

10 Tips for Early Childhood Educators



creating hardiness zones
for girls and women

1. **Freely offer a variety of choices and opportunities for play to all children.** Make trucks, action figures, baby dolls and dress up clothes equally available to both girls and boys. Encourage all children to try out different toys and activities to see if they like it.
2. **Support the interests that you see in children.** If a child is interested in frogs, help her learn more about how frogs grow and where they live. If a child loves dancing, give him more opportunities to move to music. Don't assume a child will be interested - or not interested - in something just because of his or her gender.
3. **Be a model.** Children are watching what you say and do! You can show kids that it's ok for men to wear pink, or for women to love motorcycles. Join in play to demonstrate stories and fantasies that don't involve princesses and makeup or superheroes and fighting. Show them that there is no limit to what we can do or be, no matter what our gender may be.
4. **Be aware of what you're saying and how you say it.** When you see a girl in a dress, do you tell her how pretty she looks? When you see a boy running, do you tell him how strong he is? Notice the differences in what you say to boys and to girls. Comment on behavior - what a child says, does, or thinks - instead of appearance.
5. **Challenge yourself.** Notice what makes you feel uncomfortable, and think about why. Do you feel uncomfortable when a boy wears pink and plays with dolls? Are you compelled to tell a girl playing in a muddy yard to try and stay clean? Take a close look at these reactions, and think about where they're coming from. Are they the reactions you want to have? What thoughts or actions could you replace them with?
6. **Limit the number of toys featuring established characters or brands in your classroom or home.** Instead, promote creative play by encouraging kids to create their own superheroes or princess characters. Keep toys on hand without a pre-set story line that let kids be creative, like blocks, or baby dolls (for girls and boys!). Don't be afraid to throw other toys out! Ask children to join and help you pick out toys to give away - you may be surprised about
7. **Don't use gendered words when you address children.** Research shows that when teachers highlight gender by saying things like "Good morning boys and girls," children pick up more gender stereotypes and play less with children of the other sex. Instead, use words like *children, friends, or students.*
8. **Engage children in conversation about their play and their interests.** Ask them why they like a particular toy, or why they chose an activity. Use open ended questions and spend time listening to their responses.
9. **Encourage interactive activities with all kids that include both genders.** Rather than playing video games or watching movies, encourage kids to play in active ways that allow them to interact.
10. **Challenge stereotypes.** Ask "What else can princesses do?" or "What do superheroes do when they aren't fighting crime?" Encourage kids to expand their idea of what a princess or superhero can do.

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14 common street • p.o. box 821 • waterville, me 04903-0821
207.861.8131 tel • 207.615.0514 fax
info@hghw.org • www.hghw.org