

Creating Gender Equity in the Early Years: A Resource for Local Government

The early years are a critical time when gender roles and stereotypical notions of what it means to be masculine or feminine are shaped, and when positive influences on children’s and families’ understanding of gender norms can most easily be achieved (Rainbow Families Council, 2012; OurWatch 2015). There are endless opportunities for educators, early years professionals and policy makers to have a positive influence on gender, through encouraging children’s play, language, toys and storytelling. Promoting positive gender norms in the early years creates the necessary foundation for children to grow and develop their ideas and understanding about gender and to learn about equal and respectful relationships.

This resource provides a number of tools and resources for the local government and early years sectors across Victoria. Sections of this resource may also be relevant to other sectors working to improve gender equity and prevent violence against women. Each section in this resource focuses on a theme or audience for improving gender equity in the early years, is accompanied by a training video, additional resources and reflective practice questions.

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Creating Gender Equity in the Early Years: A Resource for Local Government

Local government provide a range of services and programs to all aspects of the community, including maternal and child health, family support services and libraries. They are well placed to support gender equity in the early years, to provide leadership and influence community attitudes, infrastructure, programs and services that increase women's safety and prevent violence against women.

The purpose of this resource is to support the early years sector to continue to increase knowledge and understanding about the powerful role the sector has in providing services and programs that are gender equitable, by challenging stereotypical notions of gender and creating foundations for learning that are respectful and promote positive gender norms. This resource sets out the settings and opportunities to influence gender equity in the early years. This ranges from the delivery of maternal and child health services, providing professional development opportunities to educators and early years professionals or through policy making. The opportunities are immense.

Creating Gender Equity in the Early Years – The Project

This resource and associated tools have been developed as part of a Gender Equity in the Early Years Project, delivered by Darebin City Council, with support and expertise from Women's Health In the North. The project builds on work established in 2015, to build the capacity of Darebin City Council's services and programs, and early years educators in Darebin to influence positive gender norms in the early years.

This project was undertaken with guidance from a gender equity project team, consisting of early years and gender equity professionals from Darebin City Council, Darebin Community Health and Women's Health In the North.

Acknowledgements



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Women's Health In the North provided expertise and content in the development of this resource.



For more information about this resource of the Creating Gender Equity in the Early Years project, visit www.darebin.vic.gov.au/geey

Definitions

Gender refers to the socially learnt roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that any given society considers appropriate for men and women. Gender defines masculinity and femininity.

Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. Gender equity acknowledges that women and men have different access to resources, power, responsibilities and life experiences and different strategies are often necessary to address disadvantages and achieve equal outcomes of women and men, boys and girls.

Gender equality is the outcome reached through gender equity. It is the equal valuing by the society of the similarities and differences between women and men, and the varying roles that they play.

Gender inequality is the unequal distribution of power, resources, opportunity, and value afforded to men and women in society due to prevailing gendered norms and structures.

Gender roles are the functions and responsibilities expected to be fulfilled by women and men, girls and boys in a given society.

Gendered norms consist of a set of dominant beliefs and rules of conduct, which are determined by a society or social group in relation to the types of roles, interests, behaviours and contributions expected from boys and girls, men and women.

Sex refers to biological and physiological differences between females and males.

Stereotype refers to a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.

Sexism refers to gender discrimination. It is prejudice or discrimination based on a person's sex or gender.

Violence against women is defined as 'any act of gender based violence that causes or could cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of harm or coercion, in public or in private life' (Council of Australian Governments, 2011; United Nations General Assembly, 1993).

Source: The above definitions are sourced from Our Watch (2015) unless otherwise stated.

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Gender Equity in the Early Years

This section provides an overview of the early years as a setting for promoting gender equity and sets out the context and frameworks that guide this work. The supporting video provides an overview of the early years as a setting for gender equity and preventing violence against women.

“When children play they are making sense of their social world. In play they create and recreate their understanding of what they believe to be normal behaviour for boys and girls, women and men. They construct their play using what they have distilled from the adult world about normal gendered ways of being, thinking and acting.”
(MacNaughton, 2010)

Relationship between Gender and Violence Against Women

Violence against women is defined as ‘any act of gender based violence that causes or could cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of harm or coercion, in public or in private life’ (Council of Australian Governments, 2011; United Nations General Assembly, 1993). Violence against women is gendered in nature. Particular expressions of gender inequality consistently predict higher rates of violence against women, these include the condoning of violence against women, men’s control of decision-making and limits to women’s independence in public and private life, rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity, and male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women (OurWatch, 2015).

Working to achieve gender equality is key to ending violence against women. The strongest predictor of high levels of violence against women is unequal power between men and women. When we address gender inequity to prevent violence against women and improve women’s equal participation, we improve outcomes for the entire community.

Applying a Gender Lens in the Early Years

Working with a gender lens means taking gender into account by acknowledging the different experiences, expectations, pressures, inequalities, and needs of women, men, transgender and intersex people. Ultimately we envisage this work will become part of everyday practice, but for those who are not familiar with the impacts of gender, using a specific gender lens tools or resources will be useful.

Using a gender lens when analysing, planning, and making decisions means carefully and deliberately examining all the implications of our work in terms of gender. Working with a gender lens can inform actions to address inequalities arising from the different roles of women and men, the unequal power relationships between them, and the consequences of these inequalities on their lives, health and wellbeing.

A gender lens is designed to identify:

- hidden assumptions and values which may sustain inequality and contribute to discrimination
- the possible consequences and impacts of initiatives
- service gaps and research in areas which require further work.

A program or service that has used a gender lens is one that considers the different needs and circumstances of people of all genders (Victorian Government; Women's Health In the North).

