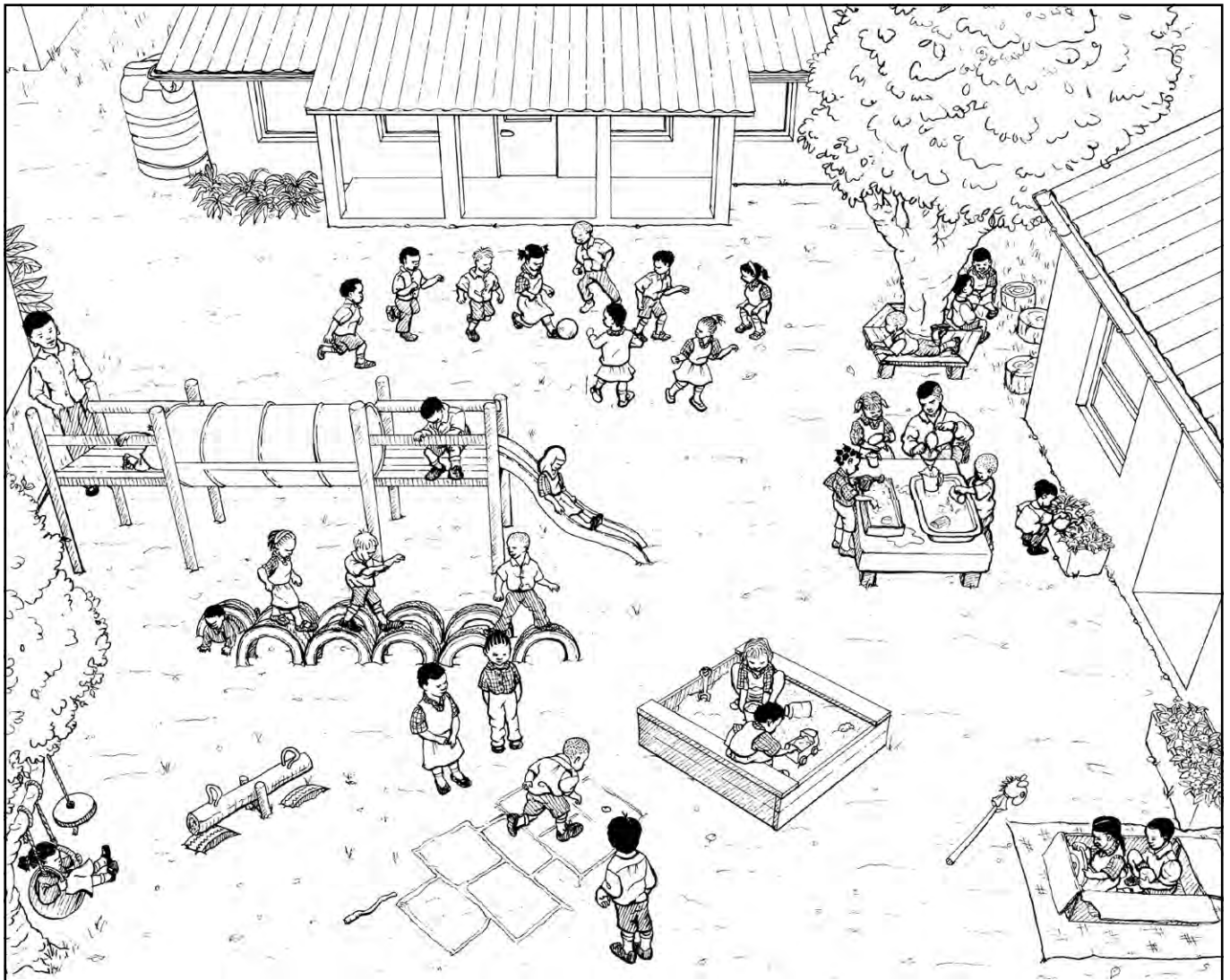
### **CREATING A POSITIVE AND SUPPORTIVE CLIMATE FOR TOILET ROUTINES:**

- Teachers should ensure that children can join toilet routines and use toilet facilities that correspond with their gender identity free of stigma or ridicule.
- Teachers should work with children to address the discomfort and foster understanding of gender diversity, to create a school culture that respects and values all children.

## YOUR OUTDOOR CLASSROOM



Here is an example of an outdoor area and how to encourage participation and learning for all children:



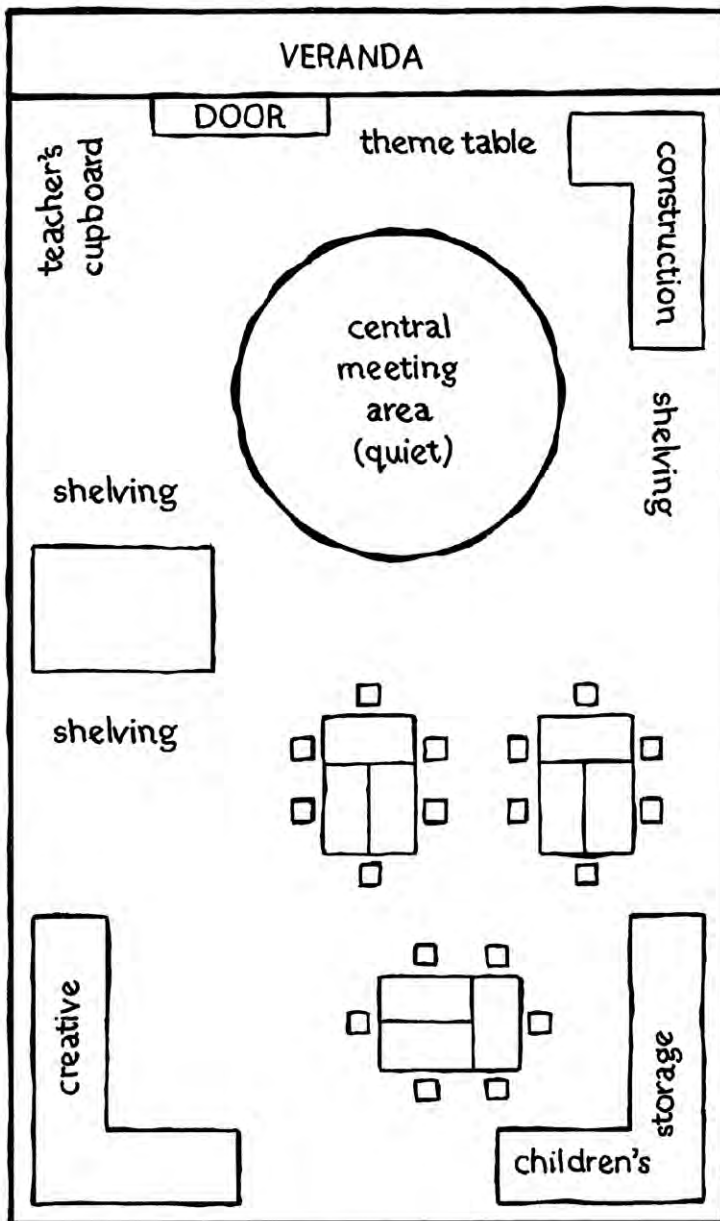
Have designated spaces for different types of activities (running; climbing, hanging and swinging; pretend play area; resting area; water play area; sand area). **This allows different groups to play at the same time.**

Encourage mingling and games that involve mixed-sex groups on the playground.

