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TIPS FOR TEACHING CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES ABOUT GENDER EQUALITY AND EQUITY

Teaching children to advocate for gender equality and equity is essential for fostering a fair and inclusive future. However, figuring out where to start can be difficult. Therefore, the following practical advice/tips on introducing the concept of gender equality and equity to children, youth and families may be helpful to support DCFS staff on approaching the topic in a safe, informative, and inclusive way.

What is Gender?

Gender is defined as social, cultural, and psychological attributes, roles and behaviors, and identities that societies associate with being a male, female, or outside the traditional binary. It is distinct from biological sex, which refers to physical characteristics such as chromosomes and reproductive anatomy. Gender can encompass a range of identities beyond male and female, and it is shaped by cultural norms, personal experiences, and individual identity.

What Is Gender Equality?

Gender equality refers to the state in which individuals of all gender identities have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. It means that people's rights, responsibilities, and opportunities are not determined by their gender identity.

Gender equality aims to eliminate discrimination and biases based on gender identity, ensuring that everyone has the same access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making power, regardless of their gender identity, including but not limited to those who identify as male, female, or non-binary. (Non-binary is a term used to describe gender identity that does not fit strictly within the traditional categories of "male" or "female." Non-binary is an umbrella term that can encompass a range of gender identities and/or gender expressions, including gender fluid, genderqueer, agender, bigender, and more. Non-binary individuals may express their gender in diverse ways and may use various pronouns, such as they/them, he/him, she/her, and others.)

What is Gender Equity?

Gender equity is the process of being fair to people of all gender identities, including but not limited to males, females and non-binary individuals. To ensure fairness, strategies and measures must often be available to compensate for advantages historically provided to cisgender men. A cisgender man is someone who was assigned male at birth and identifies as a man.

Equity leads to equality.



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Gender-Based Discrimination and Inequality Affects Various Areas of Life Including:

Education: Unequal access to education, gender biases in curriculum, and different expectations for children/youth of differing gender identities can limit opportunities.

Employment: Disparities in hiring practices, pay gaps, limited career advancement opportunities and occupational segregations based on gender.

Healthcare: Differences in the quality of care, access to services, and research that often overlooks specific health needs of people of different genders.

Political Representation: Underrepresentation of certain genders in leadership roles and decision-making bodies, limiting diverse perspectives in governance.

Legal Rights: Discrepancies in laws and their enforcement, including issues related to inheritance, property rights, and protections against gender-based violence.

Economic Opportunities: Barriers to financial independence, entrepreneurship, and access to resources like loans and credit.

Social and Cultural Norms: Gender stereotypes and societal expectations that restrict personal freedoms and reinforce inequality.

Family Life: Unequal distribution of household responsibilities, caregiving roles, and parental leave policies.

Violence and Safety: Gender-based violence, including domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and human trafficking, disproportionately affects certain genders.

Access to Technology: The digital divide where people of certain genders have less access to technology and digital literacy, affecting their ability to participate in the digital economy.

How Children Internalize Gender Stereotypes:

Gender stereotypes are widely held beliefs or expectations about the behaviors or characteristics of certain genders. These stereotypes shape our perceptions of ourselves, influencing the way we interact with people. “Boys don’t wear makeup and girls don’t play football. Girls are fragile and boys do not cry. Boys wear blue and girls wear pink.” These familiar gendered statements and stereotypical gender perceptions are often internalized within us from a young age.

Gender stereotypes like these are typically developed in the family setting when children are of a young age, observed in things like an uneven distribution of housework or different behavioral expectations for children who identify or are identified as boys and children who identify or are identified as girls. These gender stereotypes are also reinforced by various other social factors like the



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representation of cisgender women and cisgender men seen in books, films, and television. Children observe the gender stereotypes they see around them and incorporate them into their own behavior.

Promote Gender Equality in the Home:

Talk to parents and caregivers about how children model the behavior of the people who they observe around them. Leading by example is essential in teaching children about gender equality. If parents and caregivers have a partner, remind them to be mindful of the ways they split up household responsibilities between them. Ask them what messages their behaviors may be sending to children. Encourage parents and caregivers to make a conscious effort to involve their child(ren) in all areas of responsibility in the home regardless of their gender. For example, encourage children who identify as boys to get involved in cleaning and children who identify as girls to help with Do-It-Yourself roles, to combat traditional gender roles for children around the house.

Talk Openly About Gender Equality:

Encourage parents and caregivers to talk about gender equality in day-to-day life. Talk to children about representations of gender they see in the media. Are there any stereotypes that they can identify? How might these stereotypes be damaging? You can also discuss how gender inequality can occur within the home. Ask whether they think the housework is being shared out fairly. Are there any chores that seem like they are just for girls or boys? Why do they think that? Maintaining an on-going discussion about gender inequality with children helps to teach them how to identify inequality in everyday situations. By recognizing gender inequalities, children can also begin to understand and discuss other forms of inequalities, such as racial inequality, economic inequality, disability discrimination, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ+) inequality, religious discrimination, ageism, cultural and ethnic inequality, immigration status, language barriers, and body image and appearance.

Be Mindful of Gendered Language:

Discuss with families that certain language we use is gendered. Certain words we use are more associated with feminine attributes, while other words are more associated with masculine attributes. Avoid using gender-biased expressions, statements or justifications that enforce gender stereotypes. For Example:

- She runs/fights like a girl. (This can suggest that girls are not physically strong.)
- Boys don't cry. (This can suggest that boys are not allowed to show their emotions.)

Being mindful of the language that you use with children is an important part in creating a space in which they can learn about gender equality and gender equity, without reinforcing restrictive gender stereotypes.

Keep Play and Toys Gender Neutral:

Many children toys are associated with gender binaries. Play is an essential role in child development. When teaching children about gender equality, it's important to keep playtime gender neutral. Let children play with whatever age-appropriate toy they want regardless of their biological sex or gender identity.



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Encourage Access to All Activities:

Curtailing specific activities based on a child's gender can have damaging effects on their development, leading to an impaired development of certain skills. Children should be encouraged to partake in any age-appropriate activities they wish, regardless of their biological sex or gender identity, as it is their right.

Seek Out Positive Role Models:

Role models are influential on a child's development. Look for role models that defy gender stereotypes, inspiring children to take a more open approach to not only their own gender, but also the gender expectations of those around them.

Helpful Links / Resources:

LGBTQ+ Children / Non-Minor Dependents:

<https://policy.dcfslacounty.gov/Policy?id=5850&searchText=gender>

Children Aged Birth to Five:

<https://policy.dcfslacounty.gov/Policy?id=6308&searchText=children%20birth%20to%20five>

Healthy attitudes to gender: kids & teens | Raising Children Network:

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/development/toddlers-social-emotional-development/healthy-attitudes-to-gender-children-teens>

Equity vs. Equality: What's the Difference

<https://onlinepublichealth.gwu.edu/resources/equity-vs-equality/>

A Guide to Teaching Children About Gender Equality: [A Guide to Teaching Children About Gender Equality | Compass Fostering](#)

A Guide on Gender Equality for Kids: <https://kidskonnnect.com/articles/gender-equality-for-kids/>

World Atlas of Gender Equality in Education: United Nations: [World atlas of gender equality in education; 2012 \(macfound.org\)](#)

Preventing and Combatting Identity-Based Hate and Violence in LA County:

<https://ceo.lacounty.gov/ardi/combating-hate/>

For More Information: Please contact the DCFS Office of Equity Women and Girls Program.

For Gender Impact Assessment Training please click on the GIA link at:

<https://ewp.lacounty.gov/workplace/>

If you have any questions regarding this release, please email your question to:

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