



SUPPORTING FAMILIES FOR GENDER- TRANSFORMATIVE PARENTING

Challenging the gender norms and
gender inequalities to create a
more equitable environment for all
children to thrive

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MODULE I

**A boy or a girl
does it really
matter**

I. Introduction



THINK AND REFLECT

Why is it so important for people to know the sex of their child even before the birth?

Is it preferable to have a son or a daughter in the country where you live? Why?

How do you feel about that? Is this important for you?

What are the main sayings in your country or community about boys and girls? Parents of boys and girls?

Who in your childhood were the people talking about what girls/boys should do? What were they saying?

Do you send the same messages to parents and children you are working with?

How did you learn to be a boy/man or a girl/woman? Was it easy? Did you always follow the rules?

From your professional point of view, what has to be changed/transformed to achieve more equity and equality among women, men, girls and boys?

Children have various opportunities and face diverse challenges and realities from birth due to their sex at birth and gender. Together with poverty and geography, gender inequality is one of the critical drivers of adverse child outcomes. For instance, gender-related power imbalances contribute to female mortality at birth and throughout life.

On the other hand, harmful gender norms also affect boys and men by encouraging risk-taking and limiting health-seeking behavior.¹ Consciously or unconsciously, and primarily by following tradition and cultural patterns and adapting to the dominant societal discourse, parents support and transmit gender norms and expressions, even when harmful to their children and themselves.

Parenting exerts the most important and consistent influence on the development and learning of children from birth and beyond. Parenting envelops the who, what, where, when, and why of childrearing.² Thus, children's rights to survive, develop, and thrive can only be fulfilled by supporting and working in partnership with parents/caregivers, family members, and other significant adults, such as professionals and paraprofessionals across roles and sectors.

Parents are unquestionably the world's most influential agents of stability and change in children's lives (Bornstein,



One girl under age 15 is married every seven seconds.



Girls are 3X more likely to be out of school*



Girls are 2X more likely to die from malnutrition*



Girls are 2X more likely to be subjected to sexual violence*



Girls are 2X more likely to get coerced into trafficking*

***Sources: U.N. Foundation; Girls Not Brides**

M.H. 2022, p. 3). Parents transmit socio-cultural heritage to their offspring through modelling, communicating, and behaving. Very often, parenting behaviours reflect goal-directed strategies based on cultural values, customs,

1. USAID. (2020). GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT - 2020 POLICY https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USAID_GenderEquality_Policy_MT_WEB_single_508.pdf

2. Bornstein, M. H. (Ed.). (2022). Parenting: Selected Writings of Marc H. Bornstein. Routledge.



and beliefs.³ Shared values and cultural norms (i.e., how frequently parents believe that other parents in their community use a specific parenting behaviour) are the most commonly cited explanations for the differences in parent-child interactions across cultures.⁴ For example, Lansford and colleagues⁵ showed that the likelihood of parental use of corporal punishment is related to culture-wide belief in the need for such punishment in rearing children properly. In sum, science tells us how family members parent their offspring can be the most significant source of support for them and, under unfortunate circumstances, the most significant source of harm.

Parents/caregivers have a difficult task – they are trying to balance traditional cultural values and dominant societal norms while yearning to create opportunities for their children to develop and thrive regardless of their gender. This usually does not go hand in hand and requires a critical examination of the gendered parenting practices and their values and relationships.

Many professionals and practitioners face the same challenges and, like parents, have to explore their gender stereotypes and gendered behaviours.

The term parent is not limited to biological parents but extends to any guardian or caregiver providing consistent care to children and adolescents. This includes adoptive or foster parents, siblings, grandparents, other relatives and young adolescents, who are also parents. UNICEF (2021)

3. Bornstein, M. H. (2012). Cultural approaches to parenting. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, 12(2-3), 212–221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295192.2012.683359>
4. Lansford, J. E., Chang, L., Dodge, K. A., Malone, P. S., Oburu, P., Palmérus, K., Bacchini, D., Pastorelli, C., Bombi, A. S., Zelli, A., Tapanya, S., Chaudhary, N., Deater-Deckard, K., Manke, B., & Quinn, N. (2005). Physical discipline and children's adjustment: cultural normativeness as a moderator. *Child Development*, 76(6), 1234–1246. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2005.00847.x>
5. Lansford, J. E., Godwin, J., Uribe Tirado, L. M., Zelli, A., Al-Hassan, S. M., Bacchini, D., Bombi, A. S., Bornstein, M. H., Chang, L., Deater-Deckard, K., Di Giunta, L., Dodge, K. A., Malone, P. S., Oburu, P., Pastorelli, C., Skinner, A. T., Sorbring, E., Tapanya, S., & Peña Alampay, L. (2015). Individual, family, and culture level contributions to child physical abuse and neglect: A longitudinal study in nine countries. *Development and Psychopathology*, 27(4 Pt 2), 1417–1428. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S095457941500084X>



KEY MESSAGES – WHY IS THIS MODULE IMPORTANT FOR YOU

- Gender is the system by which society gives meaning to being women and men, girls and boys, based on factors such as influence in decision-making, control of family resources, and assigned roles and responsibilities.⁶
- We live in a gendered world; each society assigns specific roles to different sexes. Gender socialisation is a central and basic part of the complex process of overall socialisation.⁷
- Gender socialisation is based on underlying unequal societal norms, beliefs, and power structures that prioritize one group over another. Valuing men/boys more than women/girls (or other gender identities) leads to discriminatory outcomes.
- In many families, communities, and societies, and right from birth, gender discrimination affects girls disproportionately – and girls' chances to realize their rights and to live a life of dignity. It also impacts boys and increases the risk of toxic masculinity.
- Parents/caregivers are usually the primary, the most potent, and constant agents of socialisation, including gender socialisation.
- Parents carry their baggage of gender stereotypes and suffer tremendous societal pressure to preserve existing norms and power imbalance. They may consciously or unconsciously transfer discriminatory gender norms to their children, and thus hinder their development and wellbeing and limit their life chances. Evidence shows that equitable parenting roles are also positively related to parental wellbeing.
- Parents should be seen as a part of the broader system in which other agents of gender socialisation play important roles (siblings, relatives, peers, teachers, health and social workers, celebrities, religious leaders, etc.), and various media (movies, advertisement, social media) and enterprises.
- What parents/caregivers do with and to their children is coloured by gender either negatively (harmful social norms and behaviours), or positively (liberating children and providing them with choices).



LEARNING OUTCOMES

After this module, you will:

- Be able to explain the influence of gender on opportunities and experiences of children and adults.
- Understand and be able to explain how existing gender norms influence all aspects of child and adolescent rearing.
- Have a better understanding of the content, values, and approaches of gender-transformative parenting and explain its relevance.
- Know more and understand better gender socialisation, gender norms, diversity, and identity.
- Understand better the role of male caregivers (fathers) and learn how to engage them.
- Gain knowledge about gender diverse families.
- Learn about building parenting alliances, and the benefits for children.
- Understand better intergenerational transmission of gender norms.

6. UNICEF & ISSA. Gender Socialisation and Gender Dynamics in Families - the Role of the Home Visitor, https://www.issa.nl/sites/default/files/pdf/Publications/cross%20sectoral/Module%2018_Supporting%20Families%20for%20Nurturing%20Care_Gender.FINAL_.pdf

7. Stockard, Jean & Chafetz, Janet. (2006). Gender Socialisation. 10.1007/0-387-36218-5_11. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226960618_Gender_Socialisation

II. The power of gender: Gender socialisation, norms, and identity

Children learn societal norms from birth and throughout life, understand their value and relevance as part of society, and gradually accept them as their own. This is a process of socialisation. When they are learning and internalizing the rules, norms, and shared beliefs about what girls/women and boys/men should do, think, and feel, this is gender socialisation. At the same time, they are also learning and understanding the consequences of conforming to gender norms and the result of breaking them and choosing different ways of being. Gender socialisation is at the core of overall socialisation because all norms and behaviours (e.g., religious socialisation, school socialisation, etc.) are gender-coloured.⁸

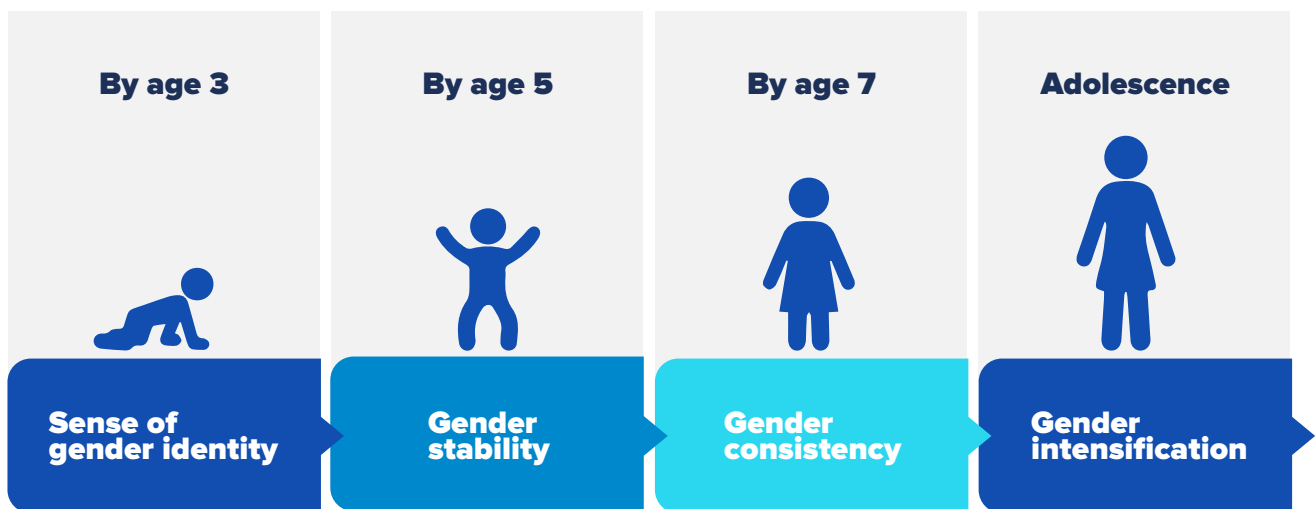
1. Gender socialisation

As shown in Figure 2, gender socialisation is a multi-dimensional and complex process that begins at birth, continues through childhood, and intensifies during adolescence until individuals have internalized traditional gender identities and begun to impart them to future generations. For example, preferences for a boy or girl child can affect the parental/caregiver's interactions with babies right from birth (UNICEF, 2011)⁹.



8. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226960618_Gender_Socialisation

9. UNICEF (2011). Promoting gender equality through UNICEF-supported programming in young child survival and development. Operational Guidance. UNICEF. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/gender/files/Survival_Layout_VWeb.pdf

Figure 1. Gender socialisation begins at birth and intensifies during adolescence

By internalizing societal norms, children also normalize unequal societal norms, beliefs, and power structures that prioritize one group and deny some rights to the less valued group. In the case of gender norms, it is about

valuing men/boys more than women/girls. Still, the exact mechanisms are in place when talking about skin colour, class, ethnicity, race, religion, and ability level.

Both gender norms and gender socialisation do not have to be harmful in their nature; the challenge is their stereotypical content, how they are transmitted, and the discrimination they are causing. The problem is not if girls and boys play with different toys, dress and behave differently, or prefer to spend time with peers of the same gender, even when they do it stereotypical (girls with dolls and boys with balls; pink and blue, etc.). The problem is if they were taught to believe that this is the only way for boys and girls to be who they are expected to be, that they do not have a choice and that all the others who do not conform are deviant. Thus, the traditional gender beliefs and norms play an essential role in (re)producing gender inequalities.

They are also harmful because they restrict the ability of children and adolescents to explore their multiple identities (e.g., for girls being more than a woman or a mother, or beautiful; and for boys being at the same time strong and sensitive) and grow as individuals in their richness.

Additionally, gender norms function as self-fulfilling prophecies. Once girls “learn” that science is not for them, their academic achievements in related topics might be lower. When boys “learn” to solve frustrations through aggression, they will become more aggressive.

In the worst cases, they endanger girls and women’s lives and physical and psychological integrity, dehumanize them, and deny all their rights.

Gender stereotypes are oversimplified and overgeneralized beliefs of what women and men are like and what traits and behaviours are expected of them or considered appropriate. Gender stereotypes are all around us, and they are at the core of prejudices, discrimination, and gender oppression. We may not see them because they are embedded in everything surrounding us, “we breathe them.” They are part of the institutions and practices, normalized (people

usually do not question them), and reflect the imbalance of power between men and women. Both adults and children have them. Gender stereotypes are notoriously sticky because we are often unaware that we hold them, and they can influence impressions, judgments, and behaviours outside of conscious awareness.¹⁰ We usually do things without thinking about why we do them. This is especially notable when it comes to gender.

10. Tiina Likki, PhD in <http://behavioralscientist.org/what-we-learned-by-failing-to-make-work-better-for-female-staff/>



**Watch
the video:**

Girl toys vs boy toys: The experiment - BBC Stories, 2017 (3 min 25 sec) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWu44AqF0il>



THINK AND REFLECT alone or with your colleagues:

- What happened in the video? What did the people do? How did they choose toys for children? How fast did they do it?
- Did they follow the children's lead, or was something else guiding them? What? Why?
- Were they limiting children's choices? Have you ever been denied some opportunities based on your gender?
- Would you do the same? Have you ever done it?
- What else could they do? What would be a gender-transformative approach?

This example shows how others see our gender, personality, and group identity. Based on the clothes, the child was seen as a boy or a girl, and then as a member of social groups – boys or girls – with the assumption that all boys and all girls like to play in the same way, with the same toys, or do the same things. This might look like a benign example, but it is not. This is how the gender journey starts. People

did not have to do what they did. A transformative approach would be to offer a child to choose the toy, ask a child what they like, and even open an exchange, verbal or nonverbal, about why they liked it and are willing to try something else. The effects of negative gender socialisation and gender norms are powerful and long-lasting.



EFFECTS OF GENDER STEREOTYPES AND WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO CHALLENGE THEM¹¹:

- Research shows that gender stereotypes result in girls, by the age of six, avoiding subjects they view as requiring them to be “really, really smart,” which reads across to lower take-up of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects in later life.
- Gender stereotyped expectations result in boys developing lower reading skills leading to them developing lower skills and contributing to the gender achievement gap.
- Children who hold more gender stereotyped views, and whose friends emphasize stereotypes, have poorer wellbeing.
- Using literature which challenges gender stereotypes can help improve self-esteem among boys.
- 36% of seven- to ten-year-old girls say they are made to feel their looks are their most important attribute contributing to dissatisfaction with their bodies which impacts on eating disorders and

suicide attempts, just as expectations around the male breadwinner and ‘stoic’ men contribute to higher male suicide rates.

- There is significant research that finds that challenging gender-stereotyped behaviour in early childhood can reduce violence against women and girls.
- Gender stereotypes can contribute to the abuse and harassment of LGBT young people and adults.
- Gender stereotypes intersect with stereotypes about race to cause harm, from exclusion of Black boys to assumptions about submissiveness of Muslim girls.

By challenging gender stereotypes, we can close the gender gap in STEM; challenge economic inequality; improve boys’ reading scores; tackle the crisis of happiness among children; limit the harms caused by negative body image; tackle the single biggest killer of men under 45 in the UK which is high suicide rates due to gender stereotypical pressures such as being the breadwinner; reduce the harms caused by violence against women and girls, create a better future for LGBT people, and address the combined harm of racism and intersectional inequalities.

2. Intergenerational transmission of gender roles and norms

Recent research in Australia¹² found substantial intergenerational correlations in gender-role attitudes between parents and children. Fathers have the same influence both on boys and girls, while mothers are more influential when it comes to the socialisation of the girls.

Findings of the IMAGES¹³ (International Men and Gender Equality Survey) suggest that if a man with positive, caring attitudes and behaviours is in the home environment, boys are likely to have more gender-equitable attitudes and are less likely to use the violence against a female partner later in life. Moreover, they become more likely to engage in

care work. Girls who grow up in such households become more independent and less subservient to men.

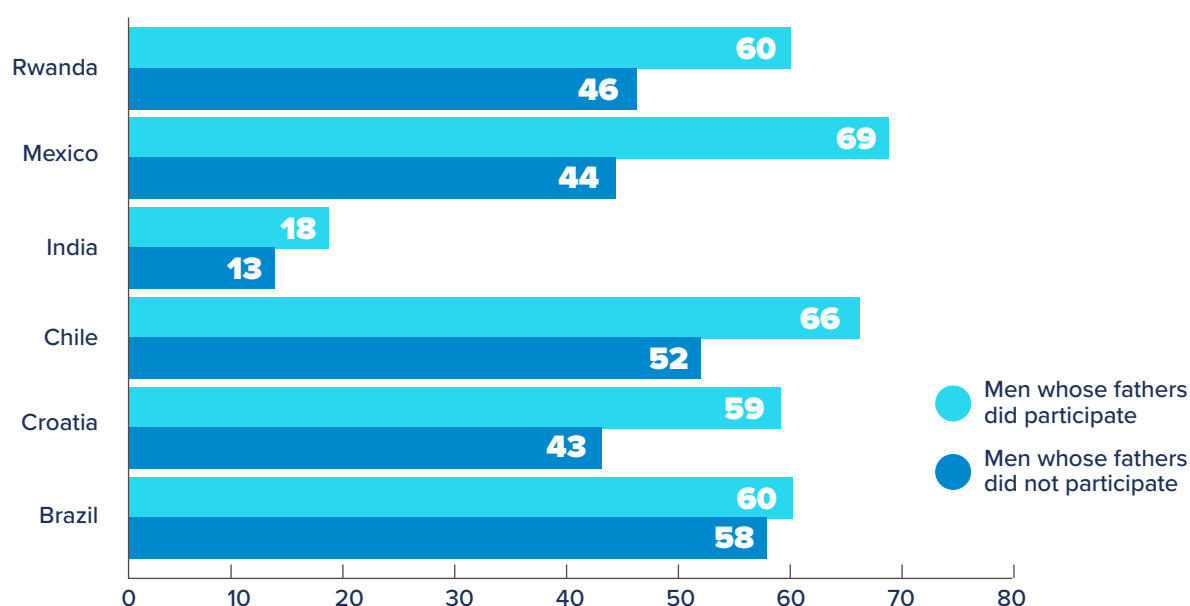
Although much attention has been given to the intergenerational transmission of violence, **“Intergenerational transmission of care” can be a key factor in transforming gender relations and ending gender inequality**, opening a more comprehensive range of future possibilities for both boys and girls. Figure 2 shows that boys who have seen their fathers engage in domestic work and care for children are more likely to be involved in household work and caregiving.¹⁴

11. <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=17fb0c11-f904-469c-a62e-173583d441c8>, pg. 6 and 7

12. Perales, F., Hoffmann, H., King, T., Vidal, S., Baxter, J. 2020. MOTHERS, FATHERS AND THE INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF GENDER-ROLE ATTITUDES, Working Papers Series, No. 2020–05 March 2020. ARK Center for Excellence for Children and Families over the Life Course, Australia

13. Promundo, IMAGES survey: <https://promundoglobal.org/programs/international-men-and-gender-equality-survey-images/>

14. UNICEF & ISSA Supporting Families for Nurturing Care: Resource modules for home visitors. Module 5. Engaging Fathers, pg. 6 – axis x presents the numbers of boys

Figure 2. Role modelling by fathers and caregivers: the impact on their sons

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IS PREVENTABLE: GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE PARENTING MAY PREVENT THE INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF GBV

Gender-based violence refers to harming other persons based on their gender. It is rooted in socially attributed power imbalances between females and males. GBV might be inflicted on others with physical, sexual, mental, or economic violence and the threat of violence, coercion, and deprivation of liberty, whether public or private. Intimate partner violence is the most common form of GBV, showing distressing rates in every country, but other worryingly common forms of GBV are also encountered, such as: sexual violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation, trafficking for sexual exploitation, female infanticide, and 'honor' crimes. Girls and women may also experience gender-based violence when deprived

of nutrition and education.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is the most pervasive yet least visible human rights violation globally. It is not restricted to any region or country, it is an issue that affects women and girls of different social and economic classes to varying degrees. India, Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Yemen, Nigeria, and the United States of America (USA)¹⁵ have been shown to have the highest rates of GBV based on a 2018 poll by Thomas Reuters Foundation.

GBV is more common than what is visible, and it might increase in situations of armed conflict, natural disasters, and emergency contexts. In such conditions, the ability to protect girls and women against GBV is weakened in societies. For example, increase in intimate partner violence, using sexual violence to achieve military aims in war, being forced to trade sex, money, and other resources for survival, and forceful and early marriages as a way

15. <https://standtoendrape.org/top-ten-countries-with-the-highest-gender-based-violence-gbv-rates-in-the-world/>

16. <https://www.unicef.org/protection/gender-based-violence-in-emergencies>

17. https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/Costing_of_Transformative_Results_Chapter_5_-_Cost_of_Ending_Gender-Based_Violence.pdf

of protection.¹⁶

GBV is a crime that also affects children that “undermines the health, dignity, security, and autonomy of its victims”.¹⁷ According to UNICEF, at least 14,200 children between 2005 and 2020 were victims of sexual violence such as rape, forced marriages, and sexual exploitation. This sexual violence disproportionately affects girls, who were 97 percent of cases from 2016 to 2020.¹⁸

Researchers around the globe agree that gender inequality and norms on the acceptability of violence against women are the root causes of violence against women and girls.

There are many risk factors for GBV, but here we want to stress those which contribute to the intergenerational perpetuation of GBV, such as a history of exposure to child maltreatment

(perpetration and experience); witnessing family violence (perpetration and experience); community norms that privilege or ascribe higher status to men and lower status to women; marital discord and dissatisfaction; difficulties in communication between partners.