## INDOOR CLASSROOM LAYOUT: AN EXAMPLE

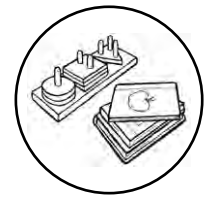


The set-up of learning areas can influence how attractive they are to different children. Here are some key points to keep in mind:

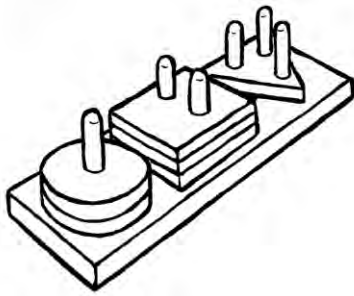


- ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO TRY OUT ALL THE LEARNING AREAS
- HAVE THE CLASS SIT IN A CIRCLE ON THE FLOOR, WITH YOU AS THE TEACHER AS PART OF THE CIRCLE FOR MORE EQUAL INVOLVEMENT
- MOVE AROUND THE ROOM TO MAKE SURE EVERYONE IS INVOLVED AND TO ENCOURAGE EVERYONE TO PARTICIPATE
- ARRANGING CHILDREN IN SMALL GROUPS CAN IMPROVE THE PARTICIPATION OF SHYER OR LESS ACTIVE CHILDREN
- TRY TO INTERVENE WHEN A GROUP OF CHILDREN TAKE UP ALL THE SPACE AND CHASE OTHER CHILDREN AWAY

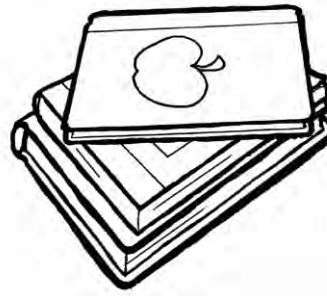
# LEARNING MATERIALS



IN THIS UNIT, WE WILL LOOK AT DIFFERENT LEARNING MATERIALS:



PLAY MATERIALS



PICTURES AND STORIES

## PLAY MATERIALS

A variety of experiences with different play materials will help children learn a wider range of skills.

However, toys and play materials often adhere to a clear gender binary (“toys for girls”, “toys for boys”), which can limit what children play with.

***By marketing toys and colours for different sexes, manufacturing companies can sell more products.***



“TOYS FOR GIRLS”



“TOYS FOR BOYS”

**Both children and adults often see a clear division between toys for children of different sexes.**

Some children may refuse to play with materials meant for another sex or tease other children who cross gender roles during play (for example, a girl pretending to be a race car driver, or a boy pretending to be a hairdresser).

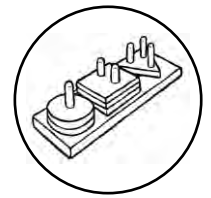
Sex-specific play materials may also influence children’s understanding of different gender roles: If dolls are only for girls, children may think that caring for children is only for women.

WHEN PLAY MATERIALS APPEAL TO ONE SEX ONLY, ALL CHILDREN MISS OUT ON IMPORTANT LEARNING EXPERIENCES.

**ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO EXPLORE ALL TYPES OF TOYS AND PLAY MATERIALS**

### HOW?

- 1 OFFER TOYS AND PLAY MATERIALS IN A WAY THAT APPEALS TO DIFFERENT CHILDREN**
- 2 ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO EXPLORE PLAY MATERIALS THAT ARE TYPICALLY “MEANT” FOR A SPECIFIC SEX**



**1 OFFER TOYS AND PLAY MATERIALS IN A WAY THAT APPEALS TO DIFFERENT CHILDREN**



**TO ENCOURAGE MIXED-SEX PLAY, COMBINE MATERIALS SO THAT THEY HAVE AN ELEMENT OF INTEREST FOR DIFFERENT CHILDREN.**

If certain learners share an interest (e.g. animals), you can stimulate their involvement by using animal themes or learning materials. This will also encourage mixed-sex play.



If you know that a shy child only plays with a few children and panics when there is too much noise and activity, encourage the child to mix with other children by choosing a quiet activity like looking at a book or playing with blocks. This may motivate the shy child to join in play with classmates.



**WHERE POSSIBLE, AVOID SEX-SPECIFIC PLAY MATERIALS.**

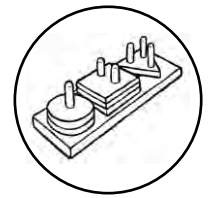
You can buy or make a doll that can be any sex. If you name the doll, choose a name that is used for boys and girls. If you dress it in clothes, use a colour and design that is not typical for either boys or girls. Another option is to make several dolls so that you provide variety: different sexes, different ages, different sets of clothes.



During fantasy play, open-ended materials such as pieces of cloth and cardboard boxes allow children to explore and develop their own sense of gender and gender roles. More traditional props such as princess dresses or firemen outfits may encourage stereotypical behaviours and limit learning experiences.



## 2 ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO EXPLORE PLAY MATERIALS THAT ARE TYPICALLY “MEANT” FOR A SPECIFIC SEX



### QUESTION BELIEFS ABOUT WHO IS ALLOWED TO PLAY WITH CERTAIN TOYS.

Always question children when they say things like:

***‘Only boys can play with cars.’ or ‘Dolls are for girls.’***

Ask them whether they are sure this is true. You can ask other children if they know girls who play with cars or boys who play with dolls.



Alternatively, offer other views yourself.

***“When I was a child, I loved playing with cars.”***

***“I think lots of children in this class – boys too - will enjoy playing with dolls because they are caring and like being kind to others.”***



### QUESTION BELIEFS ABOUT COLOURS AND WHAT THEY MEAN.

Boys may refuse to play with anything pink while girls may claim pink toys as ‘theirs’. There is no need to avoid pink or blue – there are no wrong colours – but aim to use a range of colours.

If a child asks:

***‘Is green a boy colour or a girl colour?’***

Here are some ideas of how you can respond:

***‘Colours are just colours. You can like any colour you want to.’***

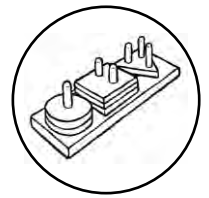
***‘Do you think there are colours just for boys, and colours just for girls?’***

***Maybe colours are just colours and everyone gets to like whatever colours they find beautiful!’***

***‘I think the world is filled with so many beautiful colours and that we all get to enjoy them. How sad would it be to think that someone couldn’t like a colour because of their sex?’***



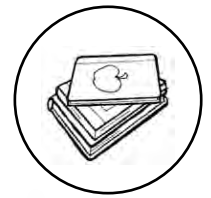
## MODEL NON-STEREOTYPICAL PLAY BEHAVIOURS FOR CHILDREN.



Show children who may not have had much opportunity to play with certain materials how to use them to get them started.



## PICTURES AND STORIES



Every storybook and poster, even one with stereotypes, can offer an opportunity to talk with children about gender roles.

### STEREOTYPES IN STORYBOOKS

Pictures and words in storybooks and posters often convey gender stereotypes. This can influence children's understanding of different gender roles.



The words used to describe characters in a book are often linked to gender stereotypes, such as boys are naughty, competitive, strong, brave, ambitious, clever; girls are beautiful, sweet,

good, shy. Stories and pictures may show certain professions are only for one sex (for example, the housewife or nurse is typically female, while the doctor or businessman is typically male). Transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming characters are very often missing from pictures and stories.