Respectful Relationships in Early Childhood: A Whole of Setting Approach

“Respectful Relationships Education is the holistic approach to school-based, primary prevention of gender-based violence. It uses the education system as a catalyst for generational and cultural change by engaging schools, as both education institutions and workplaces, to comprehensively address the drivers of gender-based violence and create a future free from such violence” (Ourwatch, 2015).

The early years are an opportunity to create the foundation for respectful relationships. Respectful relationships in early childhood, primary school and secondary school settings requires a whole of setting approach. This means that respectful relationships education must go beyond the curriculum. It needs to be embedded in all aspects of the centre or ‘setting’. The whole of setting approach is about embedding systemic change across the entire setting through policy, practice, procedures, staffing, environment, leadership and culture, and when working with children (Partners in Prevention, 2016).



SEE RESOURCE 4:

template for creating a gender equity policy for Early Years Centres. This is a great step in creating policies and practices that support early years centres and services to consider respectful relationships.

For information about the Victorian Government’s respectful relationships in early childhood, visit <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/respectfulrelec.aspx>

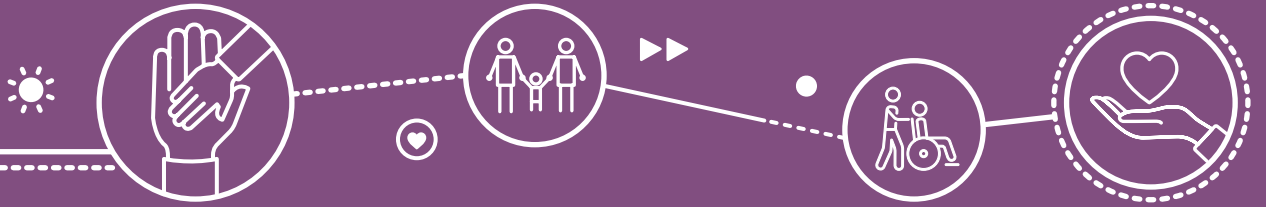
Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence

In March 2016, the Royal Commission into Family Violence handed down its findings to the Victorian Government, which included 227 recommendations aimed at addressing and improving the foundations of the current family violence service system, seizing opportunities to transform responding to family violence, and building the structures that will guide and oversee a long-term reform program that deals with all aspects of family violence.

The findings recognise the importance of local government in both responding to and preventing family violence. In respect to prevention, the findings acknowledge the importance of respectful relationships education, through curriculum and whole of setting / school. The early years, like local government play a vital role in the future of preventing violence against women and improving gender equity.

Following this, three key documents have been released to provide the structures and direction for family violence, preventing violence against women and gender equality reforms:

- [Ending Family Violence: Victoria's Plan for Change](#)
- [Free from Violence: Victoria's Strategy to Prevent Family Violence and all Forms of Violence Against Women](#)
- [Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy](#)



Frameworks for Gender Equity in the Early Years

Early years service providers work within a range of frameworks that focus on holistic development of the child, ensuring consideration of their social, emotional, physical, linguistic and psychological development and learning. The integration of a gender lens across these frameworks provides an opportunity to think about and enhance outcomes that are gender equitable. This section aims to highlight the opportunities to integrate a gender lens to enhance gender equitable outcomes in the following frameworks:

- National Quality Framework: Belonging, Being and Becoming
- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework

Both frameworks outline the five learning outcomes for children:

1. Children have a strong sense of identity
2. Children are connected with and contribute to their world
3. Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
4. Children are confident and involved learners
5. Children are effective communicators

This section also provides an overview of the national framework to prevent violence against women and children, *Change the Story*, to highlight areas of opportunities to integrate prevention with key early years frameworks.

NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK: Belonging, Being and Becoming

This framework describes the principles, practices and outcomes that support and enhance young children's learning from birth to five years of age, as well as their transition to school. In particular there are opportunities to integrate gender equity into the following quality areas:

- Educational program and practice
- Relationships with children
- Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
- Leadership and service management

VICTORIAN EARLY YEARS LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK: For All Children From Birth to Eight Years

This framework has a strong focus on practice principles for children's learning and development, which describe the most effective ways for early childhood professionals to work together with children and families to facilitate learning and development. The practice principles are based on the pedagogy of the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia and evidence about the best ways to support children's learning, development and wellbeing. The framework highlights the importance of supporting children's and families' transitions as they move within and across services throughout the early childhood period.

In particular there are opportunities to integrate gender equity into the following practice principles:

- Respectful relationships and responsive engagement
- Equity and diversity
- Partnerships with families
- Partnerships with professionals
- Reflective practice

CHANGE THE STORY: A Shared Framework for the Primary Prevention of Violence Against Women and their Children in Australia

Change the Story is a national framework for the prevention of violence against women and children in Australia. It details a national approach to this work, through identifying what drives and contributes to violence against women. It provides evidence-based guidance to government, the private sector, civil society and communities on how to strategically and effectively lead, coordinate, resource and support prevention effort across Australia. It also informs and supports the development of policy and legislation, prevention strategies, programming and advocacy that targets and seeks to reduce the drivers of violence against women.

The framework recognises that violence against women occurs when there is gender inequality. Action to prevent violence against women must work towards achieving gender equality and address the specific gendered drivers. The framework identifies settings for prevention to occur, which ensures that these actions are addressing the causes of violence across the life course. Education and care settings for children and young people are a priority setting for preventing violence against women, as they are well placed to take action to address specific gendered drivers. This setting includes childcare and early learning centres, and primary and secondary schools. The framework recognises that schools and education centres play an important role in the socialisation and cognitive and emotional development of children and young people.

This setting offers scope to influence not only education programs and curricula but also the whole education environment, as education institutions are not only places of learning, but also workplaces and community hubs (OurWatch, p. 39).