Frontline workers have the power to make a change by naming, addressing, and challenging all these factors and, introducing alternative practices, and transforming norms at the core of gender-transformative parenting, which fosters nonviolent conflict resolution, positive discipline, mutual respect, and parenting alliances.

You can find additional information on Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018, global and per region here: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240022256>



Watch the video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2OcKQ_mbiQ&list=PL1xOJ-u3MzulAmz6Tn--s73kVOgbRNGB0&index=23&ab_channel=Fanpage.it

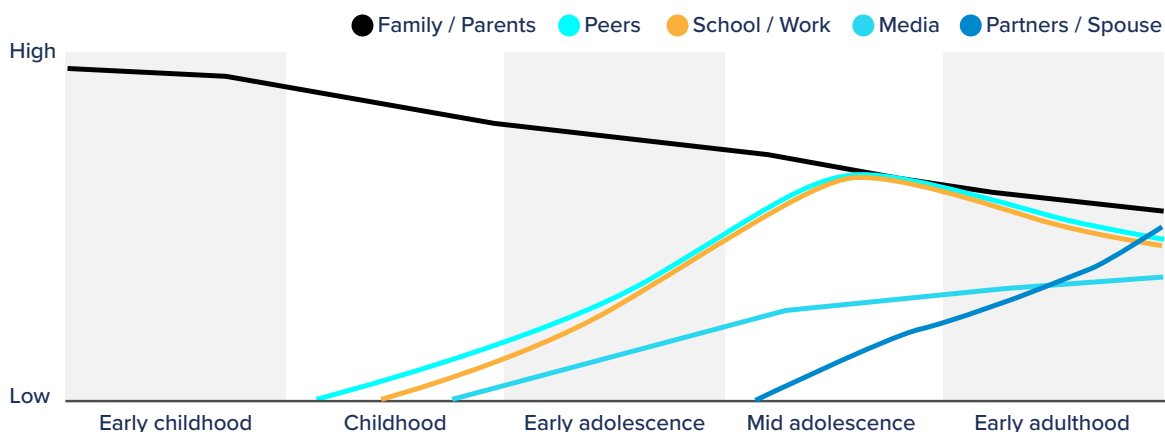
- How did these boys learn that hitting girls is not acceptable?
- What do you think about touching her without consent?
- Discuss reasons why they do not want to hit the girl – some are very gendered (“she is a girl” etc.)
- The gender transformative approach is reflected in not hitting a girl because it is not acceptable to hit anyone.

3. Agents of Gender Socialisation

Multiple ‘agents of gender socialisation’ influence children throughout their lives. They might include caregivers – parents, siblings, grandparents, other relatives, or non-related caregivers – peers, teachers, religious leaders, celebrities, and institutions such as schools, places of

worship, and media. However, parents and family are the most influential and constant agents of socialisation, even when the nature of the parent-child bond changes and the level of parental influence gradually declines as a child grows. (see Figure 2)¹⁹.

Figure 3. The main influences on gender socialisation over the life course



18. <https://www.unicef.org/protection/gender-based-violence-in-emergencies>

19. UNICEF and ICRW, 2017. Gender socialisation during adolescence in low and middle income countries: conceptualization, influences and outcomes, Innocenti Discussion Paper.

Parental socialisation also influences the interactions and socialisation between siblings. The experiences in childhood with siblings have long-term effects throughout life; the sex composition of siblings in households can have a direct impact on gender socialisation and an indirect impact through parental socialisation.

Having older siblings from the other sex might reduce the effect of gender stereotyping, for example, by leading the older sibling from the other sex. This can occur even though parents/caregivers show gender-stereotyped interactions. However, at the same time, the number of siblings and their composition is found to be influential in having increased gender-stereotyped attitudes and behaviors. For example, having many sisters might increase conservative attitudes of boys and men later in life in terms of gender.

Parents and caregivers play an essential role in having an egalitarian approach and mitigating such effects. For example, in general, daughters are expected to engage in household chores, which was found to be higher in the presence of other sex siblings. Moreover, families might have son preferences in many parts of the world; families tend to have more children when the first and second-born are of the same sex. These examples also show that parental gender socialisation can be affected mainly by deeply rooted social norms.²⁰



Watch
the video:

The effects of sexism on children. Reactions to female discrimination (Fanpage.it, 2019)



Would you like to live in a world like this? What do we have to do? What can you do alone, and who can also help you? This example also shows that children learn gender norms and accept inequalities. Building alliances between boys and girls, men and women are important,

and men need to be taught to speak out and flag unacceptable practices.

You can also watch the following video: **This Is How Children Responded to Questions about Gender Equality** (World Economic Forum, 2017)



It is often forgotten that children and adolescents also have agency and are not passive receivers of values and norms transmitted to them. The socialisation process, including gender socialisation, results from continuous interaction between the child and the world around them. The quality of these interactions represents the basis for the change that we are aiming for not aiming

to. They also form their own opinion, have their values, and are ready to speak out and stand up for themselves and others.

What do you advise parents when their children do not want to follow the norms?

20. Adapted from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/it-s-man-s-and-woman-s-world/201410/sibling-sex-and-gender-inequality>



4. What is gender identity and how diverse is it?

At birth we are assigned a **certain biological** sex and as we grow up we develop a **gender identity** which is defined as the way how person identifies as being a man, woman, transgender or third gender person. Unlike gender expression, gender identity is not visible to others. (UNESCO) Gender is mainly a social construct: it shows variations within and between societies and over time.

Gender is expressed in actions, self-presentation, and communication, but it is susceptible to influence in the culture that the individual is exposed to.

Gender diversity refers to the relationships between assigned biological sex and gender expression that leads to developing diverse but unique gender identities. If the child's gender identity is male and it matches the biological sex at birth as male. However, this might not be the case for all individuals, and it is completely normal. For example, children and teenagers can be:

- **Transgender:** Biological sex assigned at birth is different from the child's gender identity.
- **Non-binary:** Gender identity is a blend of—or something other than—male and female.
- **Gender fluid:** Moving between gender identities over time.
- **Agender:** Not identifying with any gender, not questioning their gender.

Individuals might feel stressed when their gender identity differs from their assigned biological sex or their gender expression do not match the expectations and values of society. This is called 'gender dysphoria.'



WHAT CAN PARENTS DO TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN'S GENDER IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT?

- Gender awareness and gender identity begins to develop beginning from very early ages. Parents can be attentive not to assign gender identities onto children and provide an accepting environment for their children to express themselves.
- Model and challenge gender stereotypes themselves through gender balanced parenting.
- For example, mothers can engage in outdoor activities, father can engage in cooking.
- Be informed that children discover and experiment with their identity over time, might want to express themselves in non-stereotypical ways (e.g. boys want to wear dresses etc.) and this is a normal part of development.
- Especially with older children in the period of puberty, stay informed about sexual and reproductive health, develop an open communication for adolescents to express their gender identity freely.
- Gender dysphoria might lead to anxiety, depression, or self-harm among young people. Make sure to show love and affection, keep an open mind to provide an understanding environment for your children at home as well as in your community.



WHAT CAN PROFESSIONALS DO TO SUPPORT PARENTS?

- Professionals and practitioners can help parents to understand the process of gender identity development but also empathize with their challenges and struggles as families go through a transition themselves too.
- Practitioners can support parents by acknowledging their concerns and fears and provide accurate information about health development of their child.

Additional resource: What do today's adolescents think and feel about gender identity and expression?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TShvPSFExro&ab_channel=SheKnows (She Knows, 2019)



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III. Traditional vs. gender-transformative parenting

1. Parenting

1.1. How do we define parenting?

Parenting includes interactions, behaviours, emotions, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and practices associated with providing nurturing care to children²¹. Parenting is a process of promoting and supporting the development and wellbeing of the child. It is a trusted and abiding task of parents to prepare children, as they develop, for the physical, psychosocial, and economic conditions in which they live, work, play, learn and thrive.²²

1.2. What does it mean to be a responsive parent?

Responsiveness is the dimension of parenting characterized by serve-and-return interactions, connecting with and responding to children emotionally and cognitively. Responsive relationships early in life are the most critical factor in building sturdy brain architecture²³. A stable, solid and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or another adult also contributes to building confidence, self-regulation, and resilience in children, the

ability to overcome serious hardship and challenges.²⁴ Responsive caregiving acknowledges that every child has unique needs and preferences and that children learn best through social interactions with trusted adults.

Children and adolescents feel and see that they are important, their needs are acknowledged, and their uniqueness is respected. If parents/caregivers are attuned and respond consistently, the child feels safe, supported, and free to be who they are.

Parental responsiveness can be described as a three-step process²⁵

Observation:
The parent/caregiver observes the child's signals

Interpretation:
The parent/caregiver interprets these signals, or asks clarifying questions

Action:
The parent/caregiver acts swiftly, consistently and efficiently to meet the child's needs

21. WHO, UNICEF, World Bank, 2018: Nurturing care for early childhood development. <https://nurturing-care.org/>

22. https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/16436/file/Gender_Responsive_Parenting.pdf

23. Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2021). Three Principles to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families, 2021 Update. <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>

24. Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. Resilience. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/resilience/>

25. Adapted from: Eshel, N., Daelmans, B., Mello, M. C. D., & Martines, J. (2006). Responsive parenting: interventions and outcomes. Bulletin of the World Health Organization, 84, 991-998. https://www.scielo.org/article/ssm/content/raw/?resource_ssm_path=/media/assets/bwwho/v84n12/v84n12a16.pdf

Responsive parenting also has two intertwined elements. The first element is sensitivity to children's needs and emotions. By helping children meet their needs and offering emotional support and coaching, caregivers help children develop a secure attachment and promote their wellbeing. The second element is stimulating or responsiveness to children's interests and abilities. During responsive interactions, caregivers follow their child's lead: they observe what children are interested in, look at and think about, and then use conversation or actions to advance their learning.

Maximal learning occurs when children are challenged at a level just beyond their comfort zone and are supported by a competent parent/ caregiver.

socialize them, and those decisions are made based on sex.

A body of research²⁶ shows that most parents do not use drastically different broad parenting styles with sons and daughters (authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and uninvolved).

However, specific parenting practices vary more based on the parents' and societal expectations of girls and boys. Such gender-differential practices include (Figure 5.):

- Direct messages: explicit and implicit messages about gender to the child
- Indirect messages: reactions and comments about or to the others who do or do not follow the gender norms.

2. Gender traditional parenting

Gender traditional/gendered parenting refers to parental messages and behaviours that communicate traditional gender norms and information about how girls and boys are supposed to behave. From the moment parents/caregivers learn the sex of their baby, they form expectations from the child and start making decisions about how they will

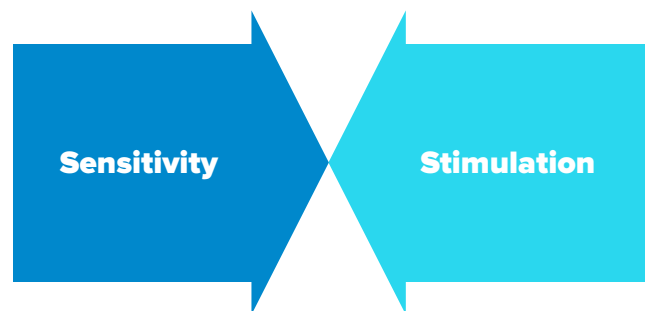
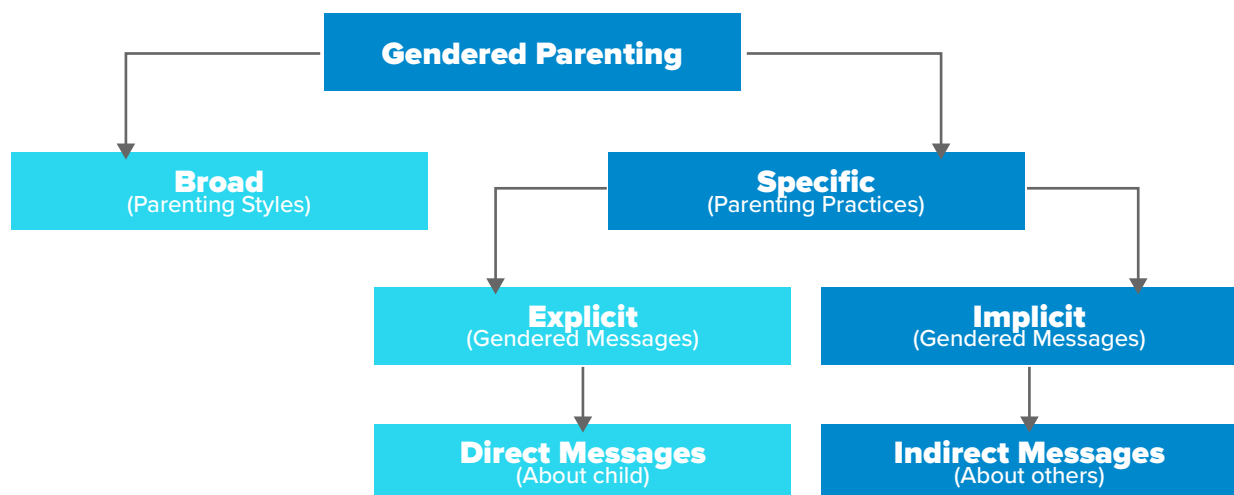


Figure 4. Gendered parenting



Source: Mesman, J., Groeneveld. G., 2017

26. Mesman, J., Groeneveld. G., 2017. Gendered Parenting in Early Childhood: Subtle But Unmistakable if You Know Where to Look, Volume 12, Issue 1, March 2018, Pages 22-27, Available at: <https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/cdep.12250>

Today, many parents will say that they do not have gender stereotypes and are OK with their boys and girls getting involved in whatever activities they want. Still, their behaviours and implicit messages do not align with this.

For example, parents might say that they do not mind what their children want to wear but keep on mainly buying pink or blue items, or they encourage children to get engaged in different activities but still praise their girls more for being so good in art and boys so skilful in climbing trees. Moreover, many parents praise girls for doing traditionally masculine activities like sports but are less comfortable with boys playing with dolls or “house.” In many cases, parents are not even aware of what they are doing. In many cases, implicit messages are more powerful than explicit ones. They can also confuse the child and make gender socialisation very challenging.

Indirect gender messaging manifests in two ways: **through differentially evaluating and labelling stereotypical and non-stereotypical behaviours and modelling.** For example, when reading books to children, parents tend to interpret images of sad children as girls.²⁷

How parents model gender roles have a significant impact on how children learn what gender norms are. For example, how parents share household tasks sends a strong message to children on what is expected from women and men. Or if fathers/male caregivers participate in care for children but say that they are “helping” mothers sending the message that caring for children is the mother’s job.

In sum, evidence suggests that what parents do, rather than their gender ideology or attitudes, is most impactful in influencing how children form gender role attitudes.²⁸ Children tend to believe more in what they see.

Indisputably, there are countries, regions, and communities where gendered parenting is the only recognized way of socializing children. The gender norms are so powerful that it is difficult or even dangerous to challenge them. In these places, explicit messages are as influential and present as implicit ones.



THINK AND REFLECT

Are your explicit and implicit messages on gender socialisation aligned when working with parents? What do you say about those who do not follow the gender norms?

- Do you advise parents to support their children to pick any activity they like, and at the same time tell them that boys need more physical activities because they are full of energy? Or tell them they should rethink involving their daughter in boxing because she might get hurt?
- Do you state that you want both parents to engage in care for the child and advise the mother on what to do if the child gets sick?
- What would be a gender transformative approach?

Professionals have to walk the talk, model equity, and equality, and be aware of what messages they send to parents.

Look at the list of messages and behaviours and mark as True those which are gender-transformative:

- When addressing girls, I use words such as sweetie, princess, beauty, and I address boys using lad, champ, pal...
- When I address children, I use their names.
- When children cry during vaccination, I comfort girls, tell boys that they should not cry, and act like girls.
- When my female colleague gets frustrated when meeting young girls married to older men, I believe that the reason for that is that she gets emotional quickly because she is a woman.
- During the divorce process, I am always supporting mothers, and I am not interested in the father’s side of the story.

Continue the list with your examples. Share with your colleagues and discuss what you can do differently and what you are already doing that is gender transformative.

27. Mesman, J., Groeneveld, G., 2017. Gendered Parenting in Early Childhood: Subtle But Unmistakable if You Know Where to Look, Volume 12, Issue 1, March 2018, Pages 22-27, Available at: <https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/cdep.12250>

28. https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/glo-early_childhood_development_annotated_bibliography-final-io-eng-jul18.pdf

Raising boys and girls – is it really so different?



SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE - TRUE/FALSE STATEMENTS

Are the following statements True or False:

1. There are significant differences between brains and of the boys and the girls. T/F
2. If you are too affectionate with boys they will become weak and incompetent. T/F
3. Mothers have higher expectations from their male infants when it comes to gross motor skills. T/F indent is off
4. Children (boys and girls both) who develop more flexible gender identities are better prepared to cope with life stress throughout childhood and into adulthood than are peers who develop more rigid, pure-feminine or pure-masculine gender identities. T/F indent is off

ANSWERS

1. False. According to the newest research (Rippon, 2020)²⁹ there are no significant differences based on sex alone between male and female brains. Differences are subtle, and a product of both nature and nurture. Believing that there are two different brains may be harmful because it could be used to justify why “girls are so caring, and not for science” and boys “born for science.” The differences between boys and girls are primarily the result of gendered socialisation. By treating girls and boys differently, by offering them different toys and activities, we are shaping their brain. If you give boys puzzles, and not to girls, boys will be better at puzzles. If you tell boys that men do not show emotions, they will develop less emotional intelligence. As Dr Rippon says: “Our plastic brains are good learners. All we need to do is change the life lessons!”

2. False. Studies show that infants and children who do not receive proper emotional support (no hugging, cuddling, no comforting, encouragement to be men and not cry) experience mental and emotional developmental problems. This might help explain also why many boys reach their developmental milestones later than girls.³⁰ At the same time, parents tend to do everything opposite with the girls (cuddling, talking and cooing at).

3. True. In early childhood parenting based on gender biases influences all spheres of child development, even gross motor development as it was demonstrated in the experiment with infant crawling, when mothers of 11-month-old infants estimated their babies’ crawling ability, crawling attempts, and motor decisions in a novel locomotor task—crawling down steep and shallow slopes. Mothers of girls underestimated their performance (because they believed that girls are not physical) and mothers of boys overestimated their performance (because boys are physical), although when tested in the same slope girls and boys showed identical levels of motor performance.³¹

4. True. A body of research for the idea that children who develop more flexible gender identities are better prepared to cope with life stress throughout childhood and into adulthood than are peers who develop more rigid, pure-feminine or pure-masculine gender identities. This means that they develop a more broad set of skills and gain diverse knowledge. All children have to be raised in equally nurturing environments and treated with treated fairly. They need to learn to be empathetic, compassionate, respectful, self-confident and independent. All children need warm and supportive adults, hugs and bedtime stories. Any kind of aggression (verbal, psychological or physical) need to have serious consequences regardless of gender, and parents should provide children with opportunities to learn alternative ways to solve problems or disputes.

29. Rippon.G. (2020).The Gendered Brain:The new neuroscience that shatters the myth of the female brain, Bodley Head

30. <https://www.everydayhealth.com/kids-health/parenting-boys-vs-girls-how-different-it/#:~:text=Most%20experts%20believe%20that%20girls,is%20the%20result%20of%20hormones.>

31. Mondschein, E.R, Adolph, E.K., and Tamis-LeMonda, C.S. (2000). Gender Bias in Mothers’ Expectations about Infant Crawling. Journal of Experimental Child Psychology 77, 304–316. <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.652.8492&rep=rep1&type=pdf>



THE MAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BOYS AND GIRLS

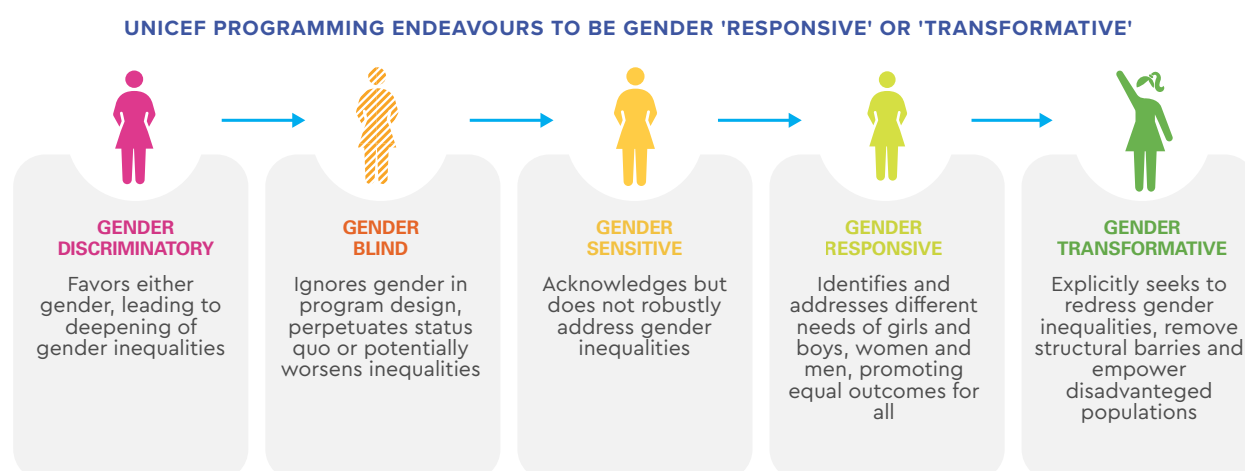
Age	Gendered parenting	Gender transformative parenting	ADOLESCENCE		
			Early	Gendered parenting	Gender transformative parenting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key developmental differences between boys and girls (if applicable) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boys slightly larger than girls Neonatally, survival rates higher among girls than boys In infancy, girls' sensory abilities are stronger: Sight, sound, smell, and touch. Boys catch up in these areas by age three 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boys slightly larger than girls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Girls begin puberty 1-2 years earlier, on average, than boys, and may be larger—on average—for a few years Girls develop reproductive capacity with the onset of menses. Boys begin reproductive capacity with the onset of sperm production—in early puberty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Girls who become pregnant have higher risk of complications than adult women; (and higher than that of boys who contribute to pregnancies) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Girls who become pregnant have higher risk of complications than adult women; (and higher than that of boys who contribute to pregnancies)

3. Gender-transformative parenting

and structural root causes of gender inequality to achieve long-lasting change (see Figure 6). Doing so ensures the protection of children's rights and healthy development and promotes equitable outcomes for all children to trigger structural change.