TYPICAL ACCESSORIES



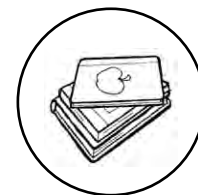
TYPICAL ROLES AND ACTIVITIES



**USE PICTURES AND STORIES TO TALK ABOUT GENDER ROLES AND PROMOTE GENDER DIVERSITY**

### HOW?

- 1 BE AWARE OF THE GENDER SENSITIVITY OF BOOKS AND PICTURES THAT YOU USE**
- 2 DRAW CHILDREN'S ATTENTION TO STEREOTYPES AND ROLE MODELS AND HELP THEM REFLECT ON GENDER**

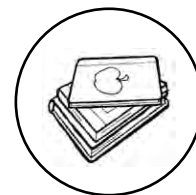


**1 BE AWARE OF THE GENDER SENSITIVITY OF BOOKS AND PICTURES THAT YOU USE**



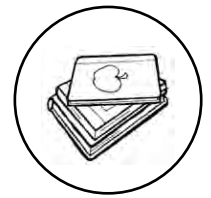
**CHECK A STORY BOOK, PICTURE BOOK OR POSTER TO DETERMINE HOW GENDER STEREOTYPICAL OR DIVERSE THE CONTENT IS.**

| TYPE OF CONTENT:   | EXAMPLES:  | HOW TO USE IT:  |
|--|--|---|
| <p>CONTENT WITH EXPLICIT GENDER STEREOTYPES OR TRADITIONAL ROLES</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• traditional fairy tales (prince and princess), stories or posters that show the mother at home looking after the children while the father is absent / at work</li> <li>• pictures in commercial magazines often contain very strong gender stereotypes (e.g. pictures of strong men, women and make-up)</li> </ul> | <p>Encourage children to identify the stereotypes in the story or illustrations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘What do you think about this?’</li> <li>• ‘Is it always this way?’</li> </ul>  |
| <p>CONTENT WITH SUBTLE GENDER STEREOTYPES OR ROLES</p>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a story with a brave (male) dog and a scared (female) cat</li> <li>• a story with animal characters that are not explicitly identified as male or female, but male pronouns are used in the words</li> </ul> <p><b><i>SUBTLE STEREOTYPES CAN BE QUITE TRICKY TO DETECT</i></b></p>                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Is it like that in your home / community?’</li> <li>• ‘Do you know of examples where things are done differently?’</li> <li>• ‘Can the roles in the story be reversed? Why/why not?’</li> <li>• ‘Would you do things differently?’</li> </ul> |



| <b>TYPE OF CONTENT:</b>   | <b>EXAMPLES:</b>  | <b>HOW TO USE IT:</b>  |
|---|---|--|
| <p>CONTENT THAT CHALLENGES GENDER STEREOTYPES AND CONTAINS GENDER NON-CONFORMING EXAMPLES</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a story about a brave girl, saving her brother from danger</li> <li>• a child who has two men as parents</li> <li>• a poster of a father who cooks for his family or takes care of a sick family member</li> </ul>                             | <p>Ideal content for questioning roles and stereotypes with children and celebrating diversity. Help children reflect on their responses and reactions to these examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do they think about this?</li> <li>• Is it always this way?</li> <li>• Is it like that in our school?</li> <li>• Would we be 'judged' (as some of the characters in the books are)?</li> <li>• Why are they judged?</li> <li>• Would you like to be this character? Why? Why not?</li> </ul> |
| <p>CONTENT THAT HIGHLIGHTS OR PROMOTES GENDER DIVERSITY</p>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a balance of characters of different gender identities, expressions and roles</li> <li>• a boy that wants to wear a skirt and earrings</li> <li>• a girl asking to be called a boy's name and who prefers shorts instead of dresses</li> </ul> |  |
| <p>GENDER NEUTRAL (NO STEREOTYPICAL CONTENT)</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stories where characters do not have a specific gender identity</li> <li>• a story that does not assign stereotypical roles to one sex only</li> </ul>   | <p>Even without talking about them explicitly, this content promotes the message that characters of different sexes are equal. Use these examples to help avoid children thinking in stereotypes.</p>  |

## 2 DRAW CHILDREN'S ATTENTION TO STEREOTYPES AND ROLE MODELS AND HELP THEM REFLECT ON GENDER



HELP CHILDREN TO BECOME AWARE OF BOOKS, POSTERS, ILLUSTRATIONS OR CHARACTERS THAT CONFIRM OR CHALLENGE STEREOTYPES, AND DRAW THEIR ATTENTION TO THIS.

Ask questions such as:

***'What are the different children doing in this picture?'***

***'Would you like to do this?'***

***'What do you think about this?'***

***'Is it always this way?'***

***'Is it like that in our school?'***

***'Is it like that in your home / community?'***

***'Do you see this often?'***

***'Would you like to be this person? Why / why not?'***

***'Would you want to do things differently?'***

Use these questions and discussions to convey the following message to children:  
CHILDREN CAN DO OR BE OR LIKE ANYTHING BECAUSE THEY ARE INDIVIDUALS WITH HOPES AND LIKES AND DESIRES. THIS IS NOT BECAUSE THEY ARE BOYS OR GIRLS.



**DISPLAY EXAMPLES OF GENDER NON-CONFORMING INDIVIDUALS OR CULTURES WHERE GENDER IS EXPRESSED DIFFERENTLY THAN REPRESENTED IN TRADITIONAL BINARY (MALE/FEMALE) NOTIONS.**



**DRAW ATTENTION TO CHARACTERS OR PICTURES OF PEOPLE DOING THINGS NOT TRADITIONALLY SEEN FOR THEIR SEX...**

such as male nurses, childcare providers and dancers;  
female soldiers, auto mechanics and athletes

Ask children about these examples:

***'Can you also do this?'***

***'Why can you do this?' or***

***'Why can't you do this?'***



# LEARNING ACTIVITIES



When children engage in a variety of learning activities, where they have opportunities to interact with different children, they develop a broader range of socio-emotional and cognitive skills.

**Traditional ideas about gender roles may prevent children from engaging in certain play behaviours or from taking on different roles in group settings. This may happen both during teacher-guided activities, and during free play.**

## TEACHER-GUIDED ACTIVITIES:

Often during teacher-guided activities, teachers divide the class into groups to work with smaller groups of children at a time while other groups conduct independent activities.

When children are divided into groups based on sex, it reinforces beliefs that children of different sexes can't work together and can't perform the same tasks. In addition, when we assume that children wouldn't be interested in an activity because of their sex, all children miss out on important learning opportunities.

Creating separate groups for different sexes sends the message that gender identity is a strict binary and discourages mixed-sex interactions and learning.

## FREE PLAY AND CHILD-INITIATED ACTIVITIES:

Across multiple contexts, children may engage in certain activities based on their sex. Boys often tend to favour construction and technical activities (e.g. playing with big blocks or small construction materials) and gross motor activities. Girls are more likely to be found at indoor play in the house corner, doing fine motor and creative art activities and reading.

