

## Parenting for prevention gender stereotypes



If you walked into a classroom with WISE educators, chances are you would observe many conversations about gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes are all the big and little assumptions and expectations we have about what boys and girls are “supposed” to be like. In fifth grade, WISE educators encourage students to define their own values when they feel pressured to conform to gender stereotypes. Sixth graders build a critical lens of what media is selling us, noticing how advertising often reinforces gender stereotypes. In seventh grade, students discuss how gender stereotypes may encourage harmful behaviors between friends and dating partners. Eighth graders reflect on how gender stereotypes inform and limit our relationships. High school students make the connection to how gendered pressures and expectations lead to gender-based violence. We spend a LOT of time talking about the impact of gender stereotypes and encouraging students to imagine the world without them. Research shows that there is a direct correlation between strong adherence to traditional gender norms and high rates of gender-based violence. Eliminating them makes the world a safer and more joyful place for all of us.



Gender stereotypes are the social expectations for men to behave one way, women to behave another way, and for all people to fit into one of those boxes. We hear things like men are leaders and women are supporters; men are strong and women are delicate; men are stoic and women are emotional. Stereotypes about women often focus on their looks or sex appeal. We tend to think about things happening to women, while we envision men being the ones to take action. This is called **objectification**: turning people into things. Instead of doing things with people, we do things to objects. Ultimately, these stereotypes make it seem normal or natural for some (men) to have power and take action, while others (women and people who are transgender) to have less power. Gender-based violence is used as a way to keep people in their stereotypical roles and keep the power imbalance in place. Gender-based violence is used to maintain power inequality between men and women; it is used against men and boys who do not fit the expectations of manliness; it is used within struggles for dominance; it is used against women and girls to keep them in a secondary position; it is used against people who are trans and gender non-conforming for challenging expectations around gender; and it is used against people who are LGBTQ for not fitting the social norms about sexuality.

Once you start to notice gender stereotypes, you begin to see them everywhere: slogans on clothing, in music, movies, and our favorite tv shows, and in casual everyday conversations. This means that there are countless opportunities for us to influence our culture every day. By challenging gender stereotypes, we can dramatically reduce gender-based violence.

### Some things we all can do:

- Encourage young people to try new things. Let them experiment with things they love like sports, toys, and clothes, and question assumptions about who can and cannot participate in various activities based on gender.
- Let children dress and play in the ways they find most comfortable and practical.
- Eliminate gendered insults from your language and call out others when they use them.
- Notice and point out stereotypes you observe in media and advertising.
- Help young people define what they value in themselves and others.
- Watch *The Sexy Lie*, a TedTalk by Caroline Heldman.