UNICEF's gender-transformative approach detects social

Figure 5. Gender Integration Continuum



Source: Adapted from World Health Organization (2011). Gender Mainstreaming Manual for Health Managers: A Practical Approach <https://www.who.int/publications/item/9789241501057>

32. <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/1380-are-there-any-differences-in-the-development-of-boys-and-girls-brains>



Thereby, UNICEF recognizes and accepts the following definition of a gender-transformative approach³³:

“A transformative approach promotes gender equality by:

- fostering critical examination of inequalities and gender roles, norms, and dynamics
- recognizing and strengthening positive norms that support equality and an enabling environment
- promoting the relative position of women, girls, and marginalized groups
- and transforming the underlying social structures, policies, systems, and broadly held social norms that perpetuate and legitimize gender inequalities.³⁴”

On that note, we see gender-transformative parenting as a parenting approach that applies gender equity (fairness), equality (equal outcomes), and inclusion in a responsive, respectful and thoughtful way through daily interactions, behaviours, emotions, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and practices. The gender-transformative parenting promotes positive gender norms and socialisation to transform

Gender-transformative parenting is parenting that infuses key normative principles such as gender equality and inclusion and promotes positive gender norms and socialization to transform power structures in future generations.

imbalanced power structures in families (and future generations). The core of this type of parenting is critical reflection and readiness for change.

Gender-transformative parenting seeks to generate non-discriminatory gender norms amongst parents, and parents constantly strive to educate themselves about their own gender biases. Parents are also aware of the different external forces (such as media/social media, social pressure coming from peers and community, etc.) that influence a child's gender norms and seek to support children and change this. Gender-transformative parenting aims for all children and families to have high wellbeing, caring for and respecting each other and their world. Parents acknowledge the child's agency and follow their lead.



**Watch
the video:**

Daisy, age 8, questions why retailers think only boys want adventure (2.36 min) (Lolly & Doodle with Bells on, 2016)

Listen carefully to what Daisy is saying and why she is annoyed.

Listen carefully to what the mother is asking and how she is reflecting and answering Daisy's questions.

33. Being Intentional about gender-transformative strategies. Reflections and lessons for UNICEF's Gender Policy and action Plan (2022-2025). A compendium of papers.

34. Interagency Gender Working Group. 2017. The Gender Integration Continuum. Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau.



WRITE DOWN WHY THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE PARENTING.

Possible justification: This is an example of gender-responsive parenting because:

- **Observation:** The mother carefully observes what Daisy is doing and listens to what she says while picking the clothes.
- **Interpretation:** She sees that Daisy is aware of gender discrimination and that she is angry. She is checking with Daisy by asking her if she feels annoyed. In this way, she is showing empathy, and at the same time, she is helping Daisy identify her feelings.
- **Action:** The mother supports and praises Daisy and asks her if she wants to choose the clothes from boys' hangers – giving her permission to step out of the traditional gender role.

- **Sensitivity:** At the same time, the mother shows sensitivity and understanding for Daisy's emotions and needs.
- **Transformation:** She stimulates Daisy to go beyond her comfort zone, challenge and transform existing situations by picking clothes she likes, and putting "boys" clothes where the "girls" clothes should be.
- Daisy feels safe and supported by a trustable and reliable adult during the whole process.

How would you react in a similar situation?

Would it be different if Daisy was a boy asking why boys aren't expected to be pretty or fabulous, or who wanted to purchase the "girls" shirt?

Interestingly, in most countries, it is less acceptable for boys to dress and play like girls than for girls to dress and play like boys. It seems that parents and society are harsher towards boys when they are not masculine enough according to the prevailing gender norms. This disparity

highlights the higher value placed on men and "masculine" behaviours than women and "feminine" behaviours. It often goes unexamined, even by people with more equitable beliefs about gender.



Watch the video:

Why Shouldn't Our Sons Wear Dresses? (Truly, 2016) (3.57 min) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JkLqhpNPRQE>

Please discuss with colleagues or parents you are working with the choice these parents made and why it is a problem when boys want to be more androgynous and feminine. What would you say to the parents from the video?

4. Gender socialisation – differences between gendered and gender-transformative parenting

The main pathways of gender socialisation are active teaching; speech, actions, behaviours, practices; modelling behaviours, and gender-based practices at home.

The table below shows examples of these pathways in traditional gendered parenting and gender-transformative parenting. When you look at this table remember the part on direct and indirect messages and gendered parenting.

35. https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/16436/file/Gender_Responsive_Parenting.pdf

The main pathways of gender socialisation	Gendered parenting	Gender transformative parenting
Active teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telling children what to do or not to do based on a stereotypical understanding of the gender roles e.g., telling boys that they cannot cry; making girls (but not boys) take on caregiving and domestic tasks at home. • Insist on obedience and accepting what authority is saying. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to children with empathy and understanding. • Being sensitive to children's needs – assessing how comfortable they are in their gender role. • Offering different opportunities and supporting a child to explore various activities and roles. • Fostering critical thinking and actively addressing gender biases in children, media, community, and society. • Praising children not only for gender-typical behaviours. • Challenging children to step out of their comfort zone to meet their needs.
Modelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only female caregivers are engaged in unpaid care work, while male caregivers are engaged in paid employment. • Male caregivers do not share any home and care responsibility. • Male caregivers do not engage in any so-called “feminine” activity – play with children only when they want, do not know how to express feelings, do not show emotions towards partner and/or children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share with a partner all domestic and child-rearing responsibilities. • Male and female caregivers freely express emotions, empathy, and compassion. • Support partners and children in pursuing their dreams respectfully and with sensitivity.
Speech, actions, behaviours, practices (whether deliberate or otherwise)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering girls and boys only one type of toys labelled as girl's and boy's toys (e.g., dolls, art for girls, and puzzles and guns for boys). • Praising girls for being caring and taking care of how they look. Praising boys for being clever and strong. • Telling girls that they should not be neurosurgeons because they are too gentle and sensitive. • Playing rough-and-tumble play with only boys because they are strong, and girls might get hurt. • Making rude jokes about women and men who are not “tough and strong.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking with children and listening to children. • Respecting a child's choice of toys, play, and professions whether or not they fit in stereotypical gender roles. • Offering children other options and encouraging them to try. • Telling children that they can make their choices regardless of what other people say. • Treating everybody with respect.

Gender-based practices at home

- Harmful gender-based practices at home.
- Treat partner (primarily women) with verbal, psychological, and physical aggression – Gender-based violence.
- Overcontrolling female family members – restricting their mobility, restrictions on female mobility;
- Stigmatization of menstruation as ‘im-pure’ or ‘taboo.’
- Using harsh and punitive discipline, including physical punishment, especially with boys.
- Disputes and conflicts are resolved peacefully and constructively.
- Mutual respect is present in the family.
- Children are allowed to have a say and make choices according to their age and capabilities.
- There are no punishments, just logical consequences of the choices made, and these rules apply to all family members (e.g., if the family rules are broken, individuals have to take responsibility).
- There are no “taboo” topics in the family, families talk about every important issue, and children are provided with age-appropriate information and support.



ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO PARENTING: GENDER NEUTRAL OR GENDER CREATIVE PARENTING

Today, increasing number of parents choose to raise children without assigning them sex and gender, waiting for children to grow up and make their own choice when if and how they want to identify their gender.

If you are interested in this topic here you can find two videos. The first one illustrating how it is done in

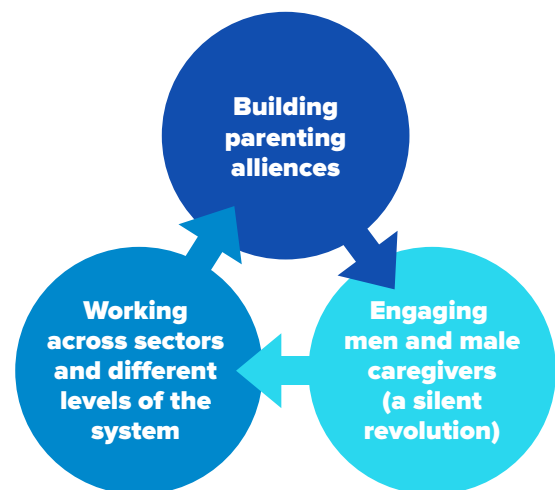
a stereotypically “normal” family (mother and father, heterosexual) Raising ‘Theybies’: Letting Kids Choose Their Gender | NBC News, 2018 (3.55 min) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AfzL8BrNSLQ>

The other video Raised Without Gender, Vice, 2017 (29.24 min) is about atypical family, with the parents with diverse gender identity, and the way how they are rearing their children. You can watch it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sPj8HhbwHs&t=42s>



IV. The ingredients of transformative parenting

In this chapter we are going to focus on three specific ingredients of transformative parenting:



GENDER EQUALITY STARTS AT HOME, TIPS AND HIGHLIGHTS

1. Talk with kids about gender equality and women's rights, challenge the existing norms, listen to and learn from your children
2. Challenge gender stereotypes at home – build a strong parenting alliance, share love for your children, care and domestic tasks and make decisions together demonstrating fairness and equality. Involve boys in care work and household chores from an early age, along with girls!
3. Walk the talk – act in a gender transformative way so that your children can see and learn from you as a role model
4. Encourage children to embrace diversity, and diverse role models of all shapes, sizes, genders, skin tones and cultural backgrounds
5. Empower children to speak out for gender equity
6. Fight stereotypes including your own
7. Use gender neutral language
8. Encourage your child to play, learn and work in mixed gender groups
9. Provide your children with opportunities of quality education
10. If your child shows signs of gender dysphoria (clinically significant distress or impairment related to a strong desire to be of another gender), e.g. anger when called a boy or girl, anxiety in social situations, depression, self-harm, etc. the key to supporting your child is to show that you love and accept them as they are

1. Building parenting alliances



THINK AND REFLECT

Which parent's involvement in child care was influenced most by the way other parent behaved?

Was it harder for female caregiver/mother male caregiver/father to balance work/family roles and responsibilities? Whose physical health was affected by being a parent? Why?

Which parent had more chances "to meet the child" before birth? Whose parenting behaviour was influenced most by marital quality?

What was helping?

You can do it individually or in pairs.

Possible answers:

Mothers are usually closer to the child including during pregnancy, and fathers remained somewhat at the margin.

If fathers got engaged in care and sharing the household chores this was changing.

Having a child affected the career of female care givers, but not the career of the fathers.

Mutual support between male and female caregivers.

The most powerful way of being a parent who transforms gender norms and offers children different ways of understanding gender roles is to build parenting alliances. A parenting alliance is an enriching relationship between parents, which is independent from their alliance as partners. It relates to agreements regarding how to raise the child, values, parenting style; how they are going to grow in their parental roles and support each other; how to divide home errands, etc.³⁶ For a child, a strong parenting alliance is the first, most potent and continuously present model of gender-balanced togetherness, equality and interaction that respects both diversity and cooperation.

Research shows that (Levtov et al., 2014)³⁷ boys and men who had engaged fathers and grew up in an environment of equal relations between parents, where both parents participated equally in making decisions on family affairs and fathers regularly took care of children and household tasks, show zero tolerance of domestic violence (and violence in general) and more egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles.

In strong parenting alliances parents learn from each other and support each other, and can influence changes in each other's attitudes towards gender roles and attitudes. The recent research from Australia³⁸ demonstrated that both paternal and maternal attitudes influence their children's attitudes and have complementary effects.



In case when two parents are different in their approach to gender norms, the child is more likely to adopt egalitarian norms. When one parent has gender-egalitarian attitudes (regardless of that parent's gender), the influence of the other parent's attitudes, even if they are different diminish. It seems, as authors say that egalitarianism is "intergenerationally stickier" than traditionalism, and that interventions that target parents should have significant impact on the new generations. For promoting and building parenting alliances both sides, mothers and fathers have to be open for partnership and willing to reconsider their beliefs about gender.

36. (ISSA&UNICEF ECARO, Module 18).

37. Margarita Jankauskaite & Vilana Pilinkaite Sotirovic. in Chapter 3 Active fatherhood as a strategy for the prevention of domestic violence: the role of social workers in FERREIRA, P., MOURA, T., & ROLINO, T. (org.). (2022). Parent European Manual: Promotion, Awareness Raising and Engagement of men in Nurture Transformations. Coimbra, Portugal: Center for Social Studies. <https://eg.uc.pt/handle/10316/97140>

38. Perales, F., Hoffmann, H., King, T. Vidal, S., Baxter, J. 2020. MOTHERS, FATHERS AND THE INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF GENDER-ROLE ATTITUDES, Working Papers Series, No. 2020-05 March 2020. ARK Center for Excellence for Children and Families over the Life Course, Australia

2. Engaging fathers and men in nurturing caring and gender-responsive fatherhood



SELF-ASSESSMENT – TRUE AND FALSE STATEMENTS

1. The main task of the father is to support mother in child rearing, and to substitute her if she is sick or working. T/F
2. Practitioners such as home visitors, paediatricians, and even social workers do not have need to engage with fathers. Mothers can share information with fathers. T/F
3. Most of the fathers want to get engaged in child rearing but they are facing a lot of barriers. T/F
4. Failure to engage fathers in positive gender socialisation can contribute to gender inequality and intergenerational transmission of traditional gender roles. T/F
5. Write your answers down and when you finish reading this chapter check your answers to see if you would change something.

Although paternal behaviours and roles vary across and within sociocultural contexts, without a doubt, fathers and men matter a lot to children's development. Research findings confirm that young children raised by involved and nurturing fathers develop better linguistic and cognitive skills, including academic readiness, and are more emotionally secure and have better social connections with peers as they get older.³⁹ Additionally, children whose fathers are more involved tend to have stronger, mental and physical health, self-esteem, resilience, social skills and levels of empathy and respect, as well as higher academic outcomes and the positive effects of father involvement are long lasting, from pre-kindergarten to early adulthood.⁴⁰ Cumulative research has shown that father's and male caregivers' involvement is positively related to child outcomes such as cognitive skills in early years and academic achievement in later years.⁴¹

Fathers' and male caregivers' engagement can take different forms: they can provide nurturing caregiving, they can participate to support and increase the academic achievement of their children (e.g. being involved in school life), to foster psychological wellbeing of the child, (e.g. playing with them, listening to them, comforting them). Several studies suggest that the influence of father

“Father” as a term carries several assumptions that may not be completely accurate given the changing family structure. In the AAP guideline on fathers, father is defined broadly as “the male or males identified as most involved in caregiving and committed to the well-being of the child, regardless of living situation, marital status, or biological relation.” Along with the biological father, this definition includes foster fathers, stepfathers, and grandfathers. (Yogman et al., 2016)

involvement can show differences on outcomes between boys and girls. For example, paternal warmth was found to be positively related to boys' self-efficacy on maths; adolescent girls' wellbeing was positively associated with the quality of the relationship between the father and the daughter.⁴² Additionally, boys who grow up in households where there is active involvement of fathers and male caregivers are less likely to use violence against partners later in adulthood.⁴³

39. Cabrera, N., and Tamis-LeMonda, C. (2013). *Handbook of Father Involvement: Multidisciplinary Perspective* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Routledge.

40. Jeynes WH. A Meta-Analysis: The Relationship Between Father Involvement and Student Academic Achievement. *Urban Education*. 2015;50(4):387-423. doi:10.1177/0042085914525789

41. Rollè, L., Gullotta, G., Trombetta, T., Curti, L., Gerino, E., Brustia, P., & Calderera, A. M. (2019). Father involvement and cognitive development in early and middle childhood: A systematic review. *Frontiers in psychology*, 2405.

42. Kara, D., & Sümer, N. (2022). The Role of Paternal Parenting and Co-parenting Quality in Children's Academic Self-Efficacy. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 772023-772023.

43. Shapiro, A. F., Krysik, J., & Pennar, A. L. (2011). Who are the fathers in healthy families Arizona? An examination of father data in at risk families. *American journal of orthopsychiatry*, 81(3), 327.

« The father has been viewed by some as a substitute for mother, or for mother's ability to meet the baby's needs. Doing so overshadows his actual role as a loving available father in his own right. (...) While the roles of the loving mother and father are not the same, they are complementary and both play a part in the development of their children » (Thomas, 2010; p.71)⁴⁴.



Watch the video:

"Khilona- A story on positive parenting" UNICEF India CO Video
<https://youtu.be/WCp9a900KY>

- What are the key messages of the video?
- How father learns to accept his son?



Watch the video:

"Being a Father:" A State of the World's Fathers Film, 2015.

- What did you hear fathers/male caregivers saying? What are the key messages?
- What did their partners and children say?
- What connects these fathers around the globe?

Did you hear them mentioning that they would like to have paid leave?

Did you hear mothers/female caregivers saying that they are happier?

Did you hear them happy being involved? What kind of dreams they have?



DID YOU KNOW?

According to a different research, fathers provide caregiving in a similar way as mothers, but there are also differences both on neuropsychological level as well as the behavioural⁴⁵:

- Fathers of children younger than 2 years old, use toys less often and more often engage in physical games than mothers
- Fathers tend to interrupt child's activity more often than mothers, for example while child is playing fathers tend to come and start tickling a child
- Fathers tend to engage less in pretend games and more often propose unconventional play, for example, by using objects in ways that are not typical or by teasing the child
- Fathers tend to excite their children more and soothe their children less than mothers
- Fathers seem to promote the autonomy of their children, especially during the early years, and have a vision of their children that is more focused on the future.

44. Thomas, L.K. (2010) Relational psychotherapy: The significance of father. Psychodynamic Practice, 16(1), 61-

45. <https://www.fatherly.com/health-science/science-benefits-of-fatherhood-dads-father-effect/#:~:text=The%20%E2%80%9Cfather%20effect%E2%80%9D%20is%20the,of%20time%2C%E2%80%9D%20Amato%20says.>

Aforementioned research from Australia showed that fathers' attitudes towards gender equality influence sons' and daughters' attitudes equally. Mothers' attitudes significantly shape the gender socialisation of their daughters, but less so for their sons. In other studies, sons of nurturing fathers become gender equitable and caring

as fathers, and daughters sometimes have more flexible perspectives on gender and gender equal relationships (Greene, 2000; MenCare, 2011). Some researchers have found that young men who are more gender equitable often identify a father or other male figure who modelled gender-equitable roles (Barker, 2001).



WATCH THE VIDEO TO LEARN MORE:

We need to change the conversation about fathers | Anna Machin, TEDx Talks, 2018 — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cu4L441x9o>

There are a few important points that Anna Machin mentions in the video:

- A broader understanding of the term “father,” going beyond biological father and the notion of one father. Fathers can be foster fathers, stepfathers and grandfathers, any “male or males identified as

most involved in caregiving and committed to the wellbeing of the child, regardless of living situation, marital status, or biological relation.” (Yogman et al., 2016)⁴⁸

- A strength-based approach – building on what fathers have to offer as parents and how they want to do it.
- The uniqueness of the child- father relationship – it should not be simply an imitation of the child-mother relationship – why should both parents do the same thing?

Although men do not go through pregnancy and hormonal changes they are biologically wired to care for infants. In the first days and weeks of fatherhood⁴⁹:

- Dopamine and oxytocin are on the rise – capacity for building attachment with the child grows
- Motivation boosts – readiness for engagement grows and capacity for processing emotions is improving
- Sensitivity for facial and emotional expression improves – fathers' responsiveness grows and sensitive to the signals of the child

- Capacity for decision making is on the rise
- They are anxious, stressed, and motivated to protect the child
- In some cases paternal perinatal mental illness (postpartum depression) may occur with symptoms different to those of women. Men do not talk about because they are ashamed, it is often taboo, and considered ‘unmanly’.⁵⁰

46. Perales, F., Hoffmann, H., King, T. Vidal, S., Baxter, J. 2020. MOTHERS, FATHERS AND THE INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF GENDER-ROLE ATTITUDES, Working Papers Series, No. 2020-05 March 2020. ARK Center for Excellence for Children and Families over the Life Course, Australia

47. Margarita Jankauskaite & Vilana Pilinkaite Sotirovic. in Chapter 3 Active fatherhood as a strategy for the prevention of domestic violence: the role of social workers in FERREIRA, P., MOURA, T., & ROLINO, T. (org.). (2022). Parent European Manual: Promotion, Awareness Raising and Engagement of men in Nurture Transformations. Coimbra, Portugal: Center for Social Studies. <https://eg.uc.pt/handle/10316/97140>

48. Yogman M, Garfield CF; Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health. Fathers' role in the care and development of their children: the role of pediatricians. *Pediatrics*. 2016;138(1):e20161128. Retrieved from <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/early/2016/06/10/peds.2016-1128.full.pdf>.

49. <https://bigthink.com/neuropsych/neuroscience-of-fatherhood/#:~:text=The%20male%20brain%20undergoes%20some,he%20becomes%20a%20father...&text=In%20the%20first%20days%20and,father%20and%20his%20newborn%20child.>

50. UNICEF & ISSA. Module 7. PARENTAL WELLBEING, https://www.issa.nl/sites/default/files/pdf/Publications/cross%20sectoral/Resource%20Modules%20for%20Home%20Visitors%20Module%207.web_.pdf

2.1. Barriers for male caregivers/fathers' involvement



THINK AND REFLECT

- Why is so difficult to involve fathers/male caregivers? What are the main challenges?
- Are we picking wrong approaches?
- Are we limited by our own stereotypes about men and their role in parenting?
- What about the policies? Do they support fathers/male caregivers' participation?
- What has to change?