**You can use your teacher-guided activities, children's free play and daily routines to address stereotypical ideas about gender that might hold children back from active participation, exploration and learning.**

**USE YOUR LEARNING ACTIVITIES TO BREAK DOWN STEREOTYPICAL IDEAS ABOUT GENDER**

## HOW?

- 1 AVOID MAKING ACTIVITIES SEX-SPECIFIC**
- 2 CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN TO ENGAGE IN A VARIETY OF PLAY AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES**
- 3 USE ACTIVITIES TO QUESTION GENDER ROLES AND STEREOTYPES TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY**

## USE YOUR LEARNING ACTIVITIES TO BREAK DOWN STEREOTYPICAL IDEAS ABOUT GENDER



### 1 AVOID MAKING ACTIVITIES SEX-SPECIFIC

There is no need for you to have separate activities for boys and girls. Rather, encourage mixed-sex groups and interaction during different activities.



#### **DIVIDE CHILDREN INTO GROUPS IN RANDOM WAYS (NOT BY SEX)**

- Avoid pairing children boy/girl/boy/girl
- Avoid dividing boys and girls into separate groups
- Use ways other than sex to group children (for example, by their month of birth, favourite animal, food, or what letter their name starts with).

*BOY/GIRL DIVISIONS EXCLUDE TRANS CHILDREN AND REINFORCES GENDER AS A STRICT BINARY.*



#### **CHANGE GROUPS EVERY SO OFTEN TO MAINTAIN MOTIVATION. CHILDREN SHOULD FIND THEMSELVES IN GROUPS THAT RESPOND TO THEIR SPECIFIC NEEDS.**

Occasionally you may want to combine certain children based on their needs, to work at their specific level. For example, children who struggle with expressing themselves in the language used in class may benefit from hearing a story in a smaller group and being asked to answer questions at their level.



#### **AVOID ROUTINES THAT SEPARATE THE BOYS FROM THE GIRLS. MAKE SURE THAT EXPECTATIONS, RULES AND ROUTINES ARE THE SAME FOR ALL CHILDREN.**



#### **AVOID ASSIGNING TASKS BY SEX (E.G. CHORES LIKE SWEEPING FOR GIRLS OR TIDYING AWAY THE CHAIRS FOR BOYS)**



**NOTE:** While encouraging mixed sex groupings is important for reducing stereotypical behaviour, it needs to be carefully managed and teachers should oversee interactions and provide support where necessary. This will help prevent certain children from dominating the activity and encourage less participative children to get involved.

## 2 CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL CHILDREN TO ENGAGE IN A VARIETY OF PLAY AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES



### AVOID ASSUMPTIONS THAT CHILDREN WON'T BE INTERESTED IN AN ACTIVITY TYPICALLY ASSOCIATED WITH ONE SEX

Be aware of stereotypical ideas about certain qualities and abilities associated with different genders (for example, that girls like dolls, dancing and singing, indoor quiet play and games associated with domestic roles, that boys enjoying cars, blocks, football, science and fighting). These ideas may dictate what activities children engage in.

Now and again, create opportunities for groups of children to have time to engage in activities that they might not gravitate towards by themselves. For instance, invite a group of children playing house to come and engage in construction activities, or create space for less experienced children to have time with the ball.



### WHEN A CHILD EXPLORES A GENDER NON-CONFORMING ACTIVITY OR ROLE, ENCOURAGE THIS CHILD TO CONTINUE AND DISCOURAGE PEERS WHO MAKE NEGATIVE COMMENTS



### ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO TRY OUT ALL THE LEARNING ACTIVITIES OR PLAY AREAS

When you notice that either boys or girls never engage in a certain activity, ask children why they are avoiding it.

Follow up by asking whether they think boys or girls can be good at this activity.

After listening, perhaps inform children that there are children of other genders who enjoy the activity. Where possible, refer to individuals known to the children. You can also show a picture (e.g. a female football team member)

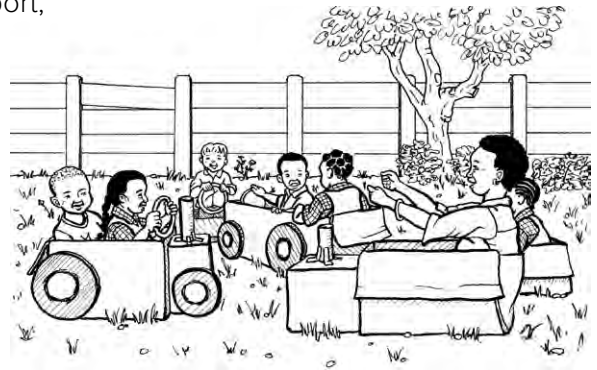
Have children rotate between different activities. This persuades them to play with all materials (including things that they may typically consider boyish or girlish).

### 3 USE ACTIVITIES TO QUESTION GENDER ROLES AND STEREOTYPES TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY



#### ORGANISE WHOLE-GROUP ACTIVITIES THAT BREAK TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES

For instance, while learning about transport, all children can pretend to drive tractors. This may initially meet some resistance and children may make remarks about certain behaviours not being for boys or for girls. This is a perfect opportunity to introduce examples of people who do break these gender roles by, for example, showing a drawing of a female tractor driver or car mechanic.



#### MODEL NON-STEREOTYPICAL PLAY BEHAVIOR TO INSPIRE CHILDREN (FOR EXAMPLE, PLAYING A MOTHER BUILDING A HOUSE OR A FATHER COOKING)



#### TEACH ADAPTED, GENDER-RESPONSIVE VERSIONS OF TRADITIONAL SONGS OR RHYMES SO THAT THEY INCLUDE CHARACTERS OF ALL SEXES IN DIFFERENT GENDER ROLES

Alternate male and female names, swap parental roles, make verses gender neutral

For example: In “The Wheels on the Bus”, use ‘parents’ instead of ‘mommies’

For example: Instead of “Old MacDonald had a farm, E-I-E-I-O // And on his farm” you can teach children to sing: “Tendai’s parents had a farm, E-I-E-I-O // And on their farm...”



#### DURING ACTIVITIES, ASK THOUGHT PROVOKING QUESTIONS THAT CHALLENGE GENDER ROLES.

Have discussions about different professions, responsibilities, family members and what they do around the home.








- “Whose father cooks?”
- “Who helps their parents in the kitchen?”
- “Can girls also drive lorries?”

THE OBJECTIVE IS TO BROADEN CHILDREN'S THINKING, NEVER TO DISAPPROVE OR JUDGE.

## PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY THROUGHOUT YOUR DAILY PROGRAMME



Below are some examples of ways to support equal participation and learning during daily activities and routines.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>MORNING CIRCLE</b><br/>(WELCOME, GREETING)</p>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure that everyone has a turn in answering questions</li> <li>• Monitor whether you give children of different sexes equal turns</li> <li>• Sit with children in a circle on the floor for more equal involvement</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>TEACHER-GUIDED ACTIVITY</b><br/>(LESSON, WORK TIME)</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage interaction by creating mixed-sex groups</li> <li>• Avoid making activities sex specific</li> <li>• Praise and help all children equally</li> <li>• Change grouping regularly to allow different children to work and bond with one another</li> <li>• Ask thought-provoking questions to challenge gender stereotypes</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>FREE PLAY</b></p>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage children to try out different learning areas and activities</li> <li>• Discourage teasing and name-calling</li> <li>• Encourage children who explore different gender roles, and discourage peers who make negative comments</li> <li>• Model non-stereotypical play behavior (e.g. a mother building a house, a father doing the cooking / cleaning)</li> <li>• Intervene when a group of children take up all the play space</li> <li>• Question beliefs about who is allowed to play with certain toys</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>REFRESHMENTS TOILET ROUTINE</b></p>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid routines that separate children based on their sex. Make sure that expectations, rules and routines are the same for all learners.</li> <li>• Ensure that children can join toilet routines and use toilet facilities that correspond with their gender identity free of stigma or ridicule</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>MUSIC, MOVEMENT, OUTSIDE PLAY</b></p>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach adapted, gender-responsive versions of traditional songs or rhymes so that they include characters of different sexes and in different gender roles</li> <li>• Try to intervene when a group of children take up all the play space and chases other learners away.</li> <li>• Encourage mingling and games that involve mixed-sex groups</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>STORY TIME</b></p>                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draw attention to examples that confirm or challenge gender stereotypes and help children reflect on these examples</li> <li>• Promote discussion about emotions and empathy, and knowledge of emotional states and emotional cues</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>TIDY UP</b></p>                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give children of different sexes similar tasks or chores like sweeping or tidying away the chairs</li> </ul>   |