**SUPPORTING VIDEO: Gender Equity in the Early Years -
Dr Kylie Smith, University of Melbourne**

Reflective Practice Questions

1. In what ways do I apply a gender lens to my practice?
 2. Is my practice open to equal and diverse experiences for both girls and boys?
 3. Is my practice informed by frameworks supporting gender equity in the early years?
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Additional Resources



Australian Government Department of Education 2009, **Belonging, Being, Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia**



Early Childhood Australia, The Early Years Learning Framework Professional Learning Program, **Thinking About Practice: working with the early years learning framework**



Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework



MacNaughton, G 2000, **Rethinking gender in early childhood education**, Sydney: Allen & Unwin.



Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016), Volume VI: Report and recommendations



Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth 2015, **Change the story: a shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia.**

2



Professional Development

This section provides resources to support the development and delivery of professional development with a range of local government officers, educators and early years professionals. The supporting video includes further details about the role of professional development in providing gender equitable services and programs.

Professional development is vital to build the capacity of both local government and early years. It will strengthen efforts to change practice, critically reflect and create more gender equitable environments, leading to respectful relationships between girls and boys. Many Local Governments provide annual training for early years professionals, including local government staff, childcare centres and kindergartens. Local government is well placed to provide low or no cost, accessible and a high standard of professional development.

Preventing violence against women, gender equity and identifying family violence are important professional development and training opportunities for the early years setting.

Preventing Violence Against Women and Gender Equity

This section provides an overview preventing violence against women and gender equity training which can be tailored to the specific needs of the early years. There are a range of organisations that provide preventing violence against women and gender equity training.

Across Victoria there are regional Women's Health Services and peak women's organisations that deliver gender equity and prevention of violence against women training, or information sessions to a range of organisations and services. These can be tailored to cover a wide range of different topics and issues as relevant to your organisation and context. The application of a gender lens and exploration of the ways in which gender and gender inequality operate are central themes in all training sessions provided by Women's Health Services. Gender equity training and sessions can be designed and tailored to address both structural and organisational issues, or take a more individualised approach to think about attitudes, behaviours and social norms. These sessions are designed to promote increased attention to gender issues within policy and practice and encourage the embedding of a gendered approach in all program design and implementation.

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria and No To Violence provide customised and tailored training courses for organisations in the prevention of violence against women. Both organisations have extensive training and prevention experience.

VicHealth deliver a 1-day Preventing violence against women: From policy to practice short course. The short course is aimed at providing an introduction and overview of the policy and evidence base for preventing violence against women before it starts. The course provides practical tools and resources for planning and delivering prevention programs and for making prevention part of your core business.

Professional development that focuses on creating gender equity in the early years, utilises the frameworks and foundations of preventing violence against women and gender equity training. Like these, the sessions explore the relationship between gender and violence. It provides an opportunity for early years educators, policy makers, maternal and child health nurses and other early years workers to explore the ways in which the early years can influence gender and challenge harmful gender stereotypes through positive gender norms.

Further information about these courses and training are available at:

Women's Health Services: www.equalityandsafetyforwomen.org.au

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria: www.dvrcv.org.au

No To Violence: www.ntvmrs.org.au

VicHealth: www.vichealth.vic.gov.au

Identifying Family Violence

Focusing on gender equity and preventing violence against women may identify the need for educators, early years professionals, services and local governments to undertake identifying family violence training. Both women's organisations and state-wide family violence training organisations can provide safe and appropriate training that ranges from providing an introduction to identifying family violence and the local service system, to accredited family violence and risk assessment training.

It is recommended that you speak with your local Family Violence Network, Women's Health Service or Domestic Violence Resource Centre to discuss your learning needs relating to family violence. This training is specific and requires specialist family violence services or training organisations to deliver it safely and appropriately.

Women's Health In the North, Northern Integrated Family Violence Services provide Identifying Family Violence: Responding to Women Training, which is open to workers across the northern metropolitan region who are not directly involved in specialist family violence service provision, but who may work with women and children who are experiencing family violence. Through this free, half-day training, participants will increase their understanding and recognition of family violence. They will gain strategies to respond to disclosures and learn about appropriate referrals for women and children.

If your service or organisation isn't located in the Northern Metropolitan region of Melbourne, contact your regional Women's Health Service: www.equalityandsafetyforwomen.org.au

The Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria provides a range of accredited and non-accredited courses:

- Identifying Family Violence and Risk Assessment: This introductory course is for workers with no specific family violence work experience. It covers the effects of family violence on adults and children, and provides an overview of legal responses, resources and referrals. The program explores ways of asking about violence and responding to disclosures and includes a component on risk assessment and safety planning based on the Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF).
- Recognising and Responding Appropriately to Family Violence: This four-day accredited course provides the basic skills, knowledge and understanding to work effectively with women and their children affected by family violence. It is suitable for new workers in family violence services and workers in community, health or legal services who have limited experience responding to family violence.
- eCRAF: The Common Risk Assessment Framework eLearning provides core knowledge on the integrated family violence system, and how to identify and respond to a victim of family violence. Access to this module is free and it is designed to be undertaken by a wide range of individuals and organisations to support induction, refresher training and professional development.

Further information about these courses and training are available at:

Northern Integrated Family Violence Services: www.nifvs.org.au

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria: www.dvrcv.org.au



SUPPORTING VIDEO: Professional development for Gender Equity in the Early Years – Sandra Morris, Women’s Health In the North

Reflective Practice Questions

1. Is my practice guided and supported by continued professional development?
2. Do my biases about gender impact on the professional development that I undertake?

Additional Resources



VicHealth: A guide to staff training on gender equity and the prevention of violence against women



Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework



Respectful Relationships in Early Childhood,
Victorian Government, Department of Education and Training



Our Watch, Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth 2015, **Change the story: a shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia, Our Watch.**

3



Creating Gender Equitable Spaces

This section focuses on creating gender equitable early years spaces and includes a number of checklists for early years centres, childcare, kindergartens, maternal and child health services and children’s hubs. The supporting videos includes an overview of the opportunities to promote gender equitable service and program delivery.