Fathers/male caregivers are not a homogeneous group, and we should acknowledge individual, cultural and other differences between them. Additionally, father involvement occurs along a continuum and fathers find different ways to get actively involved in their children's lives in different extents.

Consequently, there are many different reasons why fathers do not engage in child rearing and care to the extent that would fully contribute to the wellbeing of their partner's, children's and their own.

The main barriers fall into at least four categories: policy level, individual and family level, and level of prevailing societal norms and practices in communities and society.



Policy level	<p>Lack of clarity on what is expected from fathers</p> <p>A new internationally recognized definition of fatherhood and father involvement is needed since the existing social concept has to change according to the changes in the role of women and men, of mothers and fathers. The concept of a good father, should also be a topic of debate on the level of the family, community and society at large.⁵¹</p>
Practice and institutional level	Professional gatekeeping which includes gender norms and attitudes of frontline workers and matrifocal content and organization of programmes and services targeting families.
Individual and family level	Mothers'/women's gatekeeping.
Level of prevailing societal norms and practices in communities and society	<p>The burden of toxic masculinity.</p> <p>Fathers and men are under great societal pressure to stay loyal to a traditional male role and suffer when they do not act as expected, when they decide to recede from the expectations. They could be isolated, labelled and excluded from their peers.⁵²</p>



CASE STUDY

You are organising a session with parents on how they support each other in rearing the children. The group is mixed, and they are all parents of the seven year old children. There are more mothers than fathers. Mothers are mostly talking. They talk about children as “their own”. *When asked about the father’s involvement most of them praise their partners saying that they are helping a lot, and how much they love their children. When you ask one of the mothers how it looks like she says: “He is doing his best. When he comes from work he talks with him, plays with him, takes him out to the park. He asks about school and what is new. So, while he’s having lunch after work, I help our son get dressed*

and then they go to play ball in the park. I tell him where to go and who are the children our son likes to play with. When I have to go out I write him a note with what he has to do about the homework when they come back home. But usually I help with the homework. If I cannot make lunch, I ask my mother or my mother in law to come and help my husband. I want them to have a home-cooked meal. I also tell him to leave the dishes, and that I will take care of that. No need for him to waste time on cleaning, and messing up my kitchen, He already has only a few hours to spend with the child. I am a mother, so I know my son the best, so I have to tell my husband everything he has to know about him.” Fathers do not comment, other mothers nod their heads in agreement.

51. Trikić, Z. and Rentzou K. in Chapter 4 Early Childhood Development: The entry point to gender socialisation and gender equity via fathers’ engagement in FERREIRA, P., MOURA, T., & ROLINO, T. (org.). (2022). Parent European Manual: Promotion, Awareness Raising and Engagement of men in Nurture Transformations. Coimbra, Portugal: Center for Social Studies. <https://eg.uc.pt/handle/10316/97140>

52. In Trikić, Z. and Rentzou K. in Chapter 4 Early Childhood Development: The entry point to gender socialisation and gender equity via fathers’ engagement in FERREIRA, P., MOURA, T., & ROLINO, T. (org.). (2022). Parent European Manual: Promotion, Awareness Raising and Engagement of men in Nurture Transformations. Coimbra, Portugal: Center for Social Studies. <https://eg.uc.pt/handle/10316/97140>



THINK AND REFLECT

What are your thoughts on this situation?

Do you often hear these comments? How often does something like that happen? Do you agree with the mother (mother's).

What would you do in this situation?

Suggestion:

Step 1. Thank the mother and acknowledge her attempts to provide time for her partner and son to spend quality time together. Offer fathers in the group a chance to share their opinion, ask them how they feel in described situation, and do they need all this help and support? What would they like?

Step 2. Ask group what do children learn in a situation like this, about gender roles, responsibilities and opportunities.

Step 3. Explain the maternal gatekeeping behaviours to the group and the effects of it such as low father involvement, higher stress levels in mothers, lower satisfaction with how the family functions in general, lower satisfaction with parenting of both fathers and mothers and a less functional parenting alliance (You can always adapt the language to the group).

Step 4. Ask the group to brainstorm other solutions (be sure that fathers contribute).

Step 5. Talk with the group about building parenting alliances, and how that benefit everybody.

Step 6. Ask each member of the group to commit to try something new next time.

Strong gender stereotypical roles of mothers and fathers are at the root of a phenomenon called **maternal gatekeeping** presented in the case study above. Mothers/female caregivers are seen as primarily responsible for children, and partners. Mothers/women get a lot of messages such as that they are better prepared for raising children, and that men lack the ability to care for children and manage households. So they plan the fathers' involvement, organize it and usually ask fathers/men to follow their model (to act like them). This has two folded

effect: women are overstretched and overwhelmed, and fathers/male caregivers' do not build confidence in their skills to contribute to the family. If unchallenged, this dynamic sends messages to children about mothers and fathers that they will likely transmit to their children. Frontline workers have an opportunity to challenge maternal gatekeeping and disrupt the cycle by challenging maternal gatekeeping and suggesting a more equitable division of labour, instead of blaming women in a sexist way.



MATERNAL GATEKEEPING CAN AFFECT GRANDPARENTS

Research shows that it's really common for mothers-in-laws and daughters-in-laws to have difficult relationships, even compared to other in-law relationships. In almost all the countries around the globe, female caregivers complain about resistance, and pressure from their and in-law parents when having more flexible and egalitarian gender attitudes

and behaviours. This results in toxic stereotypes about mothers in law, which needs to be deconstructed. Yes, there are some mothers in law who are toxic (always right, she knows the best, you are not good enough as a mother etc.), however like any other relationship this one has to be nurtured. If the parental alliance is strong, respectful relationships between all family members can be built.



Professional gatekeeping which includes:

- The “matrifocal” (matricentric) content and organization of programmes and services for families, especially in early years. In many cases, programmes and services do not address the family as a system, but rather target explicitly or implicitly only mothers. Thus, fathers’ non-participation is not addressed as an issue, and it is in a way not visible. Even the names such as “maternal-child consultations”, “maternal ward”, “Child and maternal health” etc. clearly assume absence of fathers. In this way responsibility of the father for a child is also invisible.

Fathers are not seen as equal partners, and are expected to play the gendered role (i.g. earn money, discipline children, etc.) . Even when we discuss father’s involvement in family lives they are usually seen as helpers, and support to mothers. Even in international organizations, many programmes have the word “mother in their titles instead of parents.” So the fathers feel excluded instead of responsible, competent and a part of the caring space. The matrifocal focus of services and programmes (un)intentionally perpetuate traditional gender roles.



THINK AND REFLECT

Did you ever consider how fathers feel when they come with their family for a check-up, for example, to a paediatrician and the professional is addressing the mother as “mother or mama” and father by his family name e.g., Mr. X. Does the father feel included?

Health services and professionals may contribute to cultural marginalization or even exclusion of fathers.⁵³ However, research and practice have also shown that engaging men through the health sector is a powerful and effective strategy.⁵⁴

It is also worth considering that in the situation described above a woman’s complex identity disappears and she is seen only as a “mom” while calling men by name recognizes their fuller personhood.

Discuss with your female colleagues and exchange your perspectives.

Transformative approach would be to ask parents how they want to be addressed.

53. FERREIRA, P, MOURA, T., & ROLINO, T. (org.). (2022). Parent European Manual: Promotion, Awareness Raising and Engagement of men in Nurture Transformations. Coimbra, Portugal: Center for Social Studies. <https://eg.uc.pt/handle/10316/97140>

54. https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/glo-early_childhood_development_annotated_bibliography-final-io-eng-jul18.pdf

2.2. What can you do to support and enhance fathers'/men's involvement – tips for professionals

General tips:

Gaining the support of mothers/women is key to fathers' engagement all around the world	While working individually or in a group of mothers challenge mothers'/female attitudes regarding fathers' involvement. This is critical in determining if, how, and to what extent such participation actually takes place, starting from pregnancy. ⁵⁵ If the father isn't with the mother during a home visit, or visit to the health center, or community center, practitioners can always brainstorm ideas with the mother for how to get the father involved in child upbringing.
Promote parenting alliances	Work with couples or mixed groups of male caregivers/fathers and female caregivers/mothers to convey the importance of fathers' engagement as co-parents. Help them deal with their disputes in constructive and non-violent ways. That will help building parental alliances. Interventions with one parent are not recommended as by default they tend to only reach the mother. However, it may be necessary to work periodically on more sensitive subjects separately with mothers or fathers.
Involve more male staff and facilitators	Couple trainers, have gender mixed couple of trainers to model cooperation and partnership between men and women. Male caregivers/fathers represent a diverse group of individuals. Some fathers can be hard to engage because they are often from a different group or class from those that provide services to them. Additional barriers include personal resources (e.g., esteem, self-efficacy and confidence), lifestyle practices, difficulties with communication, poor health, and negative experiences in the past with service providers. Thus, for working with men, it is preferred that the pair of trainers personifies heterogeneity, for example, the trainers are of different genders and/or from different religions, class, ethnic, age, or cultural groups.
Follow the men and male caregivers/fathers	Reach out to fathers and men, and organize meeting with them when and where it suits them. Help them understand how important their involvement is. Even if you do not talk with them about gender and positive gender socialisation, the fact that they are getting involved in child's rearing is popularly called a "quiet revolution." By engaging men the gender dynamic is changing and a positive masculinity is promoted.
Make male caregivers/fathers visible	Use inclusive language, images of fathers in brochures, posters, materials, messages etc. Talk about parents and not only mothers.
Involve men and fathers from the beginning	According to the Fatherhood Institute, research findings generally indicate that men who understand the risk of pregnancy complications will support their partner's use of appropriate services, mothers who have a calm and supportive birth partner have better labours, and sharing the birth of their child can strengthen parents' relationship. Some research is showing how critical is paternal involvement just after a child is born. Fathers who spend 2 weeks or more at home after the birth are almost 2 times as likely to be involved in diapering, feeding, cleaning, and caring for their baby at 9 months (ISSA/ UNICEF, Module 5).

55. FERREIRA, P., MOURA, T., & ROLINO, T. (org.). (2022). Parent European Manual: Promotion, Awareness Raising and Engagement of men in Nurture Transformations. Coimbra, Portugal: Center for Social Studies. <https://eg.uc.pt/handle/10316/97140>

Show empathy and appreciation for male caregivers/fathers	Avoid blaming male caregivers/fathers. Acknowledge the challenges fathers may face (e.g., pressure to earn money, feeling stressed, tired, or fathers believing that parenting is a woman's job) to help them feel validated. Talk with them and how much they matter to their child and child's development to affirm the value of their role, which can often be diminished. Give fathers a lot of positive reinforcement. Praise, acknowledgement, and attention help everyone, including fathers, feel good about what they are doing and motivate them to repeat it.
Follow the interests and lead of the male caregivers/fathers	Provide a father-friendly environment. Start with how fathers want to participate, what is interesting for them, and what will benefit their children, partners, and themselves. Let fathers take the lead by asking not telling since this helps to build their confidence, sense of ownership, and buy-in. They are more likely to use an idea they come up with themselves than one they were told to do. You can always enrich their way of thinking by offering alternative ideas, and suggestions for interactions based on the type of play fathers like to have so that they are more inclined to use them.
Engage with the community-or national level champions	Connect with respected, famous and influential men and ask them to be role models and advocates to other men to get more involved.
Include different groups of male caregivers/fathers	Do not forget to reach out to non-resident fathers, fathers in prisons, fathers absent due to the military service etc.

2.3. Specific tips on how policymakers and service providers can support and encourage positive father involvement⁵⁶

Policymakers	Provide paid paternal leave to allow fathers to stay home and bond with their infants and care for sick children. Fund public-service announcements promoting positive, involved fathers and modelling effective coparenting relationships
Paediatricians	Involve fathers in health care discussions during appointments.
Social service providers	Improve "father-friendliness" of programs and help fathers take stock of what they are doing for their children and where they could do more. Encourage positive coparenting to help facilitate non-resident father involvement with their children.
Child support caseworkers	Inquire about noncustodial fathers' barriers to spending time with their children and offer to help facilitate visits.
Home-visiting providers	Engage fathers together with mothers or during the separate meetings from maternal home visits.

56. <https://www.irp.wisc.edu/resource/strategies-for-engaging-fathers-in-family-services/>



A SMALL INTERVENTION WITH GREAT IMPACT:

In Grantham, Lincolnshire in the UK (2009) two Home Visitors conducted a comparative study in which one continued to use the standard letter about the

primary birth visit ("Dear parents") while the other used a new father-inclusive version ("Dear new mum and dad"). With the standard letter 3 out of 15 dads attended. With the father-inclusive letter 11/16 dads attended. (Module 5: Engaging Fathers, pg. 18)

3. Working across sectors and different levels of the system to support and promote gender transformative parenting and create a change

Given its complex nature, challenging, and transforming gender socialisation and norms and working towards gender equity and equality requires a collaborative approach, cutting across sectors and different system levels, especially for the most vulnerable groups of women and girls.

3.1. Working across sectors

As an individual professional, you can make positive changes in the lives of many children and families by modeling and promoting gender-transformative approaches to parenting. However, you cannot provide all the support families need, and you cannot promote sustainable change and transformation in gender parenting if you are alone.



THINK AND REFLECT - MAPPING SERVICES IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY - WORKING WITH OTHER SECTORS AND SERVICES

Fill the table:

Service	Identified problem	When and why	Challenges	Possible solutions
Child protection	Girl child looks neglected – fed less than her brother	You, as a paediatrician, need legal advice and support	You do not want the child to be taken from home, and you want to find a way to support the family to make a change	<p>Before sending the family to child protection service, you discuss with the family and detect the main reasons for the problem.</p> <p>With the colleague from child protection, you discuss who else can be included, what can be done to support the family while protecting the child, etc.</p>

What is needed:

- You need to know the families and the support they need.
- You need to know available and appropriate resources in the community so that you can connect and refer families to them.
- You need to be familiar with the best ways to assess the usefulness of services.

Additionally, you have to be connected with your peers from different sectors. You need to share the vision and values to send the same message to parents about positive gender socialisation, equitable norms and transformative parenting, and take coordinated actions that benefit children, parents, communities, and society as a whole. You can also become a part of initiatives in the larger professional community for challenging gender roles, for example, joining or creating inter-sectoral working groups, organizing joint training and professional development events, supporting advocacy efforts, etc.

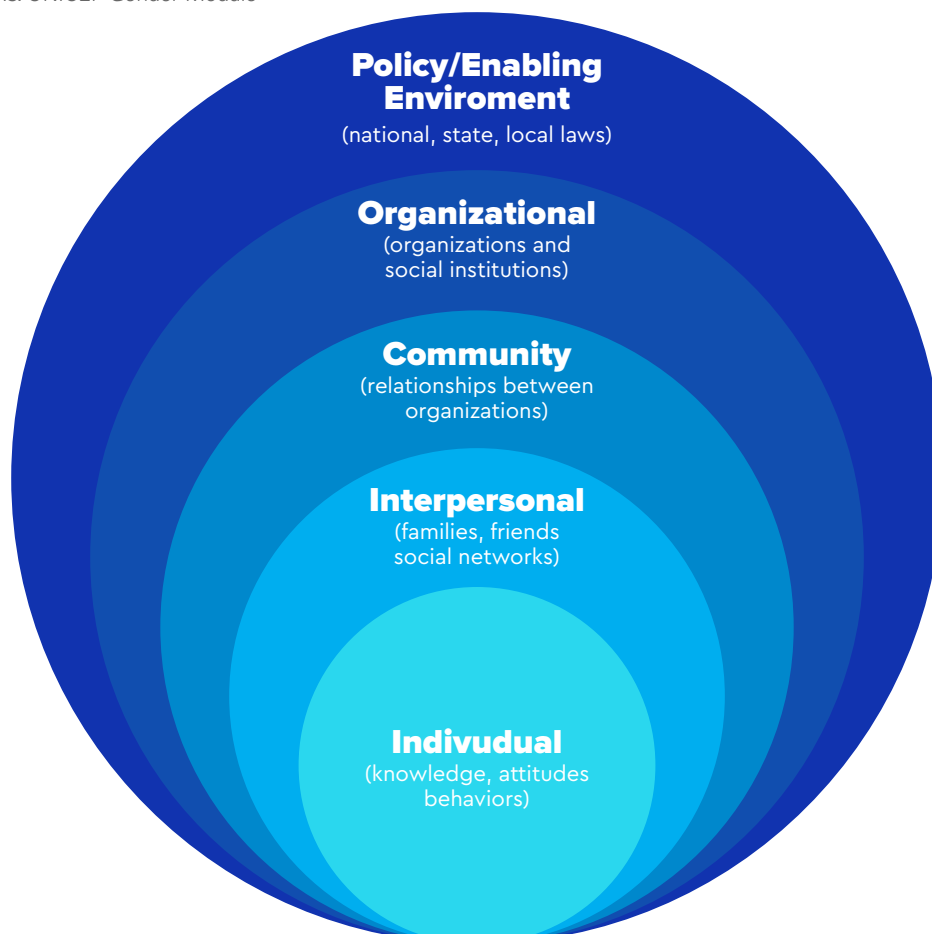
3.2. Working on the different levels of the system

To create a sustainable change, you need allies, peers from different sectors, and key stakeholders from different levels of the system. You need to step from your traditional role and:

- name the problems
- speak out on behalf of women and girls who are usually silenced, stressing the devastating effects of gendered parenting and harmful gender norms and practices, and
- build alliances on different levels of the system.

The social-ecological framework (Figure 5.) can demonstrate what frontline workers can do to introduce and support gender transformative approaches to parenting on the individual, family, community, and institutional levels.

Figure 5. source ISSA& UNICEF Gender Module





CASE STUDY⁵⁷

You are a teacher working with the family of a teenage girl. She is doing well in school, but her parents think it is time for her to leave school. In their opinion, she is a girl and does not need further education.

- **What are the resources in the family you can rely on, and what can you offer the family?**

You can, for example, explain to parents the importance of education, provide them with literature and movies, and advise them to talk with cousins, grandparents, and friends with girls in schools

- **What are the resources in the community that you can rely on?**

You can ask for support from Influential religious leaders and faith communities, and colleagues from different sectors such as law and child protection, asking them to look at the laws protecting the girl.

- **What can you do at the level of your institution?**

You can mobilize the school, school counselor, and management, organize parent support groups, etc.

- **What societal factors are important?**

Together with colleagues, give visibility to the problem, advocate for the change of laws, and protect the girls.



As an individual professional, you are NOT necessarily responsible for changing community and institutional-level norms in the short term. Still, you should see yourself contributing to the

gradual change towards accepting transformative gender parenting approaches. As mentioned above, you need to build alliances with colleagues and key stakeholders and step out of your comfort zone.



TIPS FOR PRACTITIONERS FOR SUPPORTING PARENTS IN GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE PARENTING

- Treat parents as partners and believe that they want the best for their children while acknowledging that sometimes they need support and help, especially when it comes to sensitive topics like gender socialisation.
- Understand that parents might be scared and worried about introducing parenting practices that deviate from the dominant discourse. Recognize that supporting children to challenge gender stereotypes, addressing them in gender-neutral language, exploring their gender identity etc. is a big responsibility since children and families can suffer devastating consequences. (read the story: Malala: The girl who was shoot for going to school.)
- Practitioners model to parents responsive relationships in general, as well as gender responsive relationships. In order to learn how to be responsive, parents need to experience responsive interactions with practitioners. As

we discussed before responsive interactions have two elements: sensitivity (**“ walking in family shoes”**) and **stimulation (moving to the next stage)**.

- **Sensitivity** - practitioners being empathetic to what parents are thinking and feeling at any given moment and responding to that.
- **Stimulation** - identifying what a parent is already doing well in terms of gender transformative childrearing, and then making suggestions for short, simple additions. For instance, practitioners should observe if the caregiver pays attention and responds to the child's signals (for example, encouraging daughter or son to spend more time in mixed groups of friends). Then, the practitioner should praise the caregiver for being responsive to the child. Positive reinforcement makes parents more likely to continue practicing the responsive behaviours. Then, the practitioner could challenge the parents by offering a range of ideas that mixed-sex groups can enjoy such as making puzzles, doing pretend play with dolls, making art, and playing ball games.

57. Adapted from UNICEF&ISSA Module 18



- Whatever you do keep in mind that no two children or families have the same life experiences, so it is important to avoid stereotypes and engage with children and their families at a personal and individual level.
- Create opportunities for parents to reflect and discuss gender-related questions among peers (e.g., Do they tend to have gender-stereotypical expectations for their children?; Do they tend to model traditional gender-role behaviours to their children?; Do they tend to encourage gender-stereotyped behaviours and to discourage cross gender-stereotyped behaviours in their children?).
- Model expectations for gender equitable parenting alliances in how you interact with couples. For example, ask questions to both parents, discourage men from interrupting their partner while she speaks, address them both in the same manner (e.g., both by name or both by “mom” or “dad”). Emphasize the importance of mothers’ and fathers’ contributions to the development of their children.
- Focus on your communication skills - Effective communication is key to establish positive partnerships between practitioners and parents. It encompasses active listening and respectful, clear speaking. When professionals and parents share knowledge, experience, and concerns, it helps children’s wellbeing and development. Active listening is listening on purpose, i.e. the active process of listening to understand. It is a way of listening and responding to another person that improves mutual understanding. In contrast to passively listening, the active listener has a clear goal in mind: to capture and reflect both the emotional experience and the ideological perspective of the speaker. Practitioners who are active listeners show parents that they value parents’ experience, ideas, and opinions and take their concerns seriously.
- Respect every family:
 - Religious and cultural background, values, and beliefs, as long as they are not endangering a child’s rights, wellbeing, and safety.
 - Parenting arrangements (for example, blended families, co-parenting families, single-parent families, and LGBTIQ+ families’ gender diversity).
 - Show respect for parents’ and children’s gender and preferred pronouns.
 - Level of understanding. Use ordinary, everyday language rather than professional jargon.
 - Mother language. Work with interpreters if you speak a different language from the family you are working with.