## LEARNING THEMES THAT CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO DISCUSS GENDER



Below are some examples of questions and tips on themes or topics that may be discussed during the year.

### “ALL ABOUT ME”

#### QUESTIONS:

- What career do you want when you grow up? Why?
- Which sports do you like? Why?
- Which toys do you like best? Which colours do these toys have? Is that important?
- What is your favourite colour?
- What sports do you like to play?



### “HOME”

#### QUESTIONS:

- Who do you think should wash the dishes at home? Why?
- Who should sweep at home? Why?
- Who should prepare the food at home? Why?
- Who should put your baby brother to bed? Why?



### “MY CLASSROOM”

#### QUESTIONS:

- What learning activities do you like best? Why?
- What are your favourite toys to play with? Why?
- What activities do you think you are good at? Why?
- Where and how do you help your classmates in the classroom?
- Where do they help you?



### “MY FAMILY”

#### QUESTIONS:

- What activities do you like to do with your father? Why?
- What activities do you like to do with your mother? Why?
- What activities do you like to do with your sister? Why?
- What activities do you like to do with your brother? Why?



### “FRIENDS”

#### QUESTIONS:

- What games do you like to play?
- What games do you like to play with your friends?
- What games do you like to play outside with your friends?
- Do you think boys and girls like different games? Why?



### “JOBS PEOPLE DO”

Provide learners with examples of people who break gender roles.

Where possible, refer

to local people who like activities that may be considered atypical for their gender. Link jobs to the community. Explain to learners that there are a lot of people in the community that help us. Draw attention to female police officers, male teachers or nurses.



# CLASSROOM INTERACTIONS AND LANGUAGE USE



Interactions with adults and other children play an important role in children's learning and development.

As an early childhood teacher or practitioner, you are an important presence in the lives of every single child in your care.

Your engagement with children and how you facilitate engagement between children will play a crucial role in their sense of identity and belonging.

## Creating positive interactions and using inclusive language is important for all children.

Many children whose gender identity is seen as different from what is expected of them can face very difficult circumstances such as teasing, bullying and violence. For intersex children, lack of education around and awareness of bodily diversity and intersex traits in particular can create a hostile and discriminatory environment. Creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment will benefit all children in the school.

**Identity and belonging** is a key Early Learning and Development Area in South Africa's National Curriculum Framework for children from birth to four.

Through classroom interactions and language use, teachers and practitioners can help children develop a healthy sense of identity and belonging by helping children to:

- see themselves as capable and confident learners
- develop a strong sense of self care
- build strong relationships
- develop a strong sense of celebrating difference

IN THIS UNIT, WE WILL LOOK AT DIFFERENT TYPES OF INTERACTIONS:



TEACHER-LEARNER INTERACTIONS



LEARNER-LEARNER INTERACTIONS



## TEACHER-LEARNER INTERACTIONS

Your expectations of children's abilities affect their learning outcomes.

These expectations may be shaped by stereotypical ideas about certain qualities and abilities associated with different sexes:

- *girls need to be cooperative, disciplined, kind, respectful, subservient*
- *boys need to be action-oriented, outgoing, leaders, strong or competitive*

## THE LANGUAGE YOU USE CAN LEAD CHILDREN TO BELIEVE THAT THERE ARE CERTAIN THINGS THAT ONLY CHILDREN OF A CERTAIN SEX CAN DO:

- Using words like 'good' or 'excellent' specifically for boys and words like 'beautiful' or 'lovely' specifically for girls.
- Your tone of voice may be calm or pleasant when talking to girls but harsher when talking to boys.
- You may use language that suggests that boys or girls naturally have certain qualities or behave in a certain way.
  - Descriptions like 'sensible, helpful girls' versus 'silly, naughty, rough boys'
  - Stereotypical requests, such as: 'Girls, please show these boys how to organise these bags nicely.'
  - Complaints like 'boys will be boys'

## YOUR INTERACTIONS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN SHAPE THEIR SENSE OF IDENTITY AND BELONGING.

Criticism and unsupportive language make children doubt themselves and their abilities. Affection and encouragement help children know they belong and encourage them to feel confident about who they are and what they can do.

**USE YOUR INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN TO BUILD THEIR SELF-ESTEEM AND PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY**

### HOW?

- 1 RESPECT AND PRAISE CHILDREN FOR THEIR INDIVIDUALITY**
- 2 TREAT CHILDREN EQUALLY, REGARDLESS OF THEIR SEX**
- 3 USE LANGUAGE THAT SUPPORTS GENDER DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY**

## USE YOUR INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN TO BUILD THEIR SELF-ESTEEM AND PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY



### 1 RESPECT AND PRAISE CHILDREN FOR THEIR INDIVIDUALITY

There is no need for you to have separate activities for boys and girls. Rather, encourage mixed-sex groups and interaction during different activities.

*It is critically important that children are respected and accepted for who they are. This will help them feel they belong.*



#### GIVE ALL CHILDREN POSITIVE FEEDBACK BASED ON THEIR UNIQUE SKILLS AND QUALITIES RATHER THAN THEIR SEX

Be conscious about how you praise learners. Girls are often praised for their clothes or hairstyle, or for being sweet or kind, while boys are often praised for being big, or tough or independent.

For example, you might say to a child:

**“I noticed how kind you were to your friend when she fell down”**

**“You were very helpful with clean-up today - you are such a great helper”**

**“You were such a determined runner on the playground today.”**

*IF YOU HEAR THIS TYPE OF GENDERED PRAISE FROM OTHERS, THINK ABOUT JOINING IN WITH OTHER TYPES OF PRAISE.*



#### RESPECT ALL CHILDREN'S SELF-EXPRESSION AND PERSONAL CHOICES

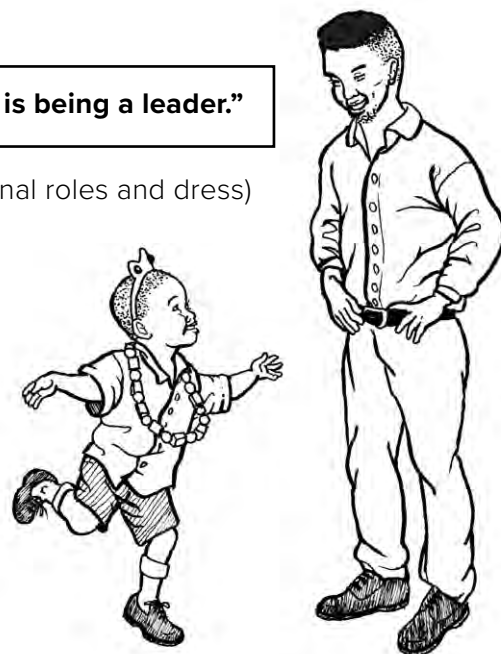
Celebrate children's self-expression and personal choices when they challenge gender stereotypes.