In this section early years providers are defined as all providers of services to early childhood, for example early years educators, early childhood centres, libraries, early years services (including maternal and child health, immunisation and family support services) and children’s hubs.

This section of the resource and associated tools have been created to assess practices within early years centres, children’s hubs and libraries to ensure their current practices, and environments, contribute to gender equity. It is recommended that the tools be used in combination with the entire resource, and in the following order:

Resource 1: Gender Equity Assessment Tool

Resource 2: Gender Equitable Spaces Assessment Tool

Resource 3: Books and Stories Library Assessment Tool

It is recognised that early years providers may be at different stages of this work and therefore it may be relevant to complete these assessments in a different order and/or at different times. These resources may also be supported by Resource 4, Template Gender Equity Policy for Early Years Services, which supports the development of a policy for centres and children’s hubs.

RESOURCE 1: Gender Equity Assessment Tool

This tool can be used by early years providers who work in an early years setting or children's hub. The assessment questions are designed to provide an overview of a centre. For more specific assessments, see Resources 2 and 3.

Gender Equity Assessment Tool	Yes	No	Key considerations and potential actions
This centre has a gender equity policy, or makes reference to gender in an equity and inclusion policy.			
Staff use language that is equitable and respectful and does not promote gender stereotypes or gender inequality.			
We apply a gender lens to all learning activities to ensure equal representation of the range of experiences, knowledge, skills and aspirations of women and men in all areas of life.			
The book collection is regularly reviewed to ensure it contains books that depict a range of different stories and experiences beyond gender stereotypical narratives.			
Early years educators in our centre use everyday learning opportunities to actively promote gender equity and challenge gender stereotypes.			
Early years educators in our centre use intentional learning methods to actively promote gender equity and challenge gender stereotypes.			
All children are encouraged to use all of the toys and equipment in the centre. Toys and equipment are not purchased in colours that reinforce gender stereotypes.			
All children are encouraged to spend time in all areas of the early years environment. Strategies are put in place to overcome barriers to children's participation in certain spaces.			
Disruptive and dominating behaviour is challenged in a framework that understands gender equity. For example, aggressive or dominate behaviour towards others is not excused through language such as 'boys will be boys'.			
Professional development opportunities with a focus on gender equity are regularly offered to centre staff.			

Spaces, Toys and Play

Children's use of space and play environments will often differ based on gender. It's important to be aware of and think about who is using what spaces within the centre, and how are they using them.

It is important to not only think about who is where and how often, but what are they doing there? How is their play reflecting ideas that may be forming about gender and their identity? What are the storylines of their play telling you about what the children think are the normal roles for women and men, girls and boys? Who takes on, or is given what roles?



RESOURCE 2:

provides a guide to assessing an early years space to ensure it is equitable.

Books and Stories

Books are a fantastic learning tool for so much more than just reading. They are a window into different worlds that teach children about a whole range of things including ideas about gender and gender roles. Messages about gender are communicated in many different ways every single day. Stories and books are a powerful communication and learning tool for young children and will either reinforce or challenge the messages they receive about gender. Our choice of stories can be an important way to break down ideas about gender that are limiting or set up certain expectations for children.

The impact on a child's understanding of gender is an important lens through which to examine all books in your centre. Whilst there are fantastic books for children with great messages about friendship, being brave and trying new things, it is also important to think about what these books are telling children about gender and gender relations. Stories that depict girls and boys partaking in a wide range of activities are important to give children options about what it means to be a girl or a boy, other than stereotypical ones. For example, stories about girls who get to be the hero and save the day, stories about boys spending a raining day inside doing the dishes and baking cakes.

Undertaking a library audit will assist in gaining a sense of the main themes of your library and if there are any gaps in the stories being told in the books available at your centre. See Resource 3, Books and Stories Library assessment tool. Whilst this assessment tool has been developed to think specifically about gender, it is important to simultaneously be thinking about the messages children receive about all aspects of identity.

RESOURCE 2: Gender Equitable Spaces Assessment Tool

This tool is designed to assist in the regular assessment of the physical environment in early childhood settings. This might include early years centres, libraries or children's hubs. This is to ensure that all children have equality of access and use of all early years facilities and areas. These include, for example, the outdoor play spaces, block area, story area and the arts and crafts area.

This tool recommends a three-part process for an initial assessment of the play spaces and physical environment at your early years centre.

1. Observational assessment
2. Consultation with children
3. Staff input and planning

The following questions and considerations have been developed to assist you to view your early years environment with fresh eyes. It has been designed to prompt thinking and questioning about things you may not have noticed before. This assessment is limited to thinking about how children interact with the environment. Additional work should be undertaken to ensure it is also a gender equitable environment for staff and families.

1. Observational Assessment

Play spaces and physical environment	Yes	No	Key considerations and potential actions
Imagery			
<p>Does the visual imagery throughout the centre depict both girls and boys, women and men?</p> <p>Counting all the images of people you can see throughout the whole environment, is there a balance in how many times women/girls and men/boys are depicted?</p> <p>Do the images around the centre portray many different roles, jobs and activities for women and men, girls and boys?</p> <p>Do any images challenge gender stereotypes by showing women and men in non-stereotypical roles?</p>			
Use of space			
<p>When children are at play, is there a difference in where girls and boys are spending most of their time?</p> <p>Are there any spaces that are dominated by boys?</p> <p>Are there any spaces that are dominated by girls?</p> <p>Are there spaces that are used equally by both girls and boys?</p>			
Toys and equipment			
<p>Are there any toys or equipment that are used more by either girls or boys?</p> <p>Are any of the toys/equipment only available in colours that reinforce gender stereotypes?</p>			

2. Consultation with children

Once you have undertaken an initial observation of what is occurring within your environment, the next step is to think about why that may be the case. This is particularly of relevance when examining children's use of space and selection of toys and equipment. Asking the children about these things is an important component of this assessment. The following questions are intended as a guide and starting point for a conversation with the children. Ideally this should occur one on one or if relevant, in small groups.