V. Diverse Families

1. Key elements to consider while working with diverse families

In contemporary societies, families can be diverse in how they are organized in terms of class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, culture, and life cycle. As practitioners, it is essential to acknowledge this diversity and understand that different family environments can also positively affect child development. However, in creating positive environments for children, these families might have multiple needs and demands based on their unique characteristics.

When working with diverse families, Frontline workers should take preventative measures in their practice against discrimination, ensure the right to privacy of personal life is protected, create a gender-equal and inclusive workplace, and be role models themselves for supporting parents in gender-transformative parenting. It is important to treat all children and caregivers equally, use gender-neutral language, and; promote positive gender socialisation and equal sharing of childcare responsibilities regardless of who the parents are. We address the characteristics of three types of families in this module: single parent/caregiver households, same-sex parents/caregivers, and adolescent parents.

a. Single parent/caregiver households

Single mothers' and their daughters' feminine traits were both higher than their masculine traits, and sons' masculine traits were higher than their feminine traits; the majority gender-role type of single parents and their children was androgyny (both male and female); significant differences were found between children's gender-role types depending on different raiser, the proportion of girls' masculine traits raised by single fathers was significantly higher than those who were raised by single mothers; (b) family socio-economic status and single parents' gender-role types positively influenced parental child-rearing gender-role attitude, which in turn, influenced the children's gender traits, and further affected children's social adjustment.⁵⁸

b. Same-sex parents/caregivers

Many frontline workers find it challenging working with same-sex couples with children.



THINK AND REFLECT

How do you feel when you see these images?



58. Chen IJ, Zhang H, Wei B, Guo Z. The model of children's social adjustment under the gender-roles absence in single-parent families. *Int J Psychol.* 2019 Jun;54(3):316-324. doi: 10.1002/ijop.12477. Epub 2018 Jan 14. PMID: 29333600

Research into the development of children raised by same-sex couples has been conducted for decades. The findings range from no identified differences between the children raised by homo- and heterosexual families, to differences determined in certain areas of socialisation (Goldberg, 2010). However, it has been recognized that same-sex families are exposed to greater stress due to the parents' sexual orientation stigma.⁵⁹ Indeed, the evidence suggests that home environments provided by lesbian and gay parents are as likely as those provided by heterosexual parents to support and enable children's psychosocial growth.⁶⁰

Research from the Netherlands shows that children in lesbian families feel less parental pressure to conform to gender stereotypes, are less likely to experience their gender as superior (intergroup bias), and are more likely to question future heterosexual romantic involvement than children in heterosexual two-parent families.⁶¹

There is evidence that children in gay households are more likely to resist and challenge stereotypical male-female behaviour. For example, boys raised by lesbians appear to be less aggressive and more nurturing than boys raised in heterosexual families. Daughters of lesbians are more likely to aspire to become doctors, lawyers, engineers, and astronauts.⁶²



Norms and attitudes towards same-sex parenting and LGBTQI communities show a wide variation across countries around the world. In some countries, sexual orientation, non-binary gender identities, and differences in family structures are regarded, as usual, widely accepted, and legal. In contrast, this acceptance is lower in some countries and even illegal, although nobody should be criminalized for their sexual orientation or identity.

As frontline workers and practitioners, you might encounter such parents/caregivers in your practice. Although it can be challenging, it is important to stay child-centred in your approach to begin with and promote positive gender socialisation. It is important to:

- Protect the privacy and confidentiality of these

parents/caregivers and families;

- Refrain from putting them in any type of danger;
- Ensure you treat every individual equally in your practice;

Challenge and reflect on your own biases and keep an open mind to learn and understand different perspectives.

- Regardless of parents' caregivers' sexual orientation enabling environments for holistic child development can be created, and gender-responsive parenting approaches can be applied. Make sure you focus on the strengths and skills of parents/caregivers in supporting them in gender-transformative parenting.

59. UNICEF&ISSA Module 18, pg. 31

60. Lesbian & Gay Parenting: <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/parenting-full.pdf>

61. Children's Gender Identity in Lesbian and Heterosexual Two-Parent Families (2009) pg. 12. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2807026/pdf/11199_2009_Article_9704.pdf

62. <https://news.usc.edu/5011/Sociology-Study-examines-gender-roles-of-children-with-gay-parents/>



MODULE II

Start before five

Gender transformative parenting in early childhood (from birth to age of five)

I. Introduction



KEY MESSAGES – WHY IS THIS MODULE IMPORTANT FOR YOU

- Gender is one of the first social categories that children learn. Between ages one and two, they are aware of physical differences between boys and girls. By the age of three, they develop a sense of gender identity and label themselves as boys or girls, and by the age of five, they have a sense of gender stability.
- The early gender socialization process sets a gendered trajectory for child's development that shapes virtually all aspects of their present and future life, including the cognitive and affective formation of gender identity and stereotypes.
- Female (mothers) and male (fathers), grandparents, and other caregivers play a crucial role in gender socialization in early childhood.
- With your professional input and support, parents can make changes in parenting to provide children fair treatment, adequate stimulation, and opportunities to achieve equal outcomes in life.
- Both mothers and fathers have equal rights to enjoy parenthood from the start.
- Parenting alliances are built even during pregnancy and present the foundation of a gender-balanced and equitable familial environment.



LEARNING OUTCOMES

After this module, you will:

- Know how to describe key developmental processes of early childhood related to gender.
- Understand and explain how different treatment of boys and girls influence brain development and create differences between boys and girls.
- Be able to explain gender socialization in the early years.
- Be able to explain the benefits of gender-responsive parenting in the early years.
- Be able to support parents develop parenting alliances in early childhood, even before the child is born.
- Think of age-specific gender-responsive strategies parents and caregivers might use to develop positive gender norms in children.

II. Specificness of early childhood, gender socialization, and identity

From birth to 1 ½ - 2 years of age, infancy is a period of great parental investment to ensure the child's survival, socialization, and learning.

The first 1,000 days—represent a unique opportunity to support child development and long-term health. Stressors such as abuse, neglect, physical and psychological violence, mother's and father's well-being and stress, and poor nutrition negatively affect the developing brain. Above all, a healthy trajectory of early development depends on the quality and reliability of a young child's close relationships and interactions with adults. For instance, babies and their parents must be supported during this time to develop a secure attachment so that parents can respond appropriately and consistently to their children's needs, particularly in times of distress (p. 21).

Without a good initial bond, children are less likely to grow up to become happy, independent, and resilient adults. It is much like building a house, where a strong foundation has to be built to support a functioning structure.

Children ages 3 to 5 years old learn the social skills needed to play and work with other children. They learn to cooperate with a larger number of peers, although they often prefer

playing in the gendered groups – boys with boys and girls with girls, and are not happy to mix.

Preschoolers love to test their physical, behavioural, and emotional limits, and they need a safe, structured environment in which they can explore and face a challenge. However, preschools need well-defined boundaries. Early morality develops as children want to please their parents and others of importance. This is commonly known as the "good boy" or "good girl" stage.

Studies from a variety of disciplinary fields highlight that the early years are fundamental for a variety of "developmental outcomes relevant to gender equality, including (Chi, 2018, p. 4) :

- the cognitive and affective formation of gender identity and stereotypes.
- specific skills learned by girls and boys through adult – child and teacher-child interactions and gendered childhood play."

Parents act as a critical influencer of gender socialization – how individuals learn to behave according to gender norms.

63. National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2004). Young children develop in an environment of relationships. Working Paper No. 1. Retrieved from <http://www.developingchild.net>

64. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2016). Parenting Matters: Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/21868>

65. NIH. National Library of Medicine. Preschooler development. <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002013.htm>

66. Chi, J. (2018) Pathways for gender equality through early childhood teacher policy in China. Echidna Global Scholars Program Discussion Paper. November 2018. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED592783.pdf>

67. UNICEF, 2019. Summary note on promoting positive gender norms and socialization. hood.



THINK AND REFLECT

- In most countries around the world, girls and boys are dressed differently, have different statuses and roles, play with different toys, and are treated differently by adults. Why is this happening? Is it because they are so biologically and genetically different?
- Could the parenting practices and not biology be a reason for girls having more developed language and boys being more physically competent?

Did you know that fathers of daughters spent about 60% more time attentively responding to their child than those with sons? They also spent about five times as much time singing and whistling with girls and spoke more openly about emotions, including sadness. Fathers of sons spent nearly three times as long each day engaged in rough and tumble play and used more “achievement-related” language, including words such as “proud,” “win,” or “best.”⁶⁸ Mothers also “talk” more with the baby girls.

Between ages 1 and 2 children are aware of physical differences between boys and girls



At 3 years old develop sense of gender identity and label themselves as girls and boys



By age of 5 Children develop a sense of gender stability



Although children play an active role in shaping their gender identity development, their foundation of knowledge about gender comes primarily from parents and caregivers. Other sources of socialization, including peers and preschool teachers, have limited influence⁶⁹.

In the early years, the human brain is highly malleable and sensitive to experience and environmental factors, or “plastic,” meaning that our brains can be influenced by outside factors, disproving arguments that boys are destined to be, for example, aggressive, risk-taking, and better at math while girls are destined to be emotional, cautious, and less physically active. Instead, through years of teaching and reinforcement, we may be producing different brains in boys/men and girls/women.⁷⁰

In the first two years, the differences between behaviours of boys and girls are minimal, but the reactions of adults differ a lot. One study showed that adults reacted immediately when the boys were “standing up for themselves” (e.g., pushing others to protect what is theirs), but they did not react when girls did the same. After two years, the same boys stood for themselves much more than girls. The fact that boys were attracting adult attention for that behaviour made it more valued.⁷¹

In conscious and/or unconscious ways, parents and caregivers transfer their own gender biases and norms to their children.

Everything is important, including:

- the way caregivers communicate with the baby
- the choice of the toys, outfits
- type of play and interactions
- who is communicating with the child (male or female caregiver)
- messages about acceptable and nonacceptable child behaviours related to gender

By praising or punishing certain behaviours, parents teach children the norms of their gender, such as boys being strong and rigid and girls being sweet, beautiful, and caring.

According to UNICEF (2011, p. 39) report, “this early socialization process sets a gendered trajectory for their development that shapes virtually all aspects of life.”

68. <https://lsa.umich.edu/psych/news-events/all-news/faculty-news/fathers-pay-more-attention-to-toddler-daughters-than-sons-study.html>

69. Martin, C. L. (2014). Gender: early socialization. In: Tremblay RE, Boivin M, Peters RDeV, eds. Tremblay RE, topic ed. Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development [online].

70. Eliot, 2009, p.8 in https://www.issa.nl/sites/default/files/pdf/Publications/cross%20sectoral/Module%2018_Supporting%20Families%20for%20Nurturing%20Care_Gender.FINAL_.pdf

71. Fagot & al, 1985 in

III. Supporting parents for gender-transformative parenting in early childhood – Tips for practitioners and parents

Like any other member of society, parents carry their baggage of stereotypes and harmful gender norms. As a professional/practitioner, you play an important role in supporting them in challenging their perspectives and transforming their parenting practices into more gender-

transformative. You can do it by modelling desirable behaviours and practices, by active teaching and transmitting knowledge and skills, influencing their attitudes, offering alternatives, and being there to hear their fears and worries.



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In the period between conception and the age of five, professionals who play the most crucial role usually come from the health sector. As a home visitor, seeing families in their natural environment, you can model behaviours and guide parents towards more equitable practices. The key achievement could be to help parents build parental alliances.

If you want more information, revisit the module 1. and consult with the UNICEF & ISSA Supporting Families for Nurturing Care resource modules:

- **Module 5:** Engaging fathers
- **Module 6:** The Art of Parenting - Love, Talk, Play, Read

- **Module 7:** Parental Wellbeing
- **Module 18:** Gender Socialisation and Gender Dynamics in Families - the Role of the Home Visitor Early childhood educators also play an important role; they can challenge existing gender norms and promote gender equity and equality in their everyday work in many ways, including avoiding gendered play, encouraging children to play together, dress as they like, etc. They can also work with female and male caregivers and nurture their joint care for children.

Professionals have an essential task to do in the child's early years. The work with parents of young children is crucial because early childhood is a time when foundations are laid, and the key difference could be made. This is when the decision could be made if the intergenerational cycle of gender discrimination will be preserved and perpetuated or broken so that a more equitable society can emerge. The earlier we start; the better results will be!

The table below will present some specific approaches and practices for gender-transformative parenting. Still, in general, the incredible brain plasticity and the trust that young children have in their parents/caregivers provide wonderful and endless opportunities to influence a child's understanding of gender and gender roles.⁷²

72. Are there any differences in the development of boys' and girls' brains?, Zero to Three, <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/1380-are-there-any-differences-in-the-development-of-boys-and-girls-brains#:~:text=Sex%20differences%20in%20the%20brain,in%20female%20than%20male%20infants>

73. Adapted from: http://csmr.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/CSRM_WP4_2018_RESILIENCE_1.pdf



CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1:

You are a paediatrician talking with the parents of an infant girl during the regular check-up about child's physical development. You are suggesting parents to engage with the child in "tummy time" (placing an infant on their abdomen while awake in order to build upper body strength and prevent flat head syndrome). The father is saying that his sweet little girl is not very interested in pushing up with her arms, and that he prefers to hold her safe in his arms. The father is expressing a gendered expectation that a girl is not very physically strong and is in need of protection. What would you respond?

Suggestions for responding for frontline workers:

- 1.** Before all baby boys and girls need a little exercise to help them grow and develop." (keeping the health of the child as a priority.)
- 2.** "You clearly love your daughter but parents can also encourage girls and boys to build some strength from an early age." (This expresses positive regard for the father while encouraging positive growth).
- 3.** "You are trying to protect your daughter. You can help keep her safe by ensuring she is on a flat surface like the floor where she cannot roll off. Baby girls and boys all need to build strength through play." (This acknowledges the father's concerns, but gently encourages him to think about the situation differently).

Case Study 2:A:

Home visitor was visiting a married couple with a newborn baby, who had moved to the city from a rural setting. The first three times she made house calls, the parents were taking care of the child independently, the father was devoted and involved in the routine tasks with the baby. The home visitor commended his involvement and emphasised the significance of the father's involvement from day one for the child's overall development and his/her achievements in later life. The mother showed her

satisfaction with the fact that her husband was caring and skilful with the baby and commended him in front of the home visitor, so that he could also hear that. On her fourth visit, there was also the grandmother (mother's mother), who got upset when she heard that her daughter's husband had to demonstrate the baby bathing skills he had learned. She believed that a woman should take care of the child and house, while a man's responsibility was to take care of the finances and protect the family. She was concerned that her daughter's partner and his family might think that her daughter was "lazy". What would you respond as a home visitor?

Suggestions for responding for frontline workers:

- 1.** Telling them that it is important for the father to be involved in childcare activities from the earliest age for the sake of the child's health, development and achievements in later life.
- 2.** Telling the grandmother that she is clearly invested in the well-being of her daughter's family. Asking the grandmother what it was like for her when she was a young mother and whether it was challenging to meet the needs of her children and broader family (unconditional positive regard).
- 3.** Acknowledging the grandmother's concerns. Acknowledging that it may not have been traditional for men to be involved in childcare but noting that the husband was genuinely open to the idea when it was first discussed, that he is doing great and that he, the baby and the mother are enjoying it (recognising the person-in-situation).

Case Study 3:

You are a preschool teacher working with children age 3 to 5. One day parents of a boy come to the kindergarten asking to talk with you. Father is angry, and mother is quietly standing aside. Father is saying that he does not want his son to play with the girls with dolls and dress as a girl in the family corner. He wants his son to play with the boys, with cars and cubes. He is also saying that he is making jokes with his son that he acts like a girl and that he should look up at him, because he is a real men. What would you do?

Suggestions for responding for frontline workers:

1. Telling father that you understand that he might be worried that his son could be bullied because he likes to play with the girls, but that not to limit opportunities you are encouraging both boys and girls to play with all the toys, and to play with each other.
2. Telling father that he is clearly invested in the well-being of his son and that he wants to be sure that his son's development is supported in the

best possible way. Asking did they as parents talk about this and did they see any changes in the boy that might worry them?

3. Acknowledging that it may not have been traditional for boys to play with girls and "girl's" toys, but that their son is not the only boy playing with girls. And that girls are also playing with boys and with boy's toys. Stressing that the most important is what they are learning from each other and through play.



For more ideas, look at Tips on gender-responsive parenting

TO PROMOTE GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE PARENTING PRACTICES AND APPROACHES, YOU CAN^{73,74}

What parents should do	What you can do in your practice	What you can advise and demonstrate to parents
Minimize the importance of gender as a category and reduce its salience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure to work in mixed groups, and refrain from gendered activities. • Ensure you include every parent and child, regardless of gender, in your practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage parents to model gender-equitable behaviours in a home environment. For example, inform them about avoiding comments that define what mothers or girls should do and what boys or fathers should do. Involve boys in domestic tasks.
Recognize children's increasing independence and abilities and individual needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that each child has equal opportunity and space to express themselves. • Refrain from differentiated approaches and gendered language when discussing their sons and daughters with families. For example, avoid comments like "you have such a sweet daughter who helps you with house chores/strong son who protects the house," etc. • Inform parents with accurate information that children become more aware of stereotypes and more able to challenge them during this period. • Advise parents not to sanction these behaviours but to support them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage and support parents to be attentive to their child's needs and interests in a non-judgmental way. • Encourage parents to be equally involved and interested in their children's lives in friend groups, school life, interests, accomplishments, and goals in life. • Suggest parents to avoid making assumptions about how their child should behave, express themselves and look. Instead encourage them to allow their children to experiment with toys, materials, clothes, and self-expression. • Advise parents to engage in discussions with their children about stereotypes and how children and adults can challenge them.

74. Adapted from https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/16446/file/Tips_on_Gender_Responsive_Parenting.pdf

75. Contreras M, Heilman B, Barker G, Singh A, Verma R, Bloomfield J. (2012). Bridges to adulthood: Understanding the lifelong influence of

<p>Promote gender-neutral learning and play environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure your practice promotes gender-neutral materials, resources and toys. • Build a gender-positive environment that challenges harmful gender stereotypes, such as posters with men in care and women in STEM. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggest parents avoid gendered materials, books, and toys and encourage their children to explore their interests. • Encourage parents to spend quality and fun time together (e.g., playing games, reading, watching movies, etc.) • Support parents to engage in books, movies, and resources that their child is interested in and discuss them with their children. • Advise parents not to prohibit books, TV shows, and social media, but to talk with their children and discuss the effects materials have on them.
<p>Use outdoor, natural play to promote non-gendered play</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform parents about the benefits of physical outdoor space. • Provide accurate information to parents that all children, regardless of their gender, are capable of rough outdoor play. • Stress the strengths in girls and weaknesses in boys. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support parents to equally provide physical and outdoor activities for their sons and daughters.
<p>Avoid gender-based violence and harmful practices at home and in broader society</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an open and safe space for a family to share problems that might be related to gender-based violence at home. • Find ways to reach out to vulnerable families in your practice actively. • Inform parents about cyber security and safety, and support them with digital literacy. • Inform parents about the adverse child outcomes of domestic violence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide them with tips and support for non-violent communication and a democratic family environment. • Encourage them to seek help from authorities, if necessary. • Connect them to parent's support groups. • Inform parents about resources on digital literacy and cyber-safety. • Encourage parents to communicate with their children about cyber violence, over-sexualization, and harmful messages on gender stereotypes in a non-judgmental way. • Advise parents to use every opportunity to model to their children how to speak out against gender inequality.

<p>Foster warm and caring interactions with children regardless of their gender</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that children feel safe and encouraged to share their emotions and opinions in your workplace regardless of their gender. • Avoid assuming gender stereotypes such as ‘boys are strong and should not cry.’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage families to show love and be affectionate towards their children regardless of gender. • Encourage families to challenge their gender stereotypes in showing love and affection towards their sons and daughters. For example, encourage families to recognize and acknowledge their sons’ emotions and vulnerabilities without comments such as ‘but you are a boy, you should toughen up.’ • Advise parents to comfort children if they are not successful in typical gendered activities.
<p>Fathers should get involved and enjoy parenting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always use gender-equal inclusive language, avoid assumptions about fathers’ and mothers’ roles at home, and always welcome all parents/caregivers to your workplace. • Refer to fathers and mothers on child development and care topics related to their children; avoid seeing fathers incompetent for care but rather recognize them as experts for their own children’s care and development. • Inform about the benefits of father involvement with accurate information such as father’s participation in domestic duties and/or child care is associated with a lower likelihood of violence toward children.⁷⁵ • Be aware of other resources in your community for positive fatherhood and refer your clients to them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggest simple activities for fathers, to begin with, to be more engaged in their child’s development and care, such as feeding, changing diapers, reading together, outdoor activities, etc. • Encourage fathers and mothers to talk about and display behaviours that challenge gender stereotypes—for example, fathers frequently cook for their children and talk about how they enjoy it. • Listen to fathers’ and mothers’ attitudes and understanding of childcare and provide another perspective for co-alliance in child care in the home environment. • Pay attention to what fathers need and want and openly ask them; avoid a matrifocal perspective on childcare.

