**Gender stereotyping in the Early Years**

We know that play is important for children’s learning and that children need a wide range of different activities and experiences to develop the skills they need for life.

There is much research into the subtle messages that children experience that can lead to indirect stereotyping and how this can limit children’s choices potentially affecting their self-image, self-esteem, their expectations and ultimately life opportunities.

Often it can be found that marketing for girls is focused on themes of caring, cooking, cleaning, imagination, and beauty while marketing for boys can be more based around toys that promote action, investigation, science, adventure, space and transport.

We take from this, that boys are frequently steered towards active and investigative play, while girls play is viewed to be passive, domestic, relational and about appearance.

Children in early years often like to follow rules, marketing and signage that is gendered, can lead to children thinking that there are rules to be followed regarding the toys and games on offer. They absorb subtle messages from the media and their environment that subtly tells them the right way to be a boy or girl.

The impact of this can be that children don’t explore activities and experiences they view as ‘not for their gender’ therefore missing opportunities to experience the breadth of what is on offer fully and freely.

**What can we do?**

**Create a safe space**

Support children in their choices especially where these might be seen in society or within families as ‘unconventional’. Reassure them that its ok to like what they like and be different and encourage a culture of acceptance. We already do this in the EYEC however there might be traditional views from family members or friends who struggle with such ideas, e.g., if a boy wants to dress up like a princess or a girl wants to be a footballer.

**Challenge stereotype comments when you hear them**

‘Of course, girls can be doctors or scientists’ or ‘boys can be ballet dancers or nurses’ etc.

Seek out positive role models for both genders and emphasise them. Try giving examples where you can from your own experiences e.g. ‘Boys can wear pink my brother does’ or ‘girls can be doctors look at Dr ………. she’s a woman ‘

In EYEC we will provide positive images and role models where we can in everyday routine and stories or for events such as in Science month, highlighting female roles across the college and asking them to share their expertise with the children and sharing the positive male role models we already have in the EYEC.

**Clothing**

Shops often target children ad divide their ranges by gender, think about clothing for children that is comfortable and unrestricting and allow children to choose, girls might like dinosaurs and diggers on their clothes whilst boys might like unicorns and fluffy rabbits.

**What else?**

Explain to family members who might buy presents for your children, a boy might like a baby doll or pram and a girl may like a football, train or car.

In EYEC we will try to avoid dividing children by gender but use instead other ways to group them, such as by age or the letter of their name. This is an effective way of taking the focus off being a boy or girl is the most important thing about them.

Role models should include gentle and caring men and strong and powerful women.

**Language we can change**

Use the word ‘Children’ instead of ‘boys and girls’, ‘families’ rather than ‘mums and dads. This is inclusive and affirms commonalities rather than differences.

Comment on a positive thing about what they are doing rather than an appearance related compliment.

Don’t give a girl a compliment you wouldn’t give to a boy.

Don’t tell children not to cry or get upset, whatever their gender, they are communicating their emotions, and this should be encouraged, talk to them about how they are feeling.

Read books where women are in active or working roles and caring or creative male figures.

This is a good article for further reading

[Microsoft Word - EX3832 Raising Children The Feminist Way 2018 PC2.docx (wordpress.com)](https://finnmackay.files.wordpress.com/2018/07/a5-raising-children-the-feminist-way-2018.pdf)