- What is your favourite area and why do you like to play here?
- Is there an area you don't like to play in, why is that?
- Is there an area you would like to play in more? Why don't you play there more?
- What other things would you like to play with here? i.e items from the storeroom, shop or home.

3. Staff Discussion

Following the observational assessment and collection of the children's perspectives, it is important for staff to identify the next steps and key actions. Discussion should focus on:

- What are the key issues that were identified from the observational assessment and consultation with children?
- What improvements and changes can be made?
- Does anyone have any specific recommendations?
- Who will be responsible for making these changes?
- How will these changes be communicated to all centre staff, the children and with parents/carers?

This resource has been adapted from Maribyrnong Facilities Assessment Tool and the Our Watch School Assessment Tool

RESOURCE 3: Books and Stories Library Assessment Tool

This book assessment tool has been adapted from the Anti-bias work of Louise Derman-Sparks.

This assessment tool has been created to assist you to consider the messages children are being exposed to from the books available at your centre. The prompts included here are only a starting point for the work you may like to undertake. Please use this as a guide and add to it or adapt it as you see relevant.

Following an assessment of the books in your collection, there may be a range of different steps to take depending on the result of your assessment. Two common outcomes will be the identification of key gaps and problematic books. It is recommended that follow-up actions to this assessment are considered as part of broader efforts to promote gender equity across your early years environment.

Review the Storyline	
Prompt for consideration	Assessment Questions
Note the main characters	<p>Considering all the books at your centre:</p> <p>How many books include only male characters? How many books include only female characters? What percentage of books have a female protagonist? Compare this to the percentage of books that have a male protagonist? Of all the characters in all the books, what percentage overall are female?</p> <p>When reading individual books:</p> <p>What activities and storylines does the main character participate in? Do the attributes, activities and behaviours of the main character reflect gender stereotypes? For example, the male characters are depicted as the hero in the story.</p>
Consider who has power in the relationships	<p>Consider the balance of people in 'doer' roles. Who is taking an active role in the story and who is ornamental or passive? Do female characters achieve success because of their own initiative and intelligence, or is their success due to their looks or relationships with male characters? Who typically causes a problem and who resolves it?</p>
Consider the messages	<p>Diversity can be depicted in a range of ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male/female roles within the family • Family structure • Ethnicity • Types of work • Socioeconomic conditions • Living environments <p>How does the book collection as a whole depict any of this diversity? What are the keys messages that the book is sharing about gender? Do the books in your collection show a range of different ways to be a boy or a girl? Can all the children at your centre see themselves and their families reflected in the books collection?</p>

Review the Illustrations	
Prompt for consideration	Assessment Questions
Look for stereotypes	<p>Create a list of common gender stereotypes to have as a reference when reviewing books.</p> <p>Does the book reinforce stereotyped ways of illustrating people?</p> <p>Are characters depicted as genuine individuals with distinctive (rather than stereotypical) features?</p>
Avoid tokenism	<p>Are there aspects of the book that are tokenistic or represent something as a one off?</p> <p>Does the book make a tokenistic or 'one off' reference to women or girls?</p> <p>Considering all the books at your centre:</p> <p>Are there any tokenistic inclusions of issues where there is only one book representing a certain perspective? For example only one book featuring a character with a disability.</p>
Look for invisibility	<p>People who are often invisible in children's books or mainstream media are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people • People with a disability • People who are homeless • Single parents or carers • Families with two mums or two dads. • Immigrant and refugee families • Families who live in rural or remote areas <p>Whose stories are missing from your book collection?</p> <p>Who are missing from your stories?</p>
Review Language	
Prompt for consideration	Assessment Questions
Check for gendered language	<p>If the story isn't about people, but animals or things, what pronouns are used? (he/she/they)</p> <p>Is 'man' used as a word to indicate everyone?</p> <p>Does the book contain language such as fireman, policeman or chairman, rather than firefighter, police officer or chairperson?</p>
Check for loaded words	<p>Does the book use words that demean or devalue certain characters in ways that are sexist, racist or perpetuate stereotypes? For example, are there other ways of telling the story that removes the sexist or racist stereotypes, such as gender, name or behaviour of the characters in individual stories.</p>
Review Book Details	
Prompt for consideration	Assessment Questions
Consider the perspective of the author	<p>What perspective does the author bring?</p> <p>Are there a wide range of perspectives from different authors included across the whole book collection?</p> <p>Are there any gaps?</p>
Check when the book was published and the age of the story	<p>How old is the book or the story (including historical fairytales that have been republished or reprinted)?</p> <p>Old does not always mean out of date but it is important to consider how changes in language have occurred over time and that older books may contain outdated terms and language that may be now considered offensive</p>



SUPPORTING VIDEO: Creating Gender Equitable Spaces - Annie Douglass, Women's Health In the North

Reflective Practice Questions

1. Does my service provide a range of dress ups and toys to allow children to explore different roles or different stories?
2. Do I read books that open up the possibilities about what girls and boys can be or do?
3. Does my practice reflect on how spaces, language, toys and play might contribute to gender inequity?

Additional Resources



City of Monash, **Promoting Gender Equality and Challenging Gender Stereotypes Children's Picture Books**



Guide to Anti-bias Children's Books



Lisen C. Roberts and Heather T. Hill, **Children's Books that Break Gender Role Stereotypes**



Mighty Girl Books for smart, confident, and courageous girls



Rainbow Families Council, **How children play: challenging myths and stereotypes**



The Ugly Truth of Children's Books Video Clip

4



Providing Gender Equitable Early Years Services

This section provides an overview of the opportunities to provide gender equitable services to the community and includes a template for creating a gender equity policy for early years services. The supporting video includes ideas for proving gender equitable early years services.