Service providers from different sectors might engage in diverse interactions with parents and caregivers based on their sector, although it is important to have shared values and understanding about gender equality and gender-transformative approaches. Below, we lay out the main

differences in interactions and provide specific tips per three main sectors; health, education and social protection.

men’s childhood experiences of violence. Analyzing data from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES). Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Promundo. <http://www.promundo.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Bridges-to-Adulthood.pdf>

Sector	Sector	Early childhood (0 to 5)
Health	Main interactions with children and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wellness, sick, and chronic illness care Screening for learning disabilities
	Tips for practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gently challenge parents to recognize biases and offer girls and boys equal opportunities Lay the foundation for sexual education
Education	Main interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elementary school
	Tips for practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledge gender-based needs of children regardless of their gender and gender identity Create gender responsive and safe learning environment Reach out to parents and organize outreach activities to keep girls in schools Value equally the learning ability of both female and male students and giving them equal chances (e.g. while answering questions, leading discussions) Facilitate both female and male students' abilities to learn, progress equally, and develop their potential to the fullest React cautiously to unfriendly and potentially gender-biased attitudes that students may demonstrate toward their female and male peers Help students question gender-biased attitudes to prevent them from happening in the future Look for characteristics/behaviours resulting from social norms that may hinder academic learning and performance and addressing them (e.g., shyness, arrogance, dominance, bullying, lack of confidence, and fear of speaking out in class) Call children by their names without using colloquial phrases such as "pal" for a boy" or "dear" for a girl Assign similar duties to female and male students (such as tidying and moving furniture) Discourage and sanction gender-discriminatory and sexist behaviours
Social Protection	Main interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Screen for GBV
	Tips for practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gently challenge parents to recognize biases and offer girls and boys equal opportunities Support father's involvement even when the parents are divorced or fathers are absent Support children (and their parents) with gender dysphoria Inform parents about the importance of a safe environment that is free from abuse and violence, rich nutrition, and responsive and warm interactions in child development regardless of gender



MODULE III

Be who you are

**Responsive parenting in middle childhood
(From the ages of 6-10)**

I. Introduction



KEY MESSAGES – WHY IS THIS MODULE IMPORTANT FOR YOU

- Middle childhood is significant because children move from stereotype rigidity toward stereotype flexibility.
- Middle childhood is also a developmental stage when children can recognize, name, and challenge acts and patterns of discrimination and injustice.
- In middle childhood, parents, grandparents, and other caregivers play an important role in gender socialization.
- School and peers play a crucial role in gender socialization and have the potential to influence parents, challenge gender norms and expectations, help children step out of traditional gender roles, or to perpetuate and enhance gender inequality.
- Middle childhood can be very challenging. In this period, trying to fit in the typical gender roles and avoid peer or parents/family pressure, many girls lower ambitions and give up activities not acceptable for their gender, even if they like them and are good at them. Likewise, boys, while trying to fit in the typical gender roles, may give up activities or work on suppressing their emotions to appear tough.
- In middle childhood, boys identify more strongly as masculine than girls do as feminine.



LEARNING OUTCOMES

After this module, you will:

- Know how to describe key developmental processes of middle childhood.
- Be able to explain the complexity of gender development in middle childhood.
- Understand the importance of the school environment and the influence that teachers and peers have.
- Think of age-specific gender-responsive strategies parents and caregivers might use to develop positive gender norms in children.

II. Specificness of middle childhood, gender socialization, and identity

Middle childhood (6 to 10 years) is sometimes called the golden era of childhood. Children are usually healthy, their development and growth are stable, and physical, social, and mental skills develop quickly.

This is also a period when children become independent, which means a lot to them. By starting school, they learn about the world around them and their place in it and having friends and forming friendships is of utmost importance.

Middle childhood is a critical time for children to develop confidence and self-respect. They long to be accepted and acknowledged by people other than their families.

By the age of ten, children express their gender identity more consistently. However, at that time, as a result of their previous and present experiences, they start to recognize gender discrimination and gender stereotypes for the first time.⁷⁶

The table below summarizes the main developmental changes in middle childhood⁷⁷:

Early adolescence (10-13 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biological changes lead to pubertal development. • Physical growth and hormonal changes accelerate. • Changes in brain development begin. • Rapid emotional changes might occur, and emotional regulation might be burdensome. • The importance of peers increases rapidly. • Memory capabilities increase. • Risk-taking behaviour increases.
Middle adolescence (14-16 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differences occur between girls and boys in physical development: Girls tend to cross the puberty period, while boys tend to continue maturing. • Awareness of body image increases, especially girls become more susceptible to body image issues. • The role of friends is pivotal in this stage and affects identity maintenance. • Emotional regulation skills become better in identifying and understanding personal and others' emotions. • Complex memory strategies, perception, and planning processes become rapid. • Impulse control increases.

76. https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/16436/file/Gender_Responsive_Parenting.pdf

77. Adapted from: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting/middle.html>

Late adolescence (17-19 years)

- Emotional development becomes more stable.
- Role of others increases.
- Purpose in life and concerns about the future become the focus.
- Emotional and physical intimacy increases.
- Emotional stability is expected, and a sense of humor develops.
- Independence increases, and adolescents become more self-reliant.
- Sexual orientation becomes clearer.
- Setting goals, expressing themselves, and generating ideas become more evident.
- Confidence increases.



THINK AND REFLECT

Watch the video: Boys and Girls on Stereotypes, New York Magazine, 2018, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aTvGSstKd5Y>

What is the video about?

Are you surprised to hear children's responses and perspectives? Why or why not?

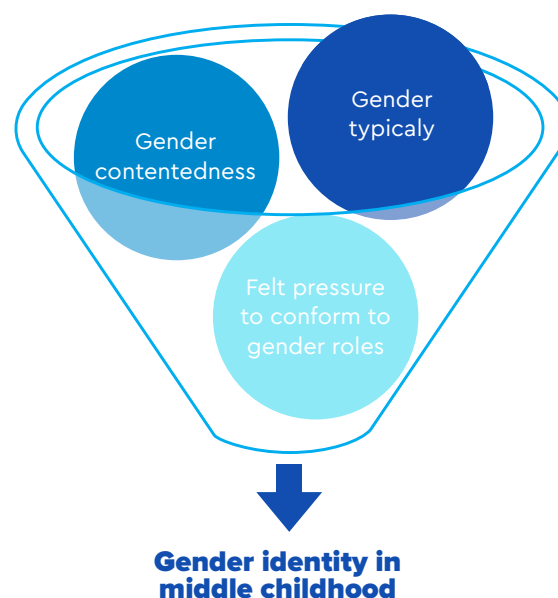
Reflect on your practice: Do you think you have different expectations from boys and girls?

Gender identity, children's understanding of what it means to be a boy or a girl, and what they must do to fit into this stereotypical image become more complex. The essential factors that influence the psychological well-being of children as their gender identity evolves include⁷⁸:

- Gender typicality – the degree to which an individual feels similar to others of the same gender
- Gender contentedness – the degree to which an individual feels comfortable with an assigned gender role, and
- Felt pressure to conform to gender roles - the degree to which a child feels that their family and peers approve of how they fit in assigned gender roles.

Gender identity can also impact a child's self-esteem.

Gender atypical and children who do not show gender contentedness are likely to be under the intense pressure to conform to gender roles and often have lower self-esteem than gender-typical and gender-contented children.⁷⁹ This is the time when they are more likely to be exposed to bullying.



It is important to note that trajectories of the development of gender identity tend to be different in boys compared to girls in their middle childhood.

78. Yunger, JL, Carver, PR, Perry, DG. Does gender identity influence children's psychological well-being. Dev Psychol. 2004; 40:572-582

79. Sravanti, L., and Vijay Sagar Kommu, John. (2020). Journal of Psychosexual Health 2(2) 192–193, 2020, SAGE. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2631831820924596>



Boys might identify themselves with the stereotypical 'masculine' ways more than girls might identify themselves with stereotypical 'feminine' ways.⁸⁰

In middle childhood, children's socio-cognitive development makes them more susceptible to societal biases. However, these biases have the potential to reduce in impact by age as children become more flexible in their thinking and seeing the world around them as they grow older towards the end of elementary school.

During middle childhood, children become increasingly aware of gender stereotypes and expectations from the

gender brought within. While trying to fit in the typical role and avoid peer or parents/family pressure, some children can give up activities and behaviours not acceptable for their gender, even if they like them and are good at them, e.g., girls may give up sports, and boys may pretend to be tough while hiding their sensitivity.

What is worrying is that girls start to believe that they are less competent than boys in middle childhood, and in many cases, their academic achievements and their self-confidence drop.



- Tend to use more masculine traits to describe themselves.
- Behave in more stereotypically masculine ways (think and act like a man).
- Identify more with male gender role.
- Value "masculine" characteristics.
- Demonstrate a pre masculine identity free of feminine attributes.



- Some girls foster feminine identities and behave in more stereotypical feminine ways.
- Majority of girls at this age tend to be more androgynous in their self-descriptions, endorsing and embracing both feminine and masculine traits and behaviours.
- Reduce identification with feminine role – they want to try everything and not be restricted with the typical role.

80. Sravanti, L., and Vijay Sagar Kommu, John.(2020). Journal of Psychosexual Health 2(2) 192–193, 2020, SAGE. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2631831820924596>



Research done in the UK shows that at the age of seven, children have a gender gap: When asked to draw what they want to be when they grow up five times more boys draw firefighters and soldiers than girls; two times more boys than boys girls draw scientists. Girls choose to be hairdressers, teachers, and doctors. In UK more women attend high-level universities like Cambridge. They are not worried about their competencies but about self-confidence.

When asked to draw surgeons, fighter pilots, and firefighters, 92% of children draw men. Watch the video to see their reactions when meeting women doing these jobs – Upworthy, 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3Aweo-74kY&t=5s>.

Optional: For more information, watch the following videos (Real Stories, 2019):

- Gender Free Kids: Questioning Gender-Based Prejudice (Education Documentary) episode 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrlcXMahB78&t=3s&ab_channel=RealStories
- No More Boys and Girls - Gender Free Kids episode 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DmUJcRrX48&ab_channel=RealStories

The middle childhood period is when changes happen in moving from stereotype rigidity toward stereotype flexibility.⁸¹

When they are encouraged, children can show flexibility and acknowledge that men and women can engage in non-stereotypical activities and jobs. During this period, many children feel empowered to explore all types of activities

and roles, allowing them to be more flexible in how they describe themselves.

Girls may want to engage with their fathers, such as building a bookshelf, or boys would like to learn to cook and spend time with their grandmothers.



The more they are given the opportunities, they become more flexible in their beliefs and attitudes towards gender stereotypes.



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81. Serbin, L. A., Powlishta, K. K., Gulko, J., Martin, C. L., & Lockhead, M. E. (1993). The development of sex typing in middle childhood. Monographs of the society for research in child development, i-95. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Kimberly-Powlishta/publication/14723826_The_Development_of_Sex_Typing_in_Middle_Childhood/links/5c097ab44585157ac1adb1eb/The-Development-of-Sex-Typing-in-Middle-Childhood.pdf

III. Supporting parents for gender-transformative parenting – Tips for practitioners and parents

This is a significant period to challenge gender norms and use peer reinforcement/influence to change gendered behaviours.

In the study done with 200 children aged between 7 years 11 months and 10 years 9 months, children were engaged in gender-atypical behaviours and were praised by their peers and adults. Peer reinforcers were more effective with younger children on child-oriented tasks, whereas adult reinforcers were more effective with older ones and

adult-oriented gender tasks. Both studies found that more atypical behaviour was elicited with male influencers.⁸²

This shows a critical approach for gender-transformative practitioners and parents to model and reinforce gender-atypical behaviours and thus give children the opportunity to be who they want to be.

Additional approaches are in the following table:



82. Katz, P. A., & Walsh, P. V. (1991). Modification of children's gender-stereotyped behavior. *Child Development*, 62(2), 338–351. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1131007>

TO PROMOTE GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE PARENTING PRACTICES AND APPROACHES, YOU CAN

What parents should do	What you can do in your practice	What you can advise and demonstrate to parents
Minimize the importance of gender as a category and reduce its salience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure to work in mixed groups, and refrain from gendered activities. • Ensure you include every parent and child, regardless of gender, in your practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage parents to model gender-equitable behaviours in a home environment. For example, inform them about avoiding comments that define what mothers or girls should do and what boys or fathers should do. Involve boys in domestic tasks.
Recognize children's increasing independence and abilities and individual needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that each child has equal opportunity and space to express themselves. • Refrain from differentiated approaches and gendered language when discussing their sons and daughters with families. For example, avoid comments like 'you have such a sweet daughter who helps you with house chores/strong son who protects the house', etc. • Inform parents with accurate information that children become more aware of stereotypes and more able to challenge them during this period. • Advise parents not to sanction these behaviours but to support them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage and support parents to be attentive to their child's needs and interests in a non-judgmental way. • Encourage parents to be equally involved and interested in their children's lives in friend groups, school life, interests, accomplishments, and goals in life. • Suggest parents to avoid making assumptions about how their child should behave, express themselves and look. Instead encourage them to allow their children to experiment with toys, materials, clothes, and self-expression. • Advise parents to engage in discussions with their children about stereotypes and how children and adults can challenge them.
Promote gender-neutral learning and play environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure your practice promotes gender-neutral materials, resources and toys. • Build a gender-positive environment that challenges harmful gender stereotypes, such as posters with men in care and women in STEM. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggest parents avoid gendered materials, books, and toys and encourage their children to explore their interests. • Encourage parents to spend quality and fun time together (e.g., playing games, reading, watching movies, etc.) • Support parents to engage in books, movies, and resources that their child is interested in and discuss them with their children. • Advise parents not to prohibit books, TV shows, and social media, but to talk with their children and discuss the effects materials have on them.

<p>Use outdoor, natural play to promote non-gendered play</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform parents about the benefits of physical outdoor space. • Provide accurate information to parents that all children, regardless of their gender, are capable of rough outdoor play. • Stress the strengths in girls and weaknesses in boys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support parents to equally provide physical and outdoor activities for their sons and daughters.
<p>Avoid gender-based violence and harmful practices at home and in broader society</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an open and safe space for a family to share problems that might be related to gender-based violence at home. • Find ways to reach out to vulnerable families in your practice actively. • Inform parents about cyber security and safety, and support them with digital literacy. • Inform parents about the adverse child outcomes of domestic violence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide them with tips and support for non-violent communication and a democratic family environment. • Encourage them to seek help from authorities, if necessary. • Connect them to parent's support groups. • Inform parents about resources on digital literacy and cyber-safety. • Encourage parents to communicate with their children about cyber violence, over-sexualization, and harmful messages on gender stereotypes in a non-judgmental way. • Advise parents to use every opportunity to model to their children how to speak out against gender inequality.
<p>Foster warm and caring interactions with children regardless of their gender</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that children feel safe and encouraged to share their emotions and opinions in your workplace regardless of their gender. • Avoid assuming gender stereotypes such as 'boys are strong and should not cry.' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage families to show love and be affectionate towards their children regardless of gender. • Encourage families to challenge their gender stereotypes in showing love and affection towards their sons and daughters. For example, encourage families to recognize and acknowledge their sons' emotions and vulnerabilities without comments such as 'but you are a boy, you should toughen up.' • Advise parents to comfort children if they are not successful in typical gendered activities.



Fathers should get involved and enjoy parenting

- Always use gender-equal inclusive language, avoid assumptions about fathers' and mothers' roles at home, and always welcome all parents/caregivers to your workplace.
- Inform about the benefits of father involvement with accurate information. For example you can say that research results highlight that when fathers are involved: children learn more; have better cognitive development and better school performance; show considerable problem-solving skills (increased curiosity, greater resistance to stress and frustration, more willing to try new things); have enhanced cognitive skills (verbal skills, higher scores in tests of cognitive ability).
- Encourage both parents' involvement in their children's lives and remind them that father involvement empowers both daughters and sons.
- Encourage fathers to be role models challenging gender stereotypes in home environment. For example, suggest cooking time with sons and outdoor activities with daughters.
- Encourage fathers to engage in equal interactions with mother/female caregivers in family decision-making and be a role models.
- Encourage fathers to show interest in schooling, not only in grades but also in how children feel, what they like to learn, etc.

Challenge harmful gender norms and intergenerational transmission of harmful norms and practices

- Educate yourself about the importance of other agents of socialization and parents as primary agents of gender socialization.
- Inform parents and caregivers about the influence of peers and social media, such as exposure to unrealistic body images, online sexual violence and abuse, and messages of toxic masculinity.
- Encourage parents to get informed on social media use and gain skills to filter content.
- Encourage parents to communicate about the use of social media, its effects on peers, and harmful gender norms with their children.
- Encourage parents to provide a safe environment for children to share their experiences with peers.

IV. The role of schools, teachers (educators), and peers

In many countries, children start formal schooling in the middle childhood period. As aforementioned, this is the period that children begin to become more independent, but also the influence of peers, social media, and other agents of socialization begin to increase. As part of the educational system, teachers play a crucial role in gender socialization by providing boys and girls with different learning opportunities and feedback. Teachers also model and provide information about gender by usually using very gender stereotypical content.⁸³

By organizing the learning environment, choosing gender-inclusive materials and curriculum, and creating a safe space for challenging traditional gender norms, teachers can be a good model for parents.

Among other things, a school that fosters **gender-transformative approaches**⁸⁴ recognizes and addresses the gender-based needs of children regardless of their gender and gender identity through its management system, policies, and practices,

- Reviews the curriculum, textbooks, other learning materials, and teachers' guides on how issues related to gender, equality, and inclusion are addressed.
- Supports gender-responsive teaching approaches and tools addressing and preventing sexual harassment and physical and sexual abuse.

- Support continuous education of poor and at-risk girls by providing scholarships and different types of support—advocate with parents for leaving girls in school and address all kinds of gender discrimination.

A gender-responsive **learning environment** may involve⁸⁵

- A mixed seating arrangement that enhances the equal participation of boys and girls and encourages girls to speak out.
- Posters and visual aids on the walls that send gender-transformative messages and highlight student work about gender positive messages and equally among boys and girls.
- Safety that allows for healthy interactions.

Key skills and strategies demonstrated by teachers who promote gender-responsive and transformative approaches may include^{86,87}:

- Valuing the learning ability of both female and male students equally and giving them equal chances (e.g. while answering questions, leading discussions)
- Facilitating both female and male students' abilities to learn, progress equally, and develop their potential to the fullest

83. The Role of Schools in the Early Socialization of Gender Differences: <https://www.child-encyclopedia.com/pdf/expert/gender-early-socialization/according-experts/role-schools-early-socialization-gender-differences>

84. Heikkilä, M. Gender equality work in preschools and early childhood education settings in the Nordic countries—an empirically based illustration. *Palgrave Commun* 6, 75 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-0459-7>

85. FAW (2018). *Gender Responsive Pedagogy: A Toolkit for Teachers and Schools*. 2nd, updated ed. Nairobi: Forum for African Women Educationalists. FAW House

86. Mlamba P, Dioum M, Makoye H, Murage L, Wagah M, Washika R. 2005. *Gender Responsive Pedagogy: A Teacher's Handbook*. Nairobi, Kenya: Forum for African Women Educationalists

87. UNESCO, 2009. *Gender in Education Network in Asia-Pacific (GENIA) Toolkit: Promoting Gender Equality in Education*. Bangkok, Thailand

- Reacting cautiously to unfriendly and potentially gender-biased attitudes that students may demonstrate toward their female and male peers
- Helping students question gender-biased attitudes to prevent them from happening in the future
- Looking for characteristics/behaviours resulting from social norms that may hinder academic learning and performance and addressing them (e.g., shyness, arrogance, dominance, bullying, lack of confidence, and fear of speaking out in class)
- Calling children by their names without using colloquial phrases such as “pal” for a boy” or “dear” for a girl
- Assigning similar duties to female and male students (such as tidying and moving furniture)
- Discouraging and punishing gender-discriminatory and sexist behaviours

Service providers from different sectors might engage in diverse interactions with parents and caregivers based on their sector, although it is important to have shared values and understanding about gender equality and gender-transformative approaches. Below, we lay out the main differences in interactions and provide specific tips per three main sectors; health, education and social protection.

Sector	Sector	Adolescence		
		Early (10-13)	Middle (14-16)	Late (17-19)
Health	Main interactions with children and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifting relationship from being oriented toward the parent to engaging more directly and privately with the child • Puberty education and care • Management of menstrual symptoms as needed • Mental health care as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puberty education and care • Management of menstrual symptoms as needed • Mental health care as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puberty education and care • Management of menstrual symptoms as needed • Mental health care as needed
	Tips for practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide sexual health education and care; including discussion of consent and coercion • Promote positive body image 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide sexual health education and care; including discussion of consent and coercion • Promote positive body image 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide sexual health education and care; including discussion of consent and coercion • Promote positive body image

Education	Main interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middle school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High school & college
	Tips for practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize your own bias and try to treat boys and girls equally • Recognize limitations of traditional gender socialization and try to interrupt harmful norms in your interactions with children • Try to use subjects and examples in your teaching that appeal to and resonate with girls and boys • Utilize peer support and education • Be a safe person for kids to talk to about issues important to them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize your own bias and try to treat boys and girls equally • Recognize limitations of traditional gender socialization and try to interrupt harmful norms in your interactions with children • Try to use subjects and examples in your teaching that appeal to and resonate with girls and boys • Utilize peer support and education • Be a safe person for kids to talk to about issues important to them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize your own bias and try to treat boys and girls equally • Recognize limitations of traditional gender socialization and try to interrupt harmful norms in your interactions with children • Try to use subjects and examples in your teaching that appeal to and resonate with girls and boys • Utilize peer support and education • Be a safe person for kids to talk to about issues important to them
Social Protection	Main interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screen for GBV 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screen for GBV 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screen for GBV
	Tips for practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a safe person for kids to talk to about issues important to them • Support children (and their parents) with gender dysphoria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a safe person for kids to talk to about issues important to them • Support children (and their parents) with gender dysphoria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a safe person for kids to talk to about issues important to them • Support children (and their parents) with gender dysphoria



MODULE IV

strong independent and responsible

Gender-transformative parenting in adolescence
(from 11 to the age of 18)

I. Introduction



KEY MESSAGES – WHY IS THIS MODULE IMPORTANT FOR YOU

- Adolescence is a crucial developmental period that embraces the transition from childhood to young adulthood. There are rapid changes in all developmental domains. Especially with the onset of puberty and the increased effect of other agents of socialization such as peers, society's gender roles, stereotypes, and values are internalized.
- For meaningful participation and interactions with adolescents, adolescents should be given safe, non-violent, and nurturing spaces to express themselves openly, communicate effectively, share their ideas, and participate in decision-making.
- Open and direct communication about sexual and reproductive health, harmful gender stereotypes posed by social media and society, and gender-based violence carry utmost importance to be able to support adolescents.
- Even though the impact of other socialization agents significantly increases during this period, parents continue to be the primary influencers of gender socialization. Adolescents can incorporate their socialization into peer dynamics. Therefore, modelling gender equitable behaviors and challenging gender norms in the home environment is crucial.
- As practitioners, you can support parents who seek help in dealing with their concerns about adolescents while they are autonomous. Your role is significant in ensuring girls' healthy development, safety, and rights.



