

# Intentional teaching



These tip sheets are designed to help all professionals who work with young children to promote respect and gender equity in their work.

Supporting children to have respectful and equitable relationships when they are young can help them grow into resilient, caring and well-functioning young people and adults and is a key step towards preventing family violence and all forms of violence against women. This involves nurturing children and helping them learn the skills to acknowledge and accept difference, resolve conflict and solve problems. It is also about challenging gender stereotypes, so children of all genders grow up feeling heard, valued and respected.

## What is intentional teaching?

The [Australian Early Years Learning Framework](#) defines intentional teaching as 'educators being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions'. Being intentional means taking the time to think about and plan what you want to teach and implementing a range of carefully considered strategies.

This is not limited to teaching. It includes every aspect of your role when working with children, including:

- How you set up learning and play environments
- The materials you make available
- How you interact with each child and family
- How you plan
- How you respond to the unexpected

Children learn about gender from the society and culture they live in as society is full of information about gender. Children receive messages such as 'girls like pink', 'boys are good at building things', 'girls should be pretty', 'boys are brave and adventurous', 'girls are passive' and 'boys are leaders' through books, games, toys, movies and other media.

Everyday interactions with family, friends and other important people in a child's life often reinforce these messages. This can influence children's ideas about what different genders are capable of, and limit their experiences and opportunities now and as they grow.

## Using intentional teaching to prevent gender inequity

If a child behaves in a way that undermines the values of respect and gender equity, early childhood professionals need to respond. However, by incorporating respect and gender equity into their intentional teaching practice, professionals can shift the focus towards prevention rather than simply responding when there is a need.

Creating a culture where a wide range of gender roles are accepted within your service is one way of intentionally teaching children about respectful and equitable gender relationships.

Just as society teaches children about gender, your service can demonstrate fair and equitable ways to discuss gender and respond to other's expressions of gender.



## Tips for promoting respect and gender equity through intentional teaching

- Purposefully provide books that depict a range of gender roles and relationships. Choose books with leaders and heroes of all genders who are clever, consultative, quiet or fearful. Select books where characters wear non-stereotypical clothing and perform a range of roles
- Deliberately provide toys and other resources that do not reinforce gender stereotypes. Avoid colour-coding or gendered packaging
- Think about how you position yourself physically. Young children are drawn to adults, so where you are positioned can influence what and who they choose to play with. Set up spaces and materials that encourage children to play with a diverse range of people and materials
- Work together with colleagues and children to intentionally plan how to respond to unfair behaviour or behaviour that reinforces rigid gender roles and stereotypes
- Reflect on how gender plays a role in your interactions with children. Model and act in ways that challenge limiting gender norms, and provide alternatives. Do you mostly talk to girls about their appearance or fairytale princesses? Do you ask boys more about sport or superheroes?

City of Melbourne and DVRCV wish to acknowledge Associate Professor Kylie Smith (University of Melbourne) and the educators and families at City of Melbourne run children's centres, whose work these tip sheets are based on. You can find the other tip sheets in this series at [www.partnersinprevention.org.au](http://www.partnersinprevention.org.au) and [www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/respectandequity](http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/respectandequity)