Local governments provide a range of early years services in the community, from maternal and child health, immunisation, childcare and kindergarten, playgroups, library services and family support services. There is a unique opportunity to influence how these services are delivered and to ensure that services reinforce positive gender norms, respect and equity.

Local governments in Victoria are required to develop municipal public health plans under the Victorian Public Health Act 2008. These plans are an opportunity to provide early year services that are gender equitable and create better health and wellbeing outcomes of their community. For example, through these plans Council's can identify new opportunities for gender equity to be embedded through early years services, such as maternal and child health or libraries.

Following the release of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence findings, local governments are now required to include measures to prevent family violence and respond to the needs of victim survivors, through their health and wellbeing plans. This provides further opportunity to demonstrate and measure efforts to create gender equity in the early years through these plans.

Local Government Provided Early Years Services

This section includes an overview of the early years services provided by local government. It highlights the opportunities that exist to apply a gender lens across early years services and programs.

Maternal and child health nurses are registered nurses with qualifications in midwifery and maternal child health. They work in maternal and child health services, which offer support, information and advice regarding parenting, and child health and development. The nature of these roles provides an opportunity to ensure that these services and programs are gender equitable. Maternal and child health has been a vital component of the family violence service system, through their risk assessment at key age and stage assessments. Increasingly there are also examples of the opportunities that this service has to influence gender in a preventative capacity. For example, through engagement with families, referrals to programs and services, and support of shared parenting practices.



SEE RESOURCE 1: Gender Equity Assessment Tool which can be used to assess services for young families.

Some Local Governments provide childcare and kindergarten services across their municipalities, while others have strong relationships with these centres and educators. Either way, there are opportunities to provide more gender equitable early years services. For example, Preschool field officers provide consultancy to early childhood teachers and parents to facilitate the inclusion of all eligible children in state-funded kindergarten programs. This is a great opportunity to provide a gender lens on early years advice and support.

Local Government early years services also provide a range of programs, such as the early years resourcing role, mobile libraries, training and communication through newsletters and information sessions. The incorporation of a gender lens across these programs provides opportunities to advance gender equitable outcomes.



SEE RESOURCE 2:

Gender Equitable Spaces Assessment Tool to support early years spaces.

Libraries are a wonderful resource and opportunity to provide gender equitable services to the community. Libraries are welcoming and inclusive community spaces where families have free access to library collections, programs, services and resources that support lifelong learning aspirations of their community. Many resources available have the opportunity to reflect and reinforce positive gender norms, equity and respect.



SEE RESOURCE 3:

Books and Stories Library Assessment Tool to undertake a gender assessment of your library and catalogue.

Children's hubs are spaces that bring together a range of early years services and are a great opportunity to ensure that messages of gender equity are reinforced across these services. For example a children's hub may include childcare, three year old and four year old kindergarten, playgroups and maternal and child health services. This provides a unique opportunity to ensure the hub's services and programs use a gender lens.



SEE RESOURCE 1:

Gender Equity Assessment Tool which can be used to assess services for young families.

RESOURCE 4: Template Gender Equity Policy for Early Years Services

This document is a template of potential sections and information that could be included in a gender equity policy for your early years centre or service. The format of current gender equity policies range from documents that read like a position statement through to comprehensive policy and procedure outlines. The information can be used to guide the development of a document that is relevant for your centre. The development of a gender equity policy should align with the structure of your other organisational policies.

Context

It is important to remember that for some people working in your centre, reading this information may be the first time they have thought about what gender equity means and why it's relevant to think about in an early years centre. This presents an opportunity to share the background information that you think is required. It is also important to state early on in the policy, how this work is valued by the organisation and why you need a policy to support it.

Points to consider:

- Why gender equity is important
- Why you have a gender equity policy
- The impact of gender stereotypes on young children
- How this is relevant to an early years environment

You will know where best to place this content and under which heading it should be so that is reflective and aligned with the structure of other organisational policies.

SAMPLE CONTENT

Children are exposed to many factors which influence their attitudes, behaviours and aspirations. One of these factors is gender. By the age of four children have already formed an understanding of what it means to be a woman or a man in today's society.

“When children play they are making sense of their social world. In play they create and recreate their understanding of what they believe to be normal behaviour for boys and girls, women and men. They construct their play using what they have distilled from the adult world about normal gendered ways of being, thinking and acting.” (Rethinking Gender in Early Years Education, Glenda MacNaughton 2000)

Stereotypical ideas about gender provide a very limiting and narrow definition of what girls and boys can and should be doing. This policy has been developed because this centre is aware of the important role we can play in challenging the constraints and inequities that gender stereotypes place on all children.

Definitions

This may be a useful addition to your policy, particular when used within an induction process for new staff to become familiar with key concepts and terms.

SAMPLE CONTENT

- **Gender equity** refers to measurable equal representation of men and women. Gender equity does not imply that men and women are the same but they have equal value and should be treated equitably.
- **Gender inequality** refers to the unequal treatment or perspectives of individuals based on their gender.
- **Stereotype** refers a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.
- **Sexism** refers to gender discrimination. It is prejudice or discrimination based on a person's sex or gender.

Values

A statement regarding the centre's values about gender equity can be a great inclusion in your gender equity policy.

SAMPLE CONTENT

Our centre is committed to developing the full potential of all children irrespective of gender. It affirms that female and male children are treated equitably in regard to ability, personality and behaviour. It further affirms the right of all children to:

- Develop without the limitations of stereotypes based on gender
- Develop a sense of pride in oneself and one's accomplishments, so enhancing feelings of positive self-esteem and self-worth
- Develop respect for each other's rights and responsibilities

Legislation and Frameworks

Acknowledging relevant and influential legislation and frameworks that guide this work is a useful inclusion. This provides a legitimising and authorising environment for why you are doing this work and why it's important.