LEARNING OUTCOMES

After this module, you will:

- Know how to describe key developmental processes during different stages of adolescence development (early, middle and late adolescence).
- Be able to explain the role of parents and institutions, peer dynamics, and social media on gender socialization.
- Be able to support parents in developing parenting alliances in adolescence.
- Think of age-specific gender-transformative strategies and approaches parents and caregivers might use to support positive gender norms in children.



THINK AND REFLECT



Examine the photos.

What do you see? How would you describe them?

- Reflect on your own description: Do you think you were biased while describing them?
- Do you think the adolescents in the pictures have healthy gender socialization and development? Why or why not?

- Reflect on what can you do to challenge existing biases, foster gender equality, provide equal chances for boys and girls and give space to them to express themselves freely?

Pictures⁸⁸

88. https://lwllies.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/MADMAN_I-USED-TO-BE-NORMAL_1120-1-1.jpg https://www.oregister.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/OCR-LHSFB-SERVITE-0825.12.kg_26647657_1591451.jpg?w=620, <https://d21zeai42a92w.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/STEMGirl-iStock.jpg>, https://media.istockphoto.com/photos/teenager-cleaning-the-kitchen-picture-id1130453338?k=20&m=1130453338&s=612x612&w=0&h=CFMgkdtaCOxh67RS5T-Q57s-_0Dm9eSq_FpXxEAn44=, <https://ichef.bbci>

II. Specificness of adolescence, positive gender socialization, and identity

Adolescence is the transition period from childhood to adulthood. Adolescents go through many changes in terms of physical and sexual development, brain development, cognitive development, and social-emotional development. Changes in height and weight are expected. These changes might happen gradually with the onset of puberty but also growth spurts can occur where developmental changes become visible simultaneously. It is important to remember that each adolescent is different, and they develop at their own pace. Signs of changes and growth can be visible sooner or later than peers and it is normal to be smaller or bigger compared to their peers for some adolescents.

During this period, a sense of self-identity emerges, and adolescents begin to explore their interests, form beliefs and have values and goals. They may also engage increasingly in risky behaviour. They develop a desire for independence and autonomy, and their relationships with parents and caregivers shift.⁸⁹

Scholars divide adolescence into three broad stages: early adolescence (10-13 years), middle adolescence (14-16 years), and late adolescence (17-19 years).⁹⁰

<p>Early adolescence (10-13 years)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biological changes lead to pubertal development. • Physical growth and hormonal changes accelerate. • Changes in brain development begin. • Rapid emotional changes might occur, and emotional regulation might be burdensome. • The importance of peers increases rapidly. • Memory capabilities increase. • Risk-taking behaviour increases.
<p>Middle adolescence (14-16 years)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differences occur between girls and boys in physical development: Girls tend to cross the puberty period, while boys tend to continue maturing. • Awareness of body image increases, especially girls become more susceptible to body image issues. • The role of friends is pivotal in this stage and affects identity maintenance. • Emotional regulation skills become better in identifying and understanding personal and others' emotions. • Complex memory strategies, perception, and planning processes become rapid. • Impulse control increases.

co.uk/images/ic/640x360/p07x0kw0.jpg

89. UNICEF, Programming guidance for parenting of adolescents, 2021

Late adolescence (17-19 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional development becomes more stable. • Role of others increases. • Purpose in life and concerns about the future become the focus. • Emotional and physical intimacy increases. • Emotional stability is expected, and a sense of humor develops. • Independence increases, and adolescents become more self-reliant. • Sexual orientation becomes clearer. • Setting goals, expressing themselves, and generating ideas become more evident. • Confidence increases.
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The overarching goal of adolescence is to enable teens to develop independent thought and independent action. To accomplish this goal, adolescents need to complete

four major tasks, such as (i) individuation, (ii) separation, (iii) autonomy, and (iv) cooperation.

Individuation	Identity development: Peers and the social world around them gain more weight in developing a unique identity.	Adolescents need support and encouragement to experiment on what they like or dislike, their values and personality in a non-judgmental way.
Separation	Separating from parental control: Adolescents might reject parents' domination and behave in an impulsive way.	Adolescents need understanding from parents' that impulsive responses from them towards parents are not personal, but a normal part of their development.
Autonomy	Control over one's own life: Adolescents learn to determine their lives in terms of making decisions for themselves.	Adolescents need support and encouragement in decision-making and understanding in terms of making mistakes.
Cooperation	Cooperation with others: Adolescents become aware that relating to others is necessary to be successful.	Adolescents need encouragement in terms of gaining the skills needed to cooperate effectively with others and letting go of self-centered needs.

a. Differences between boys and girls

Adolescence is a significant developmental period where critical biological changes happen and major psychological changes. The major transitions that adolescents go through might pose challenges to cope with and put them under stress. These include the onset of menstruation, change in voice (puberphonia) in boys, development of secondary sexual characteristics, and psychological changes that come

along. It is important to note that the changes in each developmental domain go hand in hand, affecting each other during the stages of adolescent development. For example, physical changes happening during puberty are related to sexual and reproductive development, which is, in turn, linked to social development. Some developmental changes in puberty occur differently for adolescent boys and girls:⁹¹

90. Spano, S. (2004). Stages of adolescent development.

Adolescent boys	Adolescent girls
Exact time of the onset puberty is difficult to know, but with the onset gradual changes occur over a period of time.	In general, the onset of puberty is sooner among adolescent girls compared to boys around the same age. Girls experience puberty as a sequence of events, but the progress for each adolescent can be different.
Physical changes and development of secondary sex characteristics happen: Scrotum and testes enlarges followed by changes in penis size. Pubic hair starts to grow and continues to spread around the body.	Physical changes and development of secondary sex characteristics happen: Breast starts to develop and skin around the nipples starts to change. Pubic hair starts to grow and continues to spread around the body.
Changes in body size occurs, but this might occur faster in feet, arms, legs and hands. Adolescent boys might feel clumsy.	Changes in body size occurs, but this might occur faster in feet, arms, legs and hands. Adolescent girls might feel clumsy. Body shape will also begin to change. Hips might get wider and fat accumulates around buttocks, legs and stomach.
Bodies of adolescent boys will begin to produce sperm. Boys will begin to experience erections and ejaculations which might occur during sleep.	Adolescent girls will begin to have menstrual periods, normally every month. This is related to the hormonal changes that prepares the body for reproduction.

Adolescent girls and boys might need to be supported based on their unique needs in terms of differences that occur during puberty. Earlier research reports differences between boys and girls during the adolescence period in other developmental domains such as social, emotional and cognitive development.⁹² However, the differences in other developmental and social domains are quite small and should not influence the ways how parents and caregivers

interact with their children. It is important to note the different tendencies that boys and girls show largely stem from the contextual factors. Societal expectations and processes of gender socialization are found to shape the level of gender typicality and conformity. If these gender differences are stereotyped, they might have negative effects on child development and well-being:

Reported differences in...	Boys	Girls	Effects on development and well-being
Interests and abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boys tend to be more things oriented, e.g. working with tools. Boys are more likely to be better at spatial tasks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Girls tend to be more people oriented, e.g. more contact with people. Girls are more likely to be better at verbal tasks. Girls tend to choose easier tasks and have lower expectations than boys. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limits future occupation options and life choices for both sexes. E.g. limiting STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) options for girls, and limiting work that involves social skills and care perspective. Might create performance anxiety on certain topics, especially among girls.

91. Stanford Children's Health. Puberty: Adolescent Male & Teen Girl <https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=puberty-adolescent-male-90-P01636> - <https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=puberty-adolescent-female-90-P01635>

Perceived personality and self-concept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boys tend to report being assertive and open to ideas more than girls. Body image concerns are more related to being muscular. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Girls tend to report being agreeable, warm, and open to feelings more than boys. Have poorer body image perception than boys. Girls tend to be affected by models on media and dissatisfied their bodies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Girls' self-esteem is more easily affected compared to boys, mainly based on relational problems and perceptions of self. Might cause serious health problems such as eating disorders, depression, compulsive exercise or body-building.
Gender identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender identity is stronger, tend to be more gender typical compared to girls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sexual identity is more fluid among females. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expectations for gender typicality and conformity creates more distress among adolescents.
Social relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friendly competition, risky activities, excitement as well as inhibition of intimacy and emotions characterizes same sex friendships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-disclosure, validation, caring, intimacy as well as jealousy characterizes same sex friendships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The characteristics of relationships styles might be protective for girls, e.g. less externalizing behaviours, but might increase vulnerability for depression. For boys, the reverse might be observed. Relationship styles and experiences during adolescence might affect social and personal functioning in adulthood.
Aggressive behaviours, bullying and victimization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boys tend to engage in more overt aggressive behaviours and violence than girls. Boys tend to be perpetrators for sexual harassment, but they are also harassed at similar degree as girls. Boys are more likely to engage in early and unprotected sexual behaviours compared to girls. Electronic aggression and bullying equally affects boys and girls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Girls tend to engage more in indirect aggression compared to boys. Girls are hurt more by sexual harassment. Electronic aggression and bullying equally affects boys and girls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Violence in adolescence might increase during adulthood. This might bring negative outcomes for girls' and women's health and wellbeing in terms of being exposed to violence as well as consequences such as unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. Although boys and girls are both perpetrators and victims to similar degrees, girls tend to be negatively affected. e.g. circulation of sexualized content of adolescent girls, nude pictures etc.

Moreover, the way these changes occur might also differ across cultures. They can be affected by the societal factors and social roles available to adolescents. Societies and families might vary in interpreting the biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes across adolescence. Family

and society's attitudes and cultural influences on these changes during puberty play a significant role in deciding adolescents' sexual behaviour after puberty. Parents need support to understand better their children's difficulties to guide their children in the crossroads of adolescence.⁹³

92. Perry, D. G., & Pauletti, R. E. (2011). Gender and adolescent development. *Journal of research on adolescence*, 21(1), 61-74. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/229523753_Gender_and_Adolescent_Development

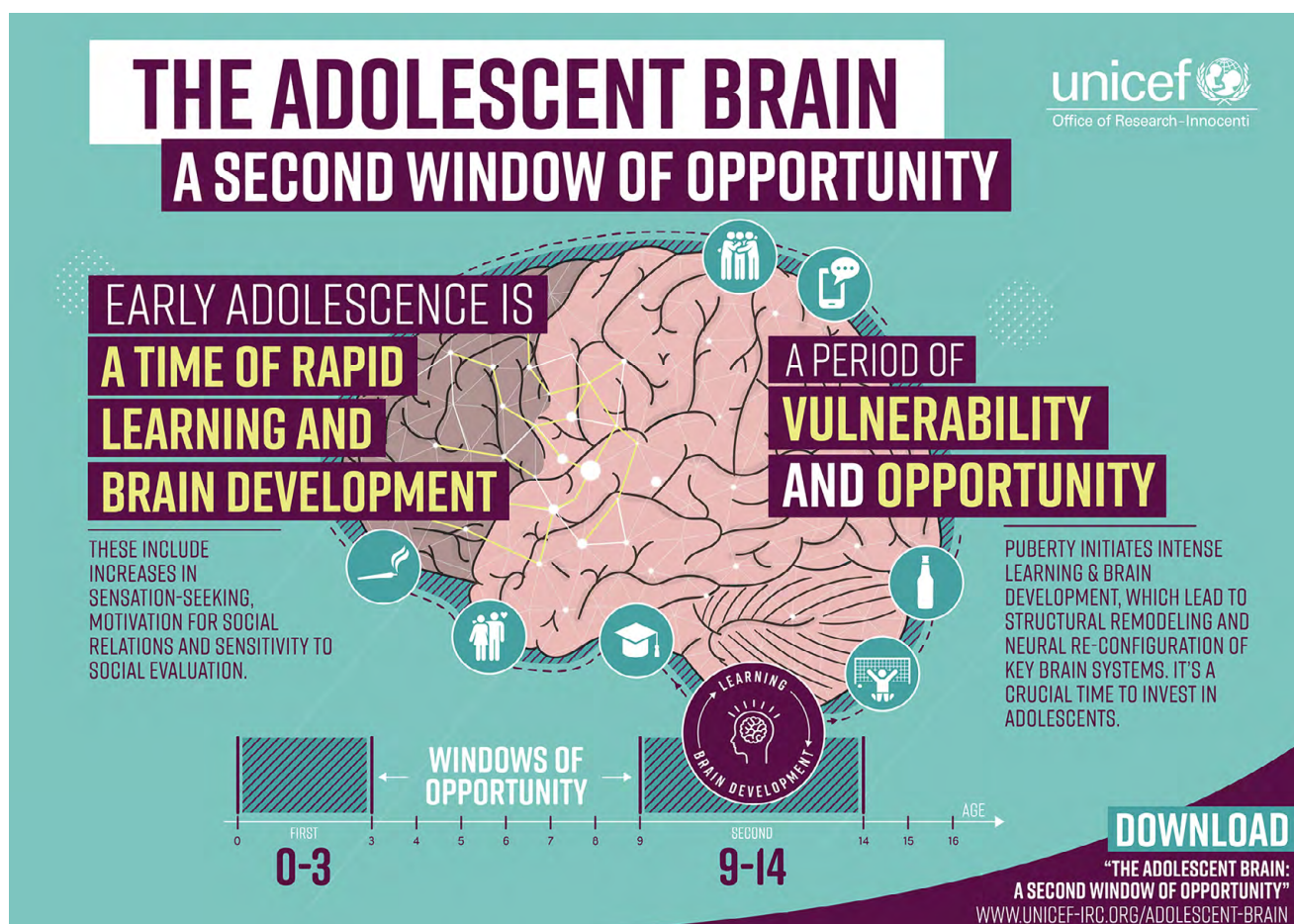
b. Brain Development in Adolescence⁹⁴

Ample research has shown that the brains of young children change dramatically in the early years. New scientific discoveries also highlight the importance of brain development during adolescence. The brain goes through an intensive remodelling during adolescence, which can continue until the mid-twenties.

The changes in the brain during this period are related to puberty and hormonal changes occurring accordingly, as well as experiences and age. Recent research has shown that adolescent brains go through changes in cerebral structure and function influenced by psychological and biological changes.⁹⁵ With the help of new neuroimaging techniques, scientists detected a decrease in the grey matter in the brain but an increase in white matter. The grey matter relates to brain regions for muscle control, sensory perception, decision making, and self-control. The connections in the grey matter are pruned away in

this period, and this process starts at the back of the brain. The remodelling of the prefrontal cortex occurs last; this is the brain part related to decision-making, the ability to plan and think about actions and consequences, problem-solving, and impulse control. Due to the changes in the prefrontal cortex, the adolescent brain tends to rely on the amygdala, which is related to emotions and impulsiveness, to engage in the skills mentioned above.

Due to these intensive changes happening in different brain parts, adolescents might engage in high-risk activities and risky behaviour. They might display ranging emotions and tend to make impulsive decisions. For example, on the one hand, sometimes they might show and express themselves maturely, but on the hand, there might be times they think and behave impulsively and emotionally. Adolescents become more susceptible to negative but positive environmental influences as the brain is under construction.



93. Kar, S. K., Choudhury, A., & Singh, A. P. (2015). Understanding normal development of adolescent sexuality: A bumpy ride. *Journal of human reproductive sciences*, 8(2), 70–74. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0974-1208.158594>: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4477452/>

94. https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/adolescent_brain_a_second_window_of_opportunity_a_compendium.pdf



TO SUPPORT ADOLESCENT BRAIN DEVELOPMENT, PARENTS CAN:

- Provide new and different experiences: Healthy risk-taking is beneficial for adolescents' identity development and skills needed for independence.
- Foster creativity and expressiveness: Sports or artistic activities such as music, writing, painting, etc., help adolescents express and control their emotions.
- Support interests, activities, and hobbies: Engaging in such activities helps adolescents develop skills and confidence.
- Communicate with adolescents in decision-making: Guiding them step by step in actions and consequences in terms of decision making.
- Engage in family routines.
- Provide positive reinforcement: Praise positive behaviours⁹⁶.



SERVICE PROVIDERS/FRONTLINE WORKERS CAN:

- Promote enrichment of learning environment as adolescents become better at understanding more complex issues.
- Provide accurate information on brain changes and their impacts on their development to adolescents and their parents/caregivers.
- Arrange your workspace to promote inclusion.
- Foster independence of adolescents by respecting their individuality and identity.⁹⁷

c. The main influencers of socialisation

During adolescence, family, parents, and caregivers continue to be the primary influencer in gender socialization. Beginning from early adolescence, changes in brain development and physical and sexual maturation of puberty during this period affect the parent-child interactions. As these changes occur, the process of individuation begins, adolescents become increasingly autonomous, and their capacities for independent decision-making develop. Parents and children might experience conflict as adolescents break away from the control and domination of their parents and they might have limited time and closeness. Yet, it is essential to note that parents still influence the development of gender identity, roles, and norms for adolescents.

The scope of the agents of socialization starts to diversify and increase in effect towards and during adolescence. Apart from parents and primary caregivers as agents of socialization, social institutions such as schools, social environment and peers, media circles, and the community begin to increase the influence of everyday interactions and shape the social environment. Engaging in daily interactions within this social environment, adolescents learn and adapt their behavior according to the different expectations in gender roles, values, and skills, which develop their gender identity according to the social environment they are exposed to.⁹⁸

95. Konrad, K., Firk, C., & Uhlhaas, P. J. (2013). Brain development during adolescence: neuroscientific insights into this developmental period. *Deutsches Arzteblatt international*, 110(25), 425–431. <https://doi.org/10.3238/arztebl.2013.0425>

96. Adapted from <https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/development/understanding-your-pre-teen/brain-development-teens#teenage-brain-development-the-basics-nav-title>



**Watch
the video:**

Toxic Influence: A Dove Film | Dove Self-Esteem Project
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PwkRHy74cZU>

Discuss what is happening in the video. What do you think about the mothers' reaction? Reflect on yourself: Do you think you are aware of the adverse effects of social media in fostering harmful gender norms? What can you do in your practice (and parenting) to challenge harmful gender norms?

Given the increased risk-taking behaviour and the increased interest in sexuality that many adolescents experience, adolescents may be at risk for unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and gender-based violence.

Gender inequality deepens these risks, as sexual aggression is accepted and encouraged for boys while girls are socialized to be less knowledgeable and less assertive about their sexuality and boundaries. Parents have a critical role in providing positive gender socialization to reduce sexual coercion and violence and promote knowledge, open communication, and safe sexual behaviours.⁹⁹

d. Differential effects of peers between boys and girls in terms of gender socialization

Although the impact of peers on perpetuating gender norms increases beginning from middle childhood to emerging adulthood, parents remain the main agent of socialization.

However, this process can be different for boys and girls:

- Girls might be more expected to stay at home with family members, whereas boys might be more encouraged to spend time outside.
- Boys, thus, might be more susceptible to gender socialization through peer dynamics, whereas for girls parents continue to be the main agent of socialization.

97. Adapted from <https://kids.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/frym.2020.00075>

III. Being a gender-transformative parent during adolescence

Adolescence can be difficult for both parents and children as they need constant communication and interaction to have a healthy development and home environment. This period is a window of opportunity to promote positive gender socialization through gender-transformative parenting. Parental awareness about intensification of gender identity and how gender roles, norms and stereotypes become more prominent during adolescence is key for gender-transformative parenting. Parents might need to support girls and boys differently in this manner, but as parents it is important to be involved, non-judgmental, and responsive with adolescents during their process of becoming more individual and autonomous regardless of gender. Parents can help adolescent girls and boys increase their meaningful participation, develop their identity, and reach their potential. They can help reduce harmful gender socialization and be role models to their children.

What can parents do to support adolescent girls:

- Engage in conversations about menstruation, changes in the body. Provide safe spaces for the adolescent to share experiences and feelings without feeling shame or guilt.
- Talk about healthy sexual behaviours as well as negative consequences of sexual risk behaviours such as unprotected sex.
- Encourage healthy risk-taking behaviours such as trying new activities as a family, volunteering, travelling together, joining teams for arts or sports. Girls are generally expected to be submissive and less independent. Also, they are more monitored by their parents compared to boys.
- Refrain from expecting them to be better at verbal tasks and poorer on maths only. Welcome adolescent girls' interests and abilities in spatial tasks as well. Encourage girls' engagement in STEM areas and future options.
- Talk about how social media can be harmful in creating unrealistic standards on body image and self-esteem. Support adolescent girls to develop a healthy self-concept and self-image.
- Listen and understand vulnerabilities and emotions without judgement. Refrain from stereotypical approaches such as 'girls are overreacting, girls are too emotional.'