Point out that **“Thabo is being kind”** or that **“Vuyo is being a leader.”**

Accept children's gender exploration (e.g. non-traditional roles and dress)

**“That looks great! If you like it and it makes you feel good, that's what matters”**

Respect children's descriptions of themselves, such as **“I'm a boygirl!”** or **“Today, I am going to be the princessboy.”**  
**“You sure are good at that; I wish I could do it as well as you do”**



*THIS GIVES NON-CONFORMING LEARNERS A SIGNAL THAT THEY ARE VALUED AND ACCEPTED.*

## 2 TREAT CHILDREN EQUALLY, REGARDLESS OF THEIR SEX



Treating children equally will set a good example that will positively influence their behaviour towards other children.



### GIVE EQUAL AND SIMILAR ATTENTION TO CHILDREN OF DIFFERENT SEXES

Ensure all children are equally talked to or asked to talk. Some shyer children are easily overlooked. Make sure that everyone has a turn.

Try to slow down and not pick the first or second person who raises their hand. Add more wait time and think time to encourage diverse participation.

Another way to encourage diverse participation is to enforce a **“three then me”** rule: **“If you’ve already shared, you have to wait for three more people to share before you share again.”**

This also creates space for more reserved children to contribute.

Reflect on your behaviour when interacting with different children:

- **Do you consistently kneel to be at the same level as the child regardless of their sex?**
- **Do you divide classroom chores and tasks equally?**

Distribute classroom tasks equally among children regardless of their sex (for instance, asking all learners to carry things, wipe down the tables, help serve snacks, tidy up the classroom).

Treat children of different sexes with the same gentleness or firmness in similar situations (for instance, when a boy cries, or when a girl shows anger).



### 3 USE LANGUAGE THAT SUPPORTS GENDER DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY



There is no need for you to have separate activities for boys and girls. Rather, encourage mixed-sex groups and interaction during different activities.

*It is critically important that children are respected and accepted for who they are. This will help them feel they belong.*



#### USE GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

- Make efforts to avoid binary words so as not to exclude anyone:  
**“Good morning, everyone”** instead of **“Good morning, boys and girls.”**  
**“People, learners, children, kids, they, them”** instead of **“Boys, girls, he and she”**  
**“All children can”** instead of **“boys can, girls can’t”**
- Use children’s names when giving positive or negative feedback:  
Rather than saying **“Boys, stop quarrelling”** use their names:  
**“Tendai and Musa, stop quarrelling.”**
- Thoughtful and gender-neutral language such as **“they”** and **“them”** lets children know that we cannot assume someone’s gender identity just by looking at them.

*THIS HELPS ALL CHILDREN FEEL INCLUDED, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THEY IDENTIFY WITH A PARTICULAR GENDER.*

*Upon first meeting someone, we typically look for visual cues regarding the sex of that person and then use binary pronouns to refer to them. Growing up, many of us were taught that if you were identifying a single person by a pronoun, you had to use "he" or "she." "They" was only for groups of people. Those rules have changed, and "they" or "them" is now a non-binary way to address someone.*

**Invite children (early in the year) to share how they would like to be addressed.** You can ask questions such as “what is your name?” and “what do you like to be called?” Before you ask children to share, explain that you want to make sure you are referring to everyone by their correct name and pronoun, which you can’t assume based on appearance. Model this approach by sharing your name and pronoun. Be sure to reinforce that it is okay if anyone chooses not to share.

*By asking learners from a young age for their preferred name and pronoun, teachers can make room for children who may be exploring their gender identity and demonstrate that gender identity should not be assumed.*



#### TALK ABOUT THE GENDER DIVERSITY OF ALL PEOPLE

- When you find it necessary to reference sex or gender, Say things like **“all sexes”** or **“children of different sexes”** or **“boys, girls, both or neither”**
- Introduce language and categories that is not all or nothing such as **“sometimes, but not always”**, or **“more common and less common”**
- Use children’s references to stereotypical ideas about gender as a teachable moment about the incredible variations of gender that exist.



**“THERE ARE LOTS OF WAYS TO BE BOYS OR GIRLS OR SOMETHING ELSE. ISN'T THAT GREAT?!”**

**“ALL CHILDREN HAVE DIFFERENT THINGS THAT THEY ARE GOOD AT”**

**“TOYS ARE TOYS, COLOURS ARE COLOURS AND CLOTHES ARE CLOTHES – EVERYONE CAN PLAY WITH ANY OF THE TOYS IN OUR CLASS”**



### **ACKNOWLEDGE AND SUPPORT BODY DIVERSITY AS A HEALTHY MANIFESTATION OF HUMAN DIVERSITY**

The school environment tends to perpetuate the belief that only two sexes exist. In addition, by treating intersex traits as birth defects or disorders, the belief that intersex people need to be “fixed” is reinforced.

Affirming body diversity is crucial for the wellbeing, self-esteem and development of intersex children.

#### **HOW TO SUPPORT BODY AND SEX DIVERSITY FOR YOUNG CHILDREN:**

- Discuss with young children the variations of both sex and gender
- Acknowledge these variations as healthy manifestations of human diversity
- Allow and support children to use the first name and pronoun of their choice
- Support children to choose which sex-segregated facilities they want to use, or provide a safe and private alternative if they request this
- If sex-segregated activities take place, allow the child to choose which group they would like to join



### **HELP CHILDREN TO REFLECT ON GENDER STEREOTYPES**

When stereotypical statements about gender are made, use questions like:

**“Is that always true?”**

**“Can anyone think of an example that does not fit the pattern?”**

**“Who decided what things are for boys and what things are for girls?”**

**“We get messages that some things are for boys and some things are for girls.**

**But these messages are just some people’s ideas. They may not be right for you.”**

**WHEN CHILDREN ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT GENDER, RESPOND IN A WAY THAT HELPS BREAK DOWN STEREOTYPICAL IDEAS ABOUT GENDER:**



***WHY DOES SHE ALWAYS PLAY WITH THE BOYS?***

- “Those are the games that she likes to play, just as there are different games that you like to play.”
- “She can play with whoever she wants to, just like you.”

***“GIRLS CAN’T DRIVE TRUCKS!”***

- “Is it fair to tell a child what they can or can’t do? I think children can have any interest they want.”
- “When I was growing up, sometimes people made fun of me because I liked to bake. Do people sometimes make fun of you about something you like to do?”

**WHEN YOU HEAR CHILDREN MAKE COMMENTS SIMILAR TO THE ONES BELOW, YOU MIGHT CONSIDER THESE RESPONSES:**

“You’re a girl!” (said in an insulting tone to a child who identifies as a boy)

***“IT’S NOT OKAY TO CALL SOMEONE A ‘GIRL’ TO MAKE THEM FEEL BAD.”***

“Boys are better at sports than girls.”