SAMPLE CONTENT

- Sex Discrimination Act 1984
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework
- National Quality Framework
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
- Early Childhood Australia (ECA) (2005) The Code of Ethics
- Children's Services Regulations 1998
- Children's Services Act 1996
- Information Privacy Act 2000
- Education and Care Service National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care Services National Regulations
- Safe and Strong - Victoria's Gender Equality Strategy

Scope

Think about who the policy will apply to. Will it be an internal staff policy or something that is shared with parents and carers? This will have implications for the Roles and Responsibilities section.

SAMPLE CONTENT

This policy applies to:

- All children who are attending or whose parents/carers are seeking for them to attend the centre
- Parents/carers of children who are attending or seeking to attend the centre
- The Management Committee, staff, volunteers, students and any other people involved in the care and education of children at this centre.

Strategies

A list of strategies that support the implementation of the gender equity policy is a useful addition.

SAMPLE CONTENT

To support the intent of this policy, this centre will endeavour to:

- Ensure that both boys and girls are equally encouraged to participate in all activities with due consideration for individual needs and interests. For example, encourage both girls and boys to use the home corner, outdoor playing equipment and toys such as cars and dolls.
- Encourage non-sexist behavior by children and staff. For example, if a child behaves in a sexist manner, a staff member takes action to educate them about other modes of behaviour.
- Purchase resources and materials that promote gender equity and counter sexist and violence supportive attitudes, for staff use and supply staff development programs focused around issues of gender equity, sexism and education.
- Encourage all children to express emotions and display affection. For example, it is alright for boys to cry or need a hug, or for girls to express emotions in an overtly or physical manner like pounding the playdough when angry.
- Ensure that all language used within the centre, both verbal and written, is gender inclusive.
- Encourage use of materials which portray women and men in roles, situations and jobs which are not stereotyped. For example, borrowing and purchasing children's literature, posters and toys which reflect this.
- Select resources where girls and boys are both seen as initiators and nurturers. For example, borrowing and purchasing children's literature, posters and toys.
- Ensure that both girls and boys equally share staff time, indoor/outdoor playing space and equipment taking into account individual needs and interests.
- Encourage the employment of both female and male staff and ensure that tasks carried out by staff are not related to gender.
- Encourage educational or information opportunities that further the aims of this policy. For example, hold parent information nights on topics related to gender equity and challenging gender stereotypes.

Roles and Responsibilities

This can be a useful section to outline clear expectations about who will be responsible for enacting the gender equity policy. You may even be ready to include certain responsibilities for parents within this as well. Typically however, a section on responsibilities is used to outline the various roles and responsibilities for staff to advance this work. This section should provide clear documentation of how staff will be supported in their work by others within the centre.

SAMPLE CONTENT

Management is responsible for:

- The development, implementation and review of and maintenance of the policy within the service
- Providing families with information about the importance of a gender equity approach in achieving positive outcomes for all children
- Providing information about the service's gender equity work in relevant community languages as required
- Considering barriers to participation in service programs and activities, and developing strategies to overcome these
- Ensuring that staff have access to appropriate and accredited professional development activities that promote a positive understanding of gender equity, and develop skills to assist them in implementing this policy
- Providing support and guidance to educators/staff
- Ensuring that educators and all staff are aware of the service's expectations regarding positive, respectful and appropriate behaviour when working with children and families
- Ensuring that any behaviour or circumstances that may constitute discrimination or prejudice are dealt with in an appropriate manner

Staff are responsible for:

- The day-to-day implementation of the gender equity policy
- Being aware of the service's expectations regarding positive, respectful and appropriate behaviour when working with children and families
- Developing and delivering an educational program that is reflective of the service's values, beliefs and philosophy, and embraces the principles of fairness, equity, diversity and inclusion
- Ensuring that the program provides opportunities for all children to participate and interact with one another, irrespective of gender
- Undertaking appropriate professional development on issues about gender equity
- Understanding, respecting and working with how different cultural child-rearing and social practices may view gender roles
- Using family-centred practice and working collaboratively with staff, parents/carers, specialist services and other professionals to implement a gender equity approach at the service.
- Providing opportunities for families to contribute to the gender equity program
- Notifying management or appropriate staff of any behaviour or circumstances that may constitute discrimination or prejudice
- Critically reflecting on practice to ensure that interactions and programs embrace a gender equitable approach in which children and families feel valued and respected, and that their contributions are welcomed
- Incorporating a gender lens across their reflective practice and observations.

Communications

Consider how information about your gender equity work will be communicated within the centre and externally to families and carers. What will the policy outline about this?

Points to consider:

- What is the purpose of newsletters and communication with parents/carers?
- How will changes in the centres operations be communicated to families and the wider community?
- How will the gender equity approach of the service be communicated?

SAMPLE CONTENT

This service is committed to open communication between all relevant parties, staff, parents/carers and children about our gender equity work. In order to reach all parents this documentation will be translated into relevant community languages.

This centre will endeavour to ensure any changes and updates relating to our gender equity work are widely communicated. This will be achieved using multiple platforms including:

- Standing agenda item for staff meetings.
- Articles in the parent/carer newsletter
- Notices on the centre notice board
- Emails to staff and parent/carers
- Letters/ notices for parents/carers.

Related Policies

If you create a stand-alone gender equity policy it is important to articulate how it relates to other policies and procedures. Alternatively, a clear focus on gender equity may be something that is included in a broader equity and inclusion policy.

Another alternative is to undertake a review of all policies with the intention of incorporating a gender lens across all areas of centre operations.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Consideration should be given to what mechanism will be put in place to ensure that the policy is user-friendly, relevant and useful in assisting and supporting staff to implement changes across the service.

