

# Exploring Gender Development and Identity

Helping Children and Families, Supporting Teachers

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# Gender Development and Identity in Young Children

Gender development is the process of identifying oneself as male or female. Gender roles are expected set thinking and behavioral patterns for males and females. Gender is what we express, how we look act and feel.

## I. Theories of gender development

### A. Behavioral Approach

-Skinner perspective

### B. Psychodynamic Approach/Feminism

-based on Freudian perspective

### C. Cognitive Approach

-the idea of children's thinking determines how they will perceive the world, and how these perceptions will be acted upon

### D. Biological Approach

-gender role is the result of biological process.

**All theories agree that Early Childhood is the time of exploring gender identity**

## Gender Development and Identity in Young Children

- II. Gender Dysphoria (GD)(previously known as Gender Identity Disorder in Children)
  - Research indicates that:
    - A. majority of children diagnosed with GD cease to desire to be the other sex by puberty, with most growing up to identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, with or without therapeutic intervention.(Jameson L, de Krester DM, Marshall JC, De Groot LJ(2013))(Dulcan, MK (2015))(Kliegman RM (2014))
    - B. the average age at which transgender people become aware they are transgender is 8 years old, and the majority (80%) are aware by the time they leave primary school.(Kennedy, N (2008)
- III. Stages of gender development “children will...”
  - A. Infancy (0-18 months)
    - observation of adults behaviors
  - B. Toddler (18-24 months)
    - begin to develop a sense of self
  - C. 3-4 years
    - initial concepts about gender are flexible
  - D. 5-6 years
    - Most ridged period of gender identity. Conscious development

**GROUP DISCUSSION:** How do children express their gender identity?

# Gender Development and Identity in Young Children

## IV. Supporting teachers

***The role of the early childhood professional during gender exploration and development is to be the representative of reality.***

***Review NAEYC Ethics; Code of Conduct: Professional Responsibilities to Children and Families***

### A. Working with children

1. Provide a safe and nurturing classroom
2. Encourage exploration of gender expression
3. Foster self esteem
4. Encourage healthy gender development by using nonspecific gender words and phrases.
5. Affirm their actions “You are doing what is just right for you”
6. Help children understand that noncompliance to gender expectations is a choice.

## Gender Development and Identity in Young Children

### B. Supporting Families: Working with families

1. Encourage parents to ask questions. There are many reasons that their son/daughter will say “I want to be a girl/boy” (examples from experience)
2. Educate parents about early childhood development.
3. Provide children’s literature that parents can use at home (See list of books)
4. Provide community resources

### C. Be a professional: doing what is best for children and families

***What do you do when reality is askew: how can we help children trust their knowledge when they see contradictions?***

1. Your personal feelings and thoughts are ok, but you keep them to yourself
2. Your job is to teach and instill in children a “love of learning “
3. When children “notice” take the time to address their concerns.

### V. Group activity and discussion

With the scenario you were given, please discuss how you would handle the situation and present:

1. What questions would you ask the family?
2. What resources would you provide?
3. How would you be the representative of reality your classroom? Affirm children’s’ actions?
4. How would you handle questions from parents and others outside your classroom (professionally)

### PRESENTATION

### VI. Review and Evaluations



# Attendance

**Trainer will ask: What are your expectations of this training?**

## Demographic poll

Attachment A\*

# **Open Discussion**

**What are your thoughts about gender development?**

**How do children identify their gender?**

**What age do children identify their gender?**

# Gender Development and Identity in Young Children

Gender development is the process of identifying oneself as male or female. Gender roles are expected set thinking and behavioral patterns for males and females. Gender is what we express, how we look act and feel.

## Developmental Theories of Gender Development

Behavioral Approach	Psychodynamic Approach/Feminism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Skinner perspective</li><li>-gender role associated behaviors are learned and not innate and shaped by reinforcement</li><li>-all behavior and personality is a result of learning (nurture), classical conditioning, and learning by observation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-based on Freudian perspective</li><li>-childhood experiences are responsible for gender development, the stages of development take place with the possibility of conflict at any stage</li><li>-family dynamics influence individuals at a subconscious level which leads to the development of internal gender identities</li></ul>



## Developmental Theories of Gender Development

Cognitive Approach	Biological Approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-the idea of children's thinking determines how they will perceive the world, and how these perceptions will be acted upon</li><li>-children have experiences with man and women, they think about their experiences, and adopt behaviors performed by people of their own sex. They classify their gender and adopt the behaviors associated with that gender</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-gender role is the result of biological process. The 23<sup>rd</sup> chromosome assigns gender XX for girls; XY for boys</li></ul>

All theories agree that Early Childhood is the time of exploring gender identity. Children need to identify their gender in order to want to change their gender. Gender identity and gender roles are two different things. Young children's' choices during this time does not predict future sexual orientation or gender identity as an adult. Before the age of 5, children do not think gender is permanent, their fantasy thinking, makes them believe they can change if they want.