***“SOME CHILDREN ARE BETTER THAN OTHERS AT SPORTS, IT DOESN’T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THEIR BEING A BOY OR GIRL. ALL CHILDREN HAVE THINGS THAT THEY ARE GOOD AT.”***



## HELP CHILDREN EXPAND THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER



Show children that gender exploration is valued in your classroom:

***“THANDI  
ISN'T A  
REAL GIRL”***

- “Tell me what you think makes someone a real girl, or a real boy. Do you think we get to decide for others? Or do each of us get to decide for ourselves?”
- Thandi knows who she is better than we do. If she says she’s a girl, then I think she’s a girl.

***“BOYS CAN'T  
WEAR  
DRESSES!”***

- “There are lots of different types of clothes. Children should get to wear what feels good to them.”
- “I think clothes are just clothes and each of us gets to decide what we like and don't like.”

***IS THAT  
PERSON A  
BOY OR A GIRL?***

- Well, we don't know just by looking at someone what their gender is or who they are. If we want to know, we would need to ask them. Is there a reason you're asking?
- I don't know - some people feel like they are either a boy or a girl, and there are also children who feel like they're both or they don't really feel like either one. If someone asked you what your gender is or who you are, what would you say?

***WHY DOES  
MUSA ALWAYS  
WANT TO DRESS  
LIKE A GIRL?***

- “There are lots of different ways that children can dress.”
- “Clothes are clothes. Musa likes to wear dresses and finds them comfortable.”

### **GENDER DOESN'T NEED TO BE A DIFFICULT, SERIOUS TOPIC.**

We want to teach children that their experience of gender can be joyful - open to experimentation and play. We want to create space for them to explore and see what feels right for them.

This is a great opportunity for you to learn more about children in your care and let them know they belong, no matter what!

## LEARNER-LEARNER INTERACTIONS:



### FACILITATING INTERACTIONS BETWEEN LEARNERS:

Interactions with other children are important, and interactions during early childhood offer learning experiences that provide the foundations for children's peer relationships as they grow and develop.

When children have the opportunity to play and interact with a variety of children, they will develop skills for interacting effectively and comfortably with children of other sexes and gender identities.

Children will benefit from these social skills later in life as well, since in most settings in a society (school, workplace, church, family and community), they will have to interact and work with people with other sexes and gender identities.

### HELPING CHILDREN TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES AND THEIR EMOTIONS:

There is nothing wrong or abnormal about emotions, however, certain emotions are considered more "acceptable" for children of specific sexes to display (for instance for boys to respond aggressively when angry, or for girls to cry when they are upset).



Researchers have found that, even more than intelligence, your emotional awareness and ability to handle feelings will determine your success and happiness in all walks of life. All learners should know that it is fine to feel a range of emotions and to cry at times. They should be encouraged to express themselves freely and to talk about how they feel. This is an important part of developing children's sense of self care. To achieve this, it is helpful to create a safe and supportive environment for all children, regardless of their sex.

**SUPPORT CHILDREN TO  
EXPRESS THEMSELVES FREELY  
AND ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER**

### HOW?

- 1 HELP CHILDREN TO TREAT ONE ANOTHER WITH RESPECT**
- 2 ENCOURAGE CHILDREN EQUALLY TO EXPRESS EMOTIONS**
- 3 HELP CHILDREN TO DEVELOP EMPATHY AND APPRECIATE DIVERSITY**



## 1 HELP CHILDREN TO TREAT ONE ANOTHER WITH RESPECT



### TAKE A ZERO-TOLERANCE APPROACH TO GENDER-BASED (OR OTHER) TEASING, EXCLUSION, AND BULLYING

- Make one of your class rules 'We are all friends'.  
You can stick this rule, with a picture, up on your wall and refer to it regularly. Introduce the rule by telling a story about teasing, bullying and excluding. The story should make clear to your learners that this behaviour is never fun and that it causes sadness.
- Discourage negative comments and any bullying  
When a child shows behaviour that is different from typical gender roles (perhaps a boy chooses a doll to play with or engages more with girls) try to understand, recognise and support this child and encourage him or her to continue.
- Intervene when children try to restrict each other's play or use biased language  
Remind children that everyone is encouraged to play, explore, and express themselves freely, and that as long as children are not hurting each other, each should be allowed to play with what is most interesting to them.



## 2 ENCOURAGE CHILDREN EQUALLY TO EXPRESS EMOTIONS



### ENCOURAGE ALL CHILDREN EQUALLY TO EXPRESS THEIR EMOTIONS

Every child is different and will respond differently when they feel certain emotions. All children should be encouraged to express a range of emotions, regardless of their sex and associated gender.

- Do not discourage girls from being assertive by telling them they are “behaving like boys”. When girls cry, do not caution them to “stop behaving like girls”
- Put a stop to any negative comments from peers when a child shows emotions or vulnerability.
- Make an ‘emotions chart’ to help children become conscious of the four basic emotions (happy, scared, angry, sad) and to learn which behaviour is acceptable and which is not.



All children need to learn that they can not hurt someone (with words or physically) when they feel angry, for example. As a teacher, you can help each child to find ways in which they express their emotions in a healthy way.



### HELP CHILDREN COPE WITH THEIR EMOTIONS

- Suggest that the child spends some time alone in a quiet corner of the classroom.
- Give the child a task to distract them.
- Ask the child to draw a picture of what they are feeling.
- Once a child has managed to work through their feelings, it is important to talk to them about what happened, especially if their behaviour was disruptive.

### 3 HELP CHILDREN TO DEVELOP EMPATHY AND APPRECIATE DIVERSITY



Empathic skills include the ability to understand and share (appreciate) the feelings of another. Developing these skills helps children learn to care for others and assist them, which counters bullying and aggression.



#### HELP CHILDREN DEVELOP EMPATHIC SKILLS

- Providing opportunities for play and role-taking allows children to practice expressing emotions and putting themselves in someone else's shoes
- Using children's books and stories to promote discussion about emotions and empathy, and knowledge of emotional states and emotional cues
- Facilitate activities and games that focus on the identification and expression of emotions

Role model prosocial behaviour for children – they rely heavily on imitation and social modelling as a learning tool.

You can also use questions to help children develop empathic skills:

**“How do you feel when...”**

**“How do you think he feels about it?”**

**“What do you think she needs from us?”**

**“How do you think they would react if...”**



#### HELP CHILDREN APPRECIATE DIVERSITY

If you respect and praise children for their individuality, you can set a good example that will positively influence children's behaviour towards others.

Give children opportunities to share interesting facts about themselves, their families, their passions and talents. Show children how to appreciate and celebrate differences:

**“That's cool! I never knew that before!”**

**“I like the way you do that.”**

**“Can you tell me more about that?”**

**Seeing you respond to diversity in a consistently supportive, empathetic way will teach children positive attitudes and effective strategies to do the same.**

# INTERACTIONS BEYOND THE CLASSROOM



**The interactions in your classroom extend to the wider school community and to children’s home environments.** Children observe interactions between adults, and what they see and hear influences what children believe about the world and about themselves. Just as children may police gender boundaries, adults may also impose gender stereotypes and expectations on children.

Gender biases may be present in the school organisation and culture as well. Often when there are men in preschool, they are either in leadership positions such as principals, chairs of governing bodies or in stereotypical male roles such as drivers and groundsman. Male teachers might behave in stereotypical ways, such as supervising vigorous games, doing maths and construction projects with children. Furthermore, we often consider that ECD teachers should be female and treat male teachers with suspicion.