SAMPLE CONTENT

In order to assess whether the aims of the policy have been achieved, the management team and relevant committees will:

- Regularly seek feedback from staff affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness
- Assess whether the strategies and procedures outlined in the gender equity policy were implemented
- Monitor complaints and incidents regarding the implementation of the policy
- Review the policy to ensure it reflects current legislation, research, policy and best practice
- Revise the policy and procedures as part of the service's policy review cycle.

Review Date

If this is the first time a gender equity policy is being created, regular renewal will assist in determining whether the policy has been useful, if anything was missing and how the policy was used.

SAMPLE CONTENT

This policy shall be reviewed in April 2018 or earlier if needed.

This template policy has been adapted from the following gender equity / inclusion policies; Dawson Street Childcare Co-Operative; Lake Park Kindergarten; Pheonix Park Long Day Care and Kindergarten; Trikki Kidz Pty Ltd.

Reflective Practice Questions

1. Does my service or program gender stereotype or prioritise based on gender?
2. Are there opportunities in the services I provide, to challenge gender stereotypes?



SUPPORTING VIDEO: Providing Gender Equitable Early Years Services – Margaret Phillips and Donna Karmis, Darebin City Council

Additional Resources



Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance, **Equity for Children and Families**



Rainbow Families Council, **How children play: challenging myths and stereotypes**

5

Building on Early Years Practice



This section includes information about reflective practice, engaging with families and carers, and learning from educators and early years professionals. It includes a checklist of reflective practice questions. The supportive video includes reflections of gender equitable practice in early years centres.

Early years educators provide a wealth of knowledge about the everyday practice, conversations and interactions with children, families and carers in early years centres. Professionals have considered gender as a key focus of their work for a number of decades. Other sectors can learn from the early years sector. The early years sector also has a strong focus on reflection in their practice.

Reflective practice

Reflecting on and critically evaluating practice is a core part of the work of educators and early years professionals. Reflecting on personal worldviews about how we individually think gender affects children's choices, options, play habits and behaviours supports gender equitable practice.

The Victorian Early Years Framework notes reflective practice as a practice principle for children's learning and development. The framework describes that effective practice is strengthened when educators and early childhood professionals:

- Gather information, including the views and perspectives of each child, and use it to inform, review and enrich decision-making
- Draw on expertise beyond the team to gain clear and shared understandings and to inform new directions
- Reflect with children and families as collaborators to create more inclusive environments to advance each child's learning and development
- Collaborate with professionals in other disciplines to provide, receive and consider multiple perspectives, encouraging every person's contribution
- Use sound evidence to inform planning for children's progress in learning and development
- Apply evidence-based practices to advance children's learning and development
- Embrace professional learning and skill development that aligns with priorities for setting, service or network improvement
- Review and evaluate to inform ongoing improvement
- Challenge and change some practices to incorporate new understandings into practice (Victorian Government, 2016).

Engaging with Families and Carers

An important component of educators and early years professionals work, is working with the families and carers of the children they support. Engaging with families and carers in a productive way about issues affecting their children and the centre is vital. Engaging with families and carers on the impact of gender stereotypes and why it is important to challenge them, can be challenging.

Communication with families and carers, through daily conversations and newsletters or other mediums is a fantastic opportunity to reflect and engage on issues such as gender. It is an opportunity to share reflections of their children's learning, play and conversation, but to also share some of the challenges that present themselves in their centres. Creating a welcoming and inclusive environment where all families are encouraged to participate in and contribute to experiences will enhance children's learning and development (MacNaughton, 2000).

RESOURCE 5: Self-reflection tool for Early Years Educators

This tool can be used for reflective practice, if you are an early years educator, practitioner or support worker in the early years setting, working with families, carers and children. This tool should be used in combination with other tools provided in this resource. This may be useful for working with a family, carer or child, in reflecting on your own practice.

Reflective questions	Yes	No	Notes
Do I have gender biases?			
Is my practice open to equal and diverse experiences for both girls and boys?			
Is my practice informed by frameworks supporting gender equity in the early years			
Is my practice guided by continued professional development?			
Do my biases about gender impact on the professional development that I undertake?			
Do I have tools, resources and support for talking with children about gender?			
Does my service provide a range of dress ups and toys to allow children to explore different roles or different stories?			
Do I read books that open up the possibilities about what girls and boys can be or do?			
Does my practice reflect on how spaces, language, toys and play might contribute to gender inequity?			
Does my service or program gender stereotype or prioritise based on gender?			
Are there opportunities in the services I provide, to challenge gender stereotypes?			
Do my everyday practices create sexism or gender inequity, even when we might consider these to be good practices?			
Do I model a positive attitude toward gender equality in every day actions and conversations with children?			
Does my own gender and sexuality influence my expectations of children, their families and carers?			
Do I talk with children, families and carers about gender, identity and sexuality?			

This tool has been adapted from, Rainbow Families Council: How children play: challenging myths and stereotypes, Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance: Equity for Children and Families and Faragher & MacNaughton: Working with Young Children.



SUPPORTING VIDEO: Reflections from Early Years Educators – Doug Fargher and Rachael Bye

Reflective Questions

1. How might my everyday practices create sexism or gender inequity, even when we might consider these to be good practices?
2. How do I model a positive attitude toward gender equality in every day actions and conversations with children?
3. How does my own gender and sexuality influence my expectations of children, their families and carers?

Additional Resources



Anti-Bias Approach in Early Childhood (3rd Edition 2016), edited by Red Ruby Scarlet.



Equity for Children and Families – Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance



Playing fair – gender equity in childcare, Extract from Putting Children First, the magazine of the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC)

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- Victorian Government 2016. Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, Department of Education and Training: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/edcare/veyldframework.pdf>
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