## II. Stages of gender development “children will...”

### **Infancy (0-18 months)**

- observation of adults behaviors
- parent interaction is based on the child's gender, which shapes the infants understanding of gender

### **Toddler (18-24 months)**

- begin to develop a sense of self
- identify gender patterns in the home and school settings
- begin to understand group belonging by gender identity

### **Preschool (3-4 years)**

- initial concepts about gender are flexible
- notice differences and question why they do or don't have certain physical features
- also causes fear, confusion, fantasy and exploration
- create strict rules and expectations of how boys and girls behave (“Joey, you can't play with Dolls, you're a boy”)

### **Kindergarten (5-6 years)**

- most ridged period of gender identity. Conscious development
- children are starting to understand there are rules and the importance in complying with the rules of gender expectations

### **GROUP DISCUSSION:**

## **Breakout group discussion**

**You will be put in a breakout group to discuss: (20 Minutes)**

**How do children express their gender identity?**

**What is the role of the Early Childhood Professional in supporting gender development?**

## The Role of the Early Childhood Professional

The role of the early childhood professional during gender exploration and development is to be the representative of reality.

**Ethical Responsibility to Children.** Early childhood educators main responsibility is to provide care and education in a safe, healthy and nurturing environment that is responsive for all children. This includes a commitment to supporting children's development and learning; respecting individual differences; and helping children learn to live, play and work cooperatively. We are committed to promoting children's self awareness, competence, self-worth, resiliency, and physical well-being. (NAEYC)

### Working with children

1. Provide a safe and nurturing classroom: **how do we provide this?**
  2. Encourage exploration of gender expression
    - provide a wide range of toys and activities
    - have dramatic play props that allow children exploration of gender roles
    - avoid gender stereotypes set by society
    - be inclusive in when you address the group; avoid dividing children by gender
    - books should have images of diversity, displays on bulletin boards and walls should expand children possibilities...girls can be truck drivers, police officers etc; boys can take care of babies and cook.
- Inspire children to be who they want to be. **Any other ideas?**

## The Role of the Early Childhood Professional

The role of the early childhood professional during gender exploration and development is to be the representative of reality.

3. Foster self esteem
  - provide positive feedback for their unique skills and qualities(EX you were very helpful today with our new student; wow, did you run fast on the playground today; I notice you helping Joey up when he fell today, that you for being kind)
  - provide positive feedback for non-gender specific achievements.
4. Encourage healthy gender development by using nonspecific gender words and phrases. **How would you do this?**
5. Affirm their actions “You are doing what is just right for you”
6. Help children understand that noncompliance to gender expectations is a choice.
  - “Bobby can pick what to wear to school, just like you do, his choices are just right for him”
  - “Both boys and girls can be good at sports, art, reading and math”
7. Most important: provide an environment of respect



# Open Discussion

## How do we create a respectful environment?

- see attachment #2 *Messages of Respect*

## How do you support parents?

# The role of the Early Childhood Professional

**Ethical Responsibilities to Families** . Families are of primary importance in children's development. Because the family and the early childhood practitioner have a common interest in the child's well-being, we acknowledge a primary responsibility to bring about communication, cooperation, and collaboration between the home and early childhood program in ways that enhance the child's development.

## Supporting Families: Working with families

**It is developmentally appropriate for children to explore and ask questions when they notice differences in others.** (changing the babies diaper)

1. Encourage parents to ask questions. There are many reasons that their son/daughter will say "I want to be a girl/boy" (examples from experience)
  - boy who wanted to wear skirts
  - boy who idolized his older sister
  - girl who wanted to climb high

All of the children had associated certain enviable behaviors with sexual identity

## The role of the Early Childhood Professional supporting families

2. Educate parents about early childhood development. Provide information and schedule educational meetings that help parents have realistic expectations of their children.
  - Parents are overwhelmed with advice from society, family, the media and trends that sometimes are reflected in their decisions and are not in the best interest of the child, or the child's development  
(example of toddler parent with potty training)
3. Provide children's literature that parents can use at home (See list of books)
4. Provide community resources
  - Always have a resource book available to families and keep it updated



## **Be a professional: doing what is best for children and families**

What do you do when reality is askew: how can we help children trust their knowledge when they see contradictions?

You must notice when children's behaviors are showing you that they might have worries, or questions about what is happening in your classroom.

1. Your personal feelings and thoughts are ok, but you keep them to yourself
  - Not your job to say what is right or wrong, but to affirm children's choices  
    "You are doing what is just right for you"
  - When children or parents question the actions, clothes, or behaviors of another child  
    "All the children are working on something in here, Joey is trying to figure himself out"
2. Your job is to teach and instill in children a "love of learning":
  - When you don't feel comfortable with questions others are asking (especially parents) tell them to speak to the center director about their concerns
3. When children "notice" take the time to address their concerns.
  - "I see you are noticing Mark has on nail polish today, he is just trying to figure something out."

# **Breakout group discussion**

## **You will be put in a breakout group to discuss the scenario you were given and then present. (20 Minutes)**

With the scenario you were given, please discuss how you would handle the situation.

1. What questions would you ask the family?
2. What resources would you provide?
3. How would you be the representative of reality your classroom? Affirm children's actions?
4. How would you handle questions from parents and others outside your classroom (professionally)

## **PRESENTATION**

# Wrap up and Evaluation

Please complete your evaluation. Thank you for your time and attention.