**“ECD SERVICES HAVE TO BE SENSITIVE TO THE BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF FAMILIES BUT AT THE SAME TIME MUST MAKE SURE THAT NO CHILD IS TREATED UNFAIRLY BECAUSE OF GENDER”**

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT’S GUIDELINES FOR ECD SERVICES (2005)

You can model behaviours that support gender equality to help other staff members and children’s families understand gender as a spectrum. You can demonstrate how children can be encouraged to express their own gender identity and break away from harmful gender stereotypes. This will have a significant impact on the health and well-being of children, because more flexible gender roles help children develop a broader range of socio-emotional and cognitive skills.

**Given the challenge that many families and communities hold to prevailing harmful gender roles and expectations, teachers can help inform families and communities by modelling an antibias approach and providing information about the effects of gender bias.**

**USE YOUR INTERACTIONS WITH SCHOOL STAFF, PARENTS AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY TO PROMOTE AND ENCOURAGE GENDER EQUALITY**

## HOW?

- 1 PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND MODEL AN ANTI-BIAS APPROACH IN YOUR INTERACTIONS WITH OTHER ADULTS**
- 2 HELP PARENTS TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILD’S HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT**



**1 PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND MODEL AN ANTI-BIAS APPROACH IN YOUR INTERACTIONS WITH OTHER ADULTS**

- Respectfully address norms and beliefs that reinforce gender stereotypes.
- Raise awareness of the persistence of gender stereotyping in school systems and how this affects learners and the community at large. Use occasions like school open days and parent meetings.
- Recognize that this may feel uncomfortable for some teachers, school staff, parents or community members. Be ready to answer their questions and respond to their concerns.
- Think about how stereotypes or biases can be addressed in your interactions with staff or parents. The tips provided on pages 35-38 are not only applicable when interacting with children. The same principles apply when engaging with adults.

Identify common goals for how learning environments should be for all children:

- Safety is something I think we can agree is important for every child here
- Kindness and respect are two values that we help every child learn and demonstrate
- Creating a more positive learning environment helps every child be more successful



## 2 HELP PARENTS TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILD'S HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT



### HELP PARENTS UNDERSTAND HOW GENDER STEREOTYPES NEGATIVELY AFFECT CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND WHAT THEY ARE ABLE TO ACHIEVE

Children learn and develop optimally when:

- they participate in a variety of learning and play activities
- their teachers make them feel safe and supported
- they receive encouragement to try different things and interact with others (happy, scared, angry, sad) and to learn which behaviour is acceptable and which is not.

Discuss with parents how traditional ideas about gender roles may prevent children from engaging in certain activities, play behaviour or taking on different roles in group settings.

That is one reason why children should be exposed and encouraged to a variety of play and interactions with peers, regardless of their sex.



### MAKE YOUR GENDER RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY CLEAR TO PARENTS AND HIGHLIGHT HOW THIS BENEFITS THEIR CHILDREN

*"As your child's teacher I want to influence how children will think of themselves and what they'll be able to do with their lives as adults. I don't want gender stereotypes to stand in their way from achieving their dreams and potential."*

*THIS HELPS ADDRESS THE GENDER STEREOTYPE THAT CAREGIVING AND PLAY WITH CHILDREN ARE PREDOMINANTLY FEMALE ROLES.*



### MAKE CONSCIOUS EFFORTS TO INVOLVE MALE CAREGIVERS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR CHILDREN, WHERE POSSIBLE.

*Raise awareness that male caregivers' contribution to learning through play adds value to the development of their children. Be conscious that many male caregivers need to check with a primary caregiver to schedule time with their child. It is therefore also important to raise awareness among primary caregivers.*



### ADDRESS CONCERNS THAT PARENTS MAY HAVE ABOUT GENDER DIVERSITY

See examples (next page) of questions parents might have, and how you might respond.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT GENDER THAT FAMILY MEMBERS MIGHT ASK YOU:



### WHY SHOULD CHILDREN LEARN ABOUT GENDER IN EDUCATION SETTINGS?

Education settings are places where children are taught to respect one another and to learn to work together regardless of their differences. Learning about gender diversity is part of that work.

Children today are growing up in a world that is increasingly recognising the diversity of gender. However, when children do not conform to the typical cultural gender expectations, they can face opposition from their peers and adults, including teasing, bullying and violence.

**Creating a more tolerant, inclusive, and accepting learning environment teaches all children to recognise and resist stereotypes. It is important to teach children to stand up for others, to resist bullying, and to work together, despite differences.**

### ARE CHILDREN NOT TOO YOUNG TO LEARN ABOUT GENDER?

Children are already learning about it. Messages about gender are everywhere, and children receive very clear messages about the “rules” for boys and girls, as well as the consequences for violating them.

By learning about the diversity of gender, children have an opportunity to explore a greater range of interests, ideas, and activities. For all children, the pressure of “doing gender correctly,” is greatly reduced, creating more space for them to discover new talents and interests.

### DOES A PERSON'S GENDER DETERMINE THEIR SEXUALITY?

*E.g. if a boy likes to wear dresses, does this mean he is sexually attracted to other boys?*

When we discuss gender, we talk about what people like to wear, the activities they engage in, and how they feel about themselves. This is not sexuality. Gender is personal (how we see ourselves), while sexual orientation is interpersonal (who we are physically, emotionally and/or romantically attracted to).

### IF BOYS ACT LIKE GIRLS, AND GIRLS ACT LIKE BOYS, DOES THIS MEAN THEY ARE TRANSGENDER?

Many young children don't conform to the cultural gender expectations. In other words, a male child may not behave in all the ways his society has come to expect of boy children or a female child may not behave in all the ways a society has come to expect of girls. This includes a range of behaviours — such as boys playing with dolls or wearing dresses, or girls who adopt boy's names. This is referred to as gender non-conforming behaviour. **These behaviours are common and do not mean that a child is necessarily transgender.** Only a few gender non-conforming children are transgender children.

## QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK FAMILY MEMBERS THAT CAN HELP THEM SUPPORT THEIR CHILD'S GENDER DEVELOPMENT:



- *WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT YOUR CHILD? WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT YOUR CHILD? WHEN DO YOU SEE YOUR CHILD EXPERIENCING JOY?*
- *IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HOW YOUR CHILD IS THINKING ABOUT GENDER. WHAT WORRIES YOU?*
- *WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR YOUR CHILD—THIS YEAR, NEXT YEAR, AS AN ADULT?*
- *WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CHILD?*
- *WHAT ARE SOME WAYS TO ADDRESS YOUR CONCERNS? WHAT SUPPORT DO YOU NEED? WHAT SUPPORT MAY YOUR CHILD NEED? WHO ELSE COULD BE BROUGHT INTO THIS CONVERSATION?*

These are simply opening questions. Make sure you reflect back the family members' feelings and concerns and ask follow-up questions.

For example, if a family member responds to the second question by saying **"It's just not normal,"** be prepared to dig a little.

You could ask, **"What's your concern about your child not being 'normal'? What worries you about that?"**

If the family member says that they hope their child will be a **"good man,"** find out more: is this desire about maintaining the family's connection to their community, wanting the child to have a family of their own, or something else?

The goal of this series of questions is to elicit family members' concerns and then help them assess the kind of help they need to be the best possible support for their child. By asking the family to think through what they hope for their child, you orient them away from fear and toward a more expansive and caring vision for their child.



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