What can parent do to support adolescent boys:

- Talk about changes in the body and sexual development and provide safe spaces for the adolescent to share experiences and emotions without feeling shame or guilt.
- Talk about healthy sexual behaviours as well as negative consequences of sexual risk behaviours such as unprotected sex.
- Encourage healthy risk-taking behaviours such as trying new activities as a family, volunteering, travelling together, joining teams for arts or sports. Boys are more likely to engage in risky behaviour with unhealthy consequences. Also, they are monitored less by their parents.
- Refrain from expecting them to be better at spatial tasks such as maths or working with tools only. Welcome adolescent boys' interests and abilities in areas that are traditionally found 'feminine.' Encourage them to explore and consider future people-oriented occupations such as care work, teaching, social work etc.
- Encourage boys to reflect and talk about their emotions and feelings. Refrain from stereotypical approaches such as 'boys should be strong and do not cry'.

- Talk about the harmful messages of social media on behaviours that perpetuate toxic masculinity and unhealthy body image.
- Talk about sexual and reproductive health, discuss about healthy sexual behaviours with a non-judgmental approach.

Regardless of gender, parents and caregivers should also engage in following for gender-transformative parenting:

- **Empowering adolescents and provide space to express themselves:** Involving them in decision-making processes, allow communication, and encourage problem-solving skills. Understanding that adolescents can challenge their parents' way of doing things, and this is a necessary thing for their identity development.
- **Being role models** as parents and question their gender roles in the home environment and society in general: Being in the alliance as parents and caregivers, co-sharing household responsibilities. Refraining from expectations such as girls should help with household chores, and care duties and boys should do heavy work outside the home.



- **Being attentive** to how you communicate with and about adolescents: Avoiding gender-stereotypical language that might limit a healthy identity development, such as 'don't act like a girl, she's being bossy' etc.
- **Being aware and informed** about positive role models and actively seek out books and media about protagonists of all genders: Providing and engaging in resources that promote gender equality, inclusion, and diversity.
- **Being interested and attentive** to adolescents' peer groups and school life: Talking about extracurricular interests and activities and encouraging them to be active in sports, music, art, etc.
- **Engaging in conversations** about harmful vs. positive ways of being a man, woman, or transgender person. Pointing out positive role models with diverse identities.
- **Making sure to spend quality time** with adolescents and finding activities enjoyed together.
- **Ensuring adolescents feel accepted** as individuals and their accomplishments are celebrated in the home environment.
- **Listening actively**, showing interest in adolescents' opinions and concerns, and refraining from devaluing their problems: Providing chances and spaces for them to solve their own problems but ensuring they are available for support and advice.
- **Talking about online and offline bullying and aggression.**
- Ensuring that adolescents get **the nutrition they need**: Helping them get enough sleep, exercise, and balance healthy meals.
- Understanding this is a period of developing a unique individual identity and respect **adolescents' privacy**.

IV. Supporting parents for gender-transformative parenting – Tips for practitioners and parents

As aforementioned, adolescents go through intense biological and psychological changes and changes in brain structure during this period. It can be challenging for parents to engage in gender-transformative parenting during adolescence. Parents might struggle to cope with their adolescents' changing physical, cognitive, and social-emotional needs and the individualization processes that their children go through. It is important that parents and caregivers provide a safe, violence-free offline and online environment where family members can communicate

freely and in a non-judgmental way so that adolescents develop healthy gender identity and agency.

Practitioners should understand the needs of parents as they might be frustrated and stressed and experience conflicts in parent-child interactions.

In the table below, you can find the main domains where, as a practitioner, you can support parents and model a gender-transformative approach.

TO PROMOTE GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE PARENTING PRACTICES AND APPROACHES, YOU CAN ^{100,101}		
What parents should do	What you can do in your practice	What you can advise and demonstrate to parents
Encourage open and honest communication, and provide safe environments for adolescents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide accurate information to parents and adolescents about 'taboo' topics such as romantic relationships, menstruation, contraception, sexuality, consent, and gender identity development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage parents to provide safe spaces for their adolescents to speak up and express themselves without fear Advise parents to be non-judgemental

98. Gender socialization during adolescence in low-middle income countries

99. UNICEF TIPS FOR PARENTS OF ADOLESCENTS TO SUPPORT GENDER RESPONSIVE PARENTING

<p>Minimize the importance of gender as a category and reduce its salience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refrain from gender roles and stereotypes while engaging with families and adolescents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage parents to model gender-equitable behaviours in the home environment. For example, inform them about avoiding comments that define what mothers or girls do or should do and what boys or fathers should do • Encourage parents to motivate adolescents, regardless of gender, to engage in sports, voluntary activities, and humanitarian work • Encourage parents to involve adolescents regardless of gender to help at home
<p>Prevent gender-based violence and harmful practices at home and in broader society</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an open and safe space for families' problems that might be related to gender-based violence at home • Give parents empathy and take care of their mental health • Find ways to reach out to vulnerable families • Inform parents about cyber security and safety, and support them with digital literacy. Refer them to experts in the field • Talk to boys and girls about sexual consent • Communicate messages about body positivity for boys and girls • Be a safe person for adolescents to report bullying, coercion, or abuse • Discuss with parents and adolescents about homophobia and transphobia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide them tips and support for non-violent communication and a democratic family environment • Encourage them to seek help from authorities, if necessary • Inform parents about resources on digital literacy and cyber-safety • Encourage parents to communicate with their children about cyber violence, over-sexualization, and harmful messages on gender stereotypes in a non-judgmental way • Encourage parents to discuss homophobia and transphobia with their children regardless of their own sexual orientation or gender identity
<p>Recognize adolescents as unique individuals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directly engage with adolescents when they are together with their families. Listen and acknowledge adolescents' needs and opinions; model a responsive behaviour to parents. • Provide opportunities for adolescents to engage directly with you in privacy without parent's participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage parents to understand the psycho-social changes adolescents go through. • Encourage parents to respect their children's privacy • Encourage parents to support their adolescents if they decide to explore or transition to a different gender identity or sexual orientation. Refer them to other professionals and connect them with support groups. • Encourage parents to challenge their boys and girls to explore various skills, interests, and professions.

<p>Promote equal chances and opportunities for all adolescents to reach their potential</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that your work promotes equal chances and inclusion for all genders. • Inform parents about the importance of education and consult with peers from other sectors and community stakeholders to prevent school drop-out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind parents about the gender disparities and their adverse effects on adolescents and broader society and help them support their children in a gender-equal way to provide equal opportunities.
<p>Foster warm and caring interactions with children regardless of their gender</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that adolescents feel safe and encouraged to share their emotions and opinions regardless of gender in your workplace. • Avoid assuming gender stereotypes such as 'boys are strong and should not cry.' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage families to show love and be affectionate towards their children regardless of their gender and age. • Encourage families to challenge their own gender stereotypes.
<p>Use resources with positive gender messages</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote positive gender socialization in your workplace by having recourses, images, books, posters, etc., that give a positive gender message. For example, pictures of women in STEM, a caring father, movies, books, or artists with gender-positive protagonists. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage parents to search for gender-positive resources and information and share them by spending quality time with their children.
<p>Fathers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind families that democratic family environments benefit adolescents' development and overall familial well-being. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage fathers to show love and affection, refrain from stereotypical behaviours such as fathers being the rule-makers, and be afraid of but open to democratic communication at home. • Encourage fathers to spend quality time with their children and show genuine interest in their children's way of life and individuality. • Encourage fathers to talk about taboo topics such as sexual and reproductive health, drug and alcohol use, gender-based and peer violence, and positive masculinity with their children, especially boys.



Challenge harmful gender norms and intergenerational transmission of harmful norms and practices

- Educate yourself about the importance of other agents of socialization and parents as primary agents of gender socialization.
- Social media and games carry risks of perpetuating harmful gender roles and stereotypes (e.g., overtly sexualizing young women, giving toxic masculine messages). Inform parents and caregivers about the influence of peers and social media/online games, such as exposure to unrealistic body images, online sexual violence and abuse, and messages of toxic masculinity.
- Encourage parents to get informed on social media use and gain skills to filter content.
- Encourage parents to communicate with adolescents about the use of social media, peer pressure, and harmful gender norms.
- Advise parents to support adolescents to talk openly about romantic relationships, safe sex, online violence, and drug use.
- Support parents to support their children in behaving under peer pressure or other factors.

Service providers from different sectors might engage in diverse interactions with parents and caregivers based on their sector, although it is important to have shared values and understanding about gender equality and gender-

transformative approaches. Below, we lay out the main differences in interactions and provide specific tips per three main sectors; health, education and social protection.

Sector		ADOLESCENCE		
		Early (10-13)	Middle (14-16)	Late (17-19)
Health	Main interactions with children and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shifting relationship from being oriented toward the parent to engaging more directly and privately with the child • puberty education and care • management of menstrual symptoms as needed • mental health care as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • puberty education and care • management of menstrual symptoms as needed • mental health care as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • puberty education and care • management of menstrual symptoms as needed • mental health care as needed
	Tips for practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide sexual health education and care; including discussion of consent and coercion • Promote positive body image 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide sexual health education and care; including discussion of consent and coercion • Promote positive body image 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide sexual health education and care; including discussion of consent and coercion • Promote positive body image
Education	Main interactions	Middle school	High school	High school & college
	Tips for practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognize your own bias and try to treat boys and girls equally • recognize limitations of traditional gender socialization and try to interrupt harmful norms in your interactions with children • Try to use subjects and examples in your teaching that appeal to and resonate with girls and boys • Utilize peer support and education • Be a safe person for kids to talk to about issues important to them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognize your own bias and try to treat boys and girls equally • recognize limitations of traditional gender socialization and try to interrupt harmful norms in your interactions with children • try to use subjects and examples in your teaching that appeal to and resonate with girls and boys • Utilize peer support and education • Be a safe person for kids to talk to about issues important to them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognize your own bias and try to treat boys and girls equally • recognize limitations of traditional gender socialization and try to interrupt harmful norms in your interactions with children • try to use subjects and examples in your teaching that appeal to and resonate with girls and boys • Utilize peer support and education • Be a safe person for kids to talk to about issues important to them



	Main interactions	Screen for GBV	Screen for GBV	Screen for GBV
Social Protection	Tips for practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a safe person for kids to talk to about issues important to them • support children (and their parents) with gender dysphoria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a safe person for kids to talk to about issues important to them • support children (and their parents) with gender dysphoria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a safe person for kids to talk to about issues important to them • support children (and their parents) with gender dysphoria

V. Adolescent Parents

Around the world, nearly 12 million girls aging between 15 and 19 years of age give birth in mainly developing low- and middle-income countries. These estimations show a significant variation across regions, showing high rates in sub-Saharan Africa and South-central and South-Eastern Asia.¹⁰² Adolescent parents may be married and unmarried. Depending on the context, the pregnancies can be regarded as a normal cultural-societal practice, or it can be regarded as shameful, inappropriate and associated with negative stereotypes for adolescents such as irresponsible, sexually promiscuous, unfocused and ambivalent for their future etc.¹⁰³ Pregnant girls and adolescent parents/caregivers might face exclusion and stigmatization in some cases.

There are several factors that influences adolescent pregnancies:

- Girls might be under pressure to get married and have children early in some cultures and societies.
- Limited educational pathways and employment opportunities.
- Lack of sex education, lack of or limited knowledge of contraception, as well as limited agency of adolescents to access and use the correct contraceptive methods.
- Exposure to sexual violence and coerced, unplanned sex. Pregnant adolescent girls and adolescent mothers are more likely to experience violence from their partners.¹⁰⁴

Pregnancies in adolescence might lead to negative

consequences for adolescents in terms of health, social and economic consequences, especially for girls. The leading cause of death among girls aging between 15 and 19 is pregnancy and childbirth complications. Unsafe abortions in this age range add to the rates of maternal mortality and lasting health problems.¹⁰⁵ Pregnant adolescent girls are more likely to drop out of school, negatively impacting their future education and financial security. These risks exacerbate in the cases of substance use, smoking and sexually transmitted infections (STI).¹⁰⁶

Pregnant adolescent girls and adolescent parents face various challenges and might have intersectional and multifaceted needs. They might deal with multiple responsibilities, encounter barriers such as lack of or limited childcare support, restrictive laws and policies, low accessibility to transportation or financial constraints.¹⁰⁷ Adolescent parents might be experiencing more mental health problems, abuse, trauma, violence as well as educational and financial difficulties. Especially depression is common among adolescent mothers; twice as likely compared to nonpregnant adolescent girls.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, repeat pregnancies are also common among adolescent mothers within 24 months of a first birth.¹⁰⁹

Children born to adolescent parents might experience complications such as risk of preterm delivery, low-birth weight, and severe conditions as well as delays in language and cognitive development.¹¹⁰ Earlier research has shown intergenerational cycles in terms of substance abuse, early sexual activity and becoming adolescent parents themselves as well as academic struggles that in turn might limit their future options.¹¹¹

100. Adapted from: http://csrm.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/CSRM_WP4_2018_RESILIENCE_1.pdf

101. Adapted from https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/16446/file/Tips_on_Gender_Responsive_Parenting.pdf

102. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-pregnancy>

103. Adapted from https://www.issa.nl/sites/default/files/pdf/Publications/cross%20sectoral/Module%2018_Supporting%20Families%20for%20Nurturing%20Care_Gender.FINAL_.pdf

104. Loaiza E & Liang M. (2013). Adolescent pregnancy: A review of the evidence. New York: UNFPA.

105. Darroch, J. E., Woog, V., Bankole, A., & Ashford, L. S. (2016). Adding it up: costs and benefits of meeting the contraceptive needs of adolescents.

106. Thompson, G. (2016). Meeting the needs of adolescent parents and their children. Paediatrics & child health, 21(5), 1. <https://cps.ca/en/documents/position/adolescent-parents>

107. Harding, J. F., Zief, S., Farb, A., & Margolis, A. (2020). Supporting Expectant and Parenting Teens: New Evidence to Inform Future Programming and Research. Maternal and Child Health Journal, 24(2), 67-75.

108. Thompson, G. (2016). Meeting the needs of adolescent parents and their children. Paediatrics & child health, 21(5), 1. <https://cps.ca/en/documents/position/adolescent-parents>

109. Barnett B, Liu J, DeVoe M, Duggan AK, Gold MA, Pecukonis E. Motivational intervention to reduce rapid subsequent births to adolescent mothers: A community-based randomized trial. Ann Fam Med 2009;7(5):436-45.



Engagement to suitable supportive networks that help foster positive parenting and combat with adversity is crucial for parental well-being of adolescent parents. It is crucial to emphasize that adolescent parents have the potential to become supportive parents themselves with the right support and intervention.¹¹² Recognizing the needs and challenges of adolescent parents is the first step to provide an inclusive and gender-transformative service provision.

a. Adolescent fathers

Most of the earlier literature on adolescent pregnancy and parenting only focused on adolescent mothers. Mainly girls are targeted for pregnancy prevention programs. The focus on involving young boys and adolescent fathers has been lacking from literature, especially the benefits of father involvement for parental well-being and child outcomes. It is important to recognize that adolescent boys who become adolescent fathers are more likely to be in a generational cycle of poverty. Furthermore, substance use, school delinquency, risky behaviours, low academic attainment are associated with fatherhood in adolescence. Frontline

workers can play a key role in engaging adolescent fathers and promoting equal parenting to foster positive outcomes for both adolescent parents and their children.

b. The role of frontline workers

During adolescence period, compared to early ages, the frequency of health screenings might reduce which makes preventive care rather difficult. In addition, adolescents might experience the fear of being judged and tend to prioritize their privacy. Therefore, encounters with frontline workers usually happens in a health service context during pregnancy or parenting. However, it is important to acknowledge that supporting adolescent parents required a multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach including service provisions in education, social services (e.g. home visiting) and community level engagement.

Frontline workers play a key role in promoting positive outcomes for adolescent parents as well as their babies. The following points provide an overview of key elements to support adolescent parents and their children. The main element is that all types of support and care activities should be provided in the context of adolescent development.

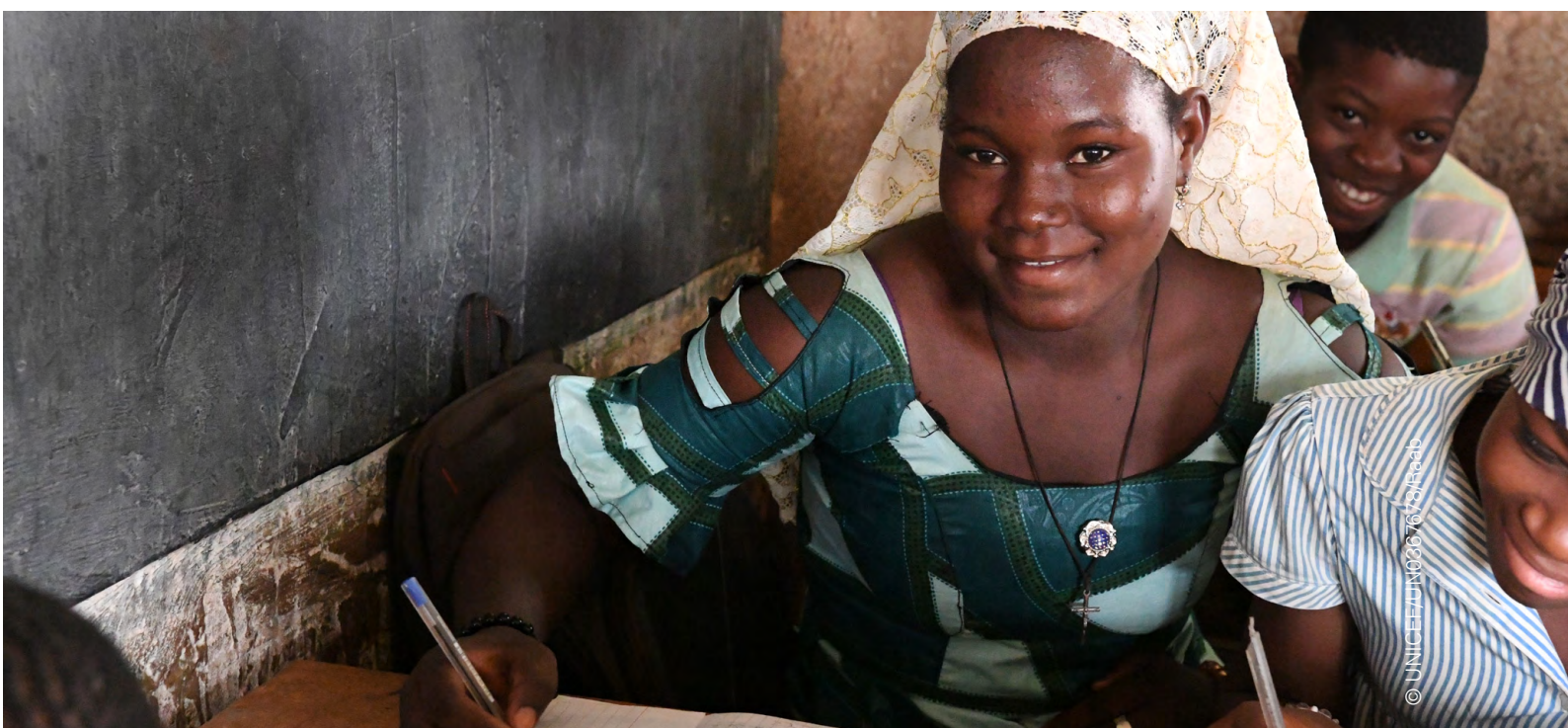
110. WHO. Global health estimates 2015: deaths by cause, age, sex, by country and by region, 2000–2015. Geneva: WHO; 2016.

111. Kahn JR, Anderson KE. Intergenerational patterns of teenage fertility. *Demography* 1992;29(1):39-57.

112. Thompson, G. (2016). Meeting the needs of adolescent parents and their children. *Paediatrics & child health*, 21(5), 1. <https://cps.ca/en/documents/position/adolescent-parents>

More specifically frontline workers should:

- Establish a long-lasting relationship with the adolescent, that allows flexibilities in attendance to appointments. This is central for supporting adolescent parents especially adolescent mothers. This will not only allow the health worker to maintain screenings but also to understand the needs of the adolescent, refer to tailored services if necessary and thus actively mitigate the financial, educational, social and health related risks.
- Be aware of the adversity and stigmatization that the adolescent might be facing, and thus provide a welcoming and non-judgmental atmosphere in the setting.
- Administer screenings for development and growth, follow-up vaccinations for immunization body image concerns (e.g. asking about their feelings about the changes in their body) and nutrition and food security (e.g. asking about their knowledge on healthy nutrition, worries about not being able to afford healthy food).
- Ensure support mechanisms in home environment are in place, encouraging the extended family to engage in caring for the adolescent mother and the child.
- Provide information and resources for lactation and breastfeeding, encourage fathers (if possible) caring family members to be supportive.
- Screen for overall sexual health and sexually transmitted infections (STI); provide information and counselling for contraceptive methods and services to adolescent mothers as well as adolescent fathers.
- Screen for overall well-being and mental health. Screen for depression, postpartum depression, anxiety, addiction, post-traumatic stress disorder and trauma; and refer to related services if needed.
- Screen for gender-based violence, develop safety plans if needed by engaging in related services and helplines.
- Recognize the needs of adolescents in terms of parenting support, financial stability, housing and education. Refer to community resources if possible.
- Emphasize the importance of continuing education and provide information on the risks of dropping out of school. Provide advice on services that help adolescents to complete their degrees.
- Include fathers if possible. Provide information on the beneficial effects of father involvement on child development.
- Acknowledge the social and contextual needs of adolescent fathers and provide resources and services for paternal well-being if necessary.
- Support adolescent parents in building parental alliances and provide information on the benefits of co-parenting for both parental well-being and positive child outcomes.
- Connect adolescents with alternative ways and services to continue and complete education or if possible, explore opportunities in the current school system.



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