

# Challenging stereotypes with our children



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We know that stereotypes are everywhere and in our world from the moment we are born, but know that making small changes can make a real difference.

## Did you know?

Modern neuroscientists have identified no decisive, category-defining differences between the brains of men and women<sup>1</sup> and the idea that differences between boys and girls are biological and cannot be changed, has been discredited.<sup>2</sup>

Instead, it should be acknowledged that the relationship between the brain and its world is a constant two-way flow of traffic, and we need to pay as much attention to what is going on outside our heads as well as inside.<sup>3</sup>

## Gender-disguise studies

A review of dozens of gender-disguise studies show adults rating babies' expressions and physical appearances differently based on the sex they believed the babies to be. Adults also tend to choose different toys for each sex, footballs and hammers for babies believed to be boys, dolls and hairbrushes for those they believe to be girls. They also engage with them differently – in a more physical way with boys and more verbal ways with girls.

## And it's not just in play that we see these stereotypes:

- Analysis of the most popular children's books in 2018 showed that male characters dominated and that a child is **seven times** more likely to read a story that has a male villain in it than a female baddie.<sup>4</sup>
- Almost **three times** as many STEM toys were found to be advertised as for boys than girls.<sup>5</sup>
- In toy catalogues, girls were **twelve times** more likely to be shown playing with baby dolls, while boys were **4 times** as likely to be shown playing with cars. Of the children shown with guns and war toys, **97%** were boys.<sup>6</sup>



1. Rippon, G. (2019). The Gendered Brain, Bodley Head: London. 2 & 3. Fine, C. (2011). Delusions of Gender: the real science behind sex differences. 4. Eliot, L. (2009). Pink Brain, Blue Brain: How small differences grow into troublesome gaps - and what we can do about it.. 5. The Institute of Engineering and Technology (2016). 6. Let Toys be Toys (2017); Catalogues review.

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# What can I do to help challenge stereotypes?



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As parents and carers, there are some simple things we can do to help.

- 1 Offer a range of toys, all the colours and options for clothes.
- 2 Make sure that everyone gets involved in all chores (adults and children)
- 3 Swap sex pronouns in books to even out characters
- 4 Use traditional stories to discuss stereotypes with kids – ask:
  - *Is this story fair?*
  - *Who is missing?*
  - *Who would you want to be?*
  - *How would you change the story?*
- 5 Play sport together – all be part of the game (could just be tag)
- 6 Try not to use boys and girls all the time as it emphasises that this is a very important difference
- 7 Swap it to test it–would you also say that to a boy or girl?
- 8 Encourage your children to have a mixed group of friends
- 9 Model behaviour as parents/carers
- 10 Encourage emotional literacy in all children
- 11 Never use ‘girly’ or ‘girl’ as an insult or negative
- 12 Be mindful of the language you use and which behaviour you praise.
- 13 Empower your child to question the stereotypes they see around them
- 14 Show children positive male and female role models

Remember we have all been through the same conditioning and are all in this together. If we can be mindful and aware then once we see, hear, and notice the stereotypes, we can change them and grow a generation of equals.

