

Respect Gender Equality in the Early Years

A guide for childcare professionals

<http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/Projects/EarlyYears>

Resources

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

Books and stories

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

Colouring books

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

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

Letterbox Library: www.letterboxlibrary.com

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

Bookbugs: Scottish Book Trust: www.scottishbooktrust.com/babies-early-years

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

www.scottishbooktrust.com/babies-early-years/professionals/packs/pirate

A Mighty Girl: www.amightygirl.com

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

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

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

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

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

Lola at the Library by Anna McQuinn

Age 0-3

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

Peekaboo Morning by Rachel Isadora

Age 0-3

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

The Daddy Book by Todd Parr

Age 0-5

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

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

Age 0-5

Just one of the popular series by Itchy-Coo of engaging colourful books in Scots for younger readers. See www.itchy-coo.com

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

Age 0-5

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

Baby Ruby Bawled by Malaika Rose Stanley

Age 2-7

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

Princess Smartypants by Babette Cole

Age 3-7

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

The Pirate Girl by Cornelia Funke

Age 3-7

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

And Tango Makes Three by Justin Richardson

Age 4-8

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

Bridget's Beret by Tom Lichtenheld

Age 4-8

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

The Name Jar by Yansook Choi

Age 4-8

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

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

Age 5-9

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

And me! By Karen and Lynne Wiley

Age 0-5

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

Films and TV

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Cat Returns most of which are easily available, and are dubbed in English.

Mulan: Disney classic with a female heroine.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Toys

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

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

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

Go Go Sports Dolls: www.gogosportsgirls.com

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

Community Playthings: www.communityplaythings.co.uk

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

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

The Creativity Hub: www.thecreativityhub.com

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

Orchard Toys: www.orchardtoys.com

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

Crafts

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

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

- SES Creative makes various sets including 'eco', clay and painting: www.ses-creative.com/en/

Persona dolls

Persona dolls are used in many childcare settings to encourage children to develop empathy and challenge discrimination and unfairness. You can use them to tell stories, discuss feelings and answer questions and to introduce difference e.g. gender, culture, skin and disability.

More information and ideas about using the dolls in your setting at:

<http://www.persona-doll-training.org/>

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

Clothes

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

www.heimoose.co.uk unisex and brightly coloured clothing; site is divided into separate sections for boys and girls but many items are interchangeable

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

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

www.pigtailpals.com US-based company selling non-stereotyped clothing for girls and boys

Further reading

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

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

Breaking-down stereotypes and engaging fathers in services for children and families, Children in Scotland, 2010:

www.childrenscotland.org.uk/docs/GEDNEWSLETTEROCT2010v4.pdf

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

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

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

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

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

Early years, life chances and equality: a literature review, Paul Johnson and Yulia Kossykh, EHRC, 2008 www.equalityhumanrights.com

Embracing Equality: promoting equality and inclusion in early years, Pre-school Learning Alliance, 2007 www.pre-school.org.uk

Frogs and snails, sugar and spice, Cathy Nutbrown,
www.teachnursery.com/images/uploads/article/gender-stereotyping-in-the-early-years.pdf

Gender Equality: a toolkit for education staff, Scottish Government, 2007:
www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/08/30161011/1

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The XY Factor: addressing gender issues in the early years, Pre-school Learning Alliance, 2011 www.pre-school.org.uk

Your Essential Guide to Inclusive Practice. National Day Nurseries Association, 2009
www.ndna.org.uk/advice-information/publications/inclusive-practice

Websites

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

Children in Scotland: www.childreninScotland.org.uk

Education Scotland: www.educationscotland.gov.uk

Equality and Human Rights Commission: www.equalityhumanrights.com

Gender and Education Association: www.genderandeducation.com

Let Toys Be Toys campaign: www.lettoysbetoys.org.uk

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

National Children's Bureau: www.ncb.org.uk

NUT: www.teachers.org.uk/node/12981

Pink Stinks Campaign: www.pinkstinks.org.uk

See Jane - US campaign to increase and improve the representation of girls in children's media: www.seejane.org