



Tips for Healthy Gender Development

Groups of men and women are like each other in more ways than they are different. They can all be smart, be creative, and remember things. Parents can help their daughters and their sons do many things whether they are boys or girls. All children need to be active, creative, and sensitive.

As a parent, you can help your child build healthy ideas about being a girl or a boy. You can help your child learn to respect the other sex.

- **Be careful with your words.** When you say something to your daughter, think about what you say. Would you say the same thing to your son? Try to say things that will help both boys and girls feel good. Say things that help them learn that they can do many things. Praise your daughter and your son for whatever they do well.

- **Show boys and girls the many things that men and women can do.** As a parent, do some things that men usually do and some things that women usually do. Let children watch and talk to men and women who do many different jobs. Watch TV and movies and point out the many things that men and women do. Tell your children when you agree with what the actors do and when you disagree.

- **Help girls learn about math and science. Help boys feel good about reading and language.** In the United States, girls do well with math and science when they are very young. When they get a little older, some girls think they cannot learn those things. They stop doing so well. Some boys do not do well with reading. Parents can help girls with math and science. They can give extra help to boys when they learn about reading and language.

- **Help children understand the messages in television.** You probably watch television or movies with your children. Talk about what you see. Talk about what the men and women are doing. Talk about how they treat each other. Discuss the messages in the programs and ads. Talk about your own beliefs and values.

- **Be a good role model.** Do many different things. Explain to the children that boys and girls usually can do the same things.

- **Give boys and girls chances to watch men and women doing many different jobs.** For example, let them learn about female construction workers or male nurses.

- **Be honest when children ask how boys and girls are the same and different.** Use correct words for body parts.

- **Encourage children to play with both boys and girls.** But be ready for them to say they do not want to do that at some ages. Boy-girl friendships may develop later.

- **Provide toys that are not just for a boy or a girl.** Let children be creative and make their own toys with boxes, art supplies, sheets, and other items.

- **Make positive statements about girls and boys.** Say nice things about both genders.

- **Do not expect all boys or all girls to like the same things.** Ask your child what he likes and doesn't like. Let your son play dress-up, house, and dolls sometimes. Let your daughter play with trucks, blocks, and sports activities sometimes. Also let them say that they don't like those things.

Sources:

Benokraitis, N. V. (2002). *Marriages and families: Changes, choices, and constraints* (4th ed.). NJ: Prentice Hall.

<http://www.selfhelpmagazine.com/articles/parenting/healthygirls.html>

<http://familyfun.go.com/parenting/child/dev/expert/dony77faboygirl/dony77faboygirl.html>

Prepared by:

Jodi Putnam Wall and
Nithyakala Karuppaswamy
Extension Graduate Research Assistants
with
Judith A. Myers-Walls, Ph.D., CFLE
Extension Specialist