

# How we can help children build their own future, *free from violence*



WOMEN'S  
AND GIRLS'  
EMERGENCY  
CENTRE

ALL  
IN

A resource guide for families

# Glossary

## Gender

Gender refers to the roles, behaviours, and expectations that society considers appropriate for men and women. It goes beyond biological differences (sex) and includes how individuals identify themselves in terms of masculinity, femininity, or other gender expressions.

## Gender Equality

Gender equality means treating everyone fairly, regardless of their gender. It ensures that both men and women have the same opportunities, rights, and responsibilities in all aspects of life, such as work, education, and social interactions. The goal is to create a balanced and just society where no one is favoured or discriminated against based on their gender.

## Gender Stereotypes

People sometimes have ideas about how women and men should be or what they should do. These ideas are called gender stereotypes. They can be good or bad. For example, a positive stereotype is that "girls are caring," but a negative one is that "girls are weak".

## Gender Roles

Gender roles are the expectations and behaviours society considers appropriate for individuals based on their gender. These roles often define how men and women are supposed to act, what tasks they should perform, and what characteristics are considered suitable for each gender.

## Unconscious Bias

Unconscious bias is when our brains make quick judgements about people or situations without us even realising it. These judgements are often influenced by our background, experiences, or cultural upbringing. Unconscious bias can affect our decisions and actions, leading to unintentional preferences or prejudices.

## Gender Based Violence

Any type of harm that is perpetrated against a person or group of people because of their sex, gender, sexual orientation and/or gender identity. This type of violence includes physical, sexual, emotional, or economic abuse. Gender-based violence is a serious issue that disproportionately affects women and girls.

## Violence Against Women

Research shows that violence against women arises in the social context of gender inequality. There is a strong and consistent association between gender inequality and violence against women.



# About All In

The All In program empowers early childhood educators and families to work together in preventing gender-based violence.

Through workshops, resources and tools, All In helps educators create an inclusive and supportive environment where children can safely explore their interests and what makes them unique.

## What are the outcomes of the All In program?

All In equips educators with the knowledge, resources, and confidence to challenge gender stereotypes through their environment, culture, activities, policies, and practice. **All contributing to:**



### Overcoming gender stereotypes

The project starts with helping educators recognise what gender inequality and gender stereotypes in early childhood education settings look like.

We share practical actions and resources to help educators actively challenge gender stereotypes.



### Diversity and inclusion

All In works with centres on concepts of culturally safe spaces, identities and strengths in early years environments.

We also work to develop an understanding of Aboriginal child rearing practices from First Nations Communities.



### Healthy and respectful relationships

All In activities and resources challenge gender stereotypes and support participants with practical tools to help build healthy and respectful relationships between all children.

We promote awareness of boundaries, communication, and mutual understanding, working towards creating a safe environment where all children can thrive.

# What are gender stereotypes?

“Gender stereotypes are oversimplified ideas, messages and images about differences between males and females. They have become meaningful because society has given them meaning and value”.

- OurWatch

(Australia's National Peak Body for Prevention of Gender Based Violence).

## Have you heard these gender stereotypes before?

Gender stereotypes creep into so many parts of our lives, without us even realising. Over time, gender stereotypes and discrimination start to create boxes that limit all children.

Here are some examples of common gendered language:



# Why do gender stereotypes matter?

“Children’s understanding of gender is influenced and reinforced at a young age through interactions and experiences with family, culture, lifestyle, the media, education and childcare environments and the wider community.”

Research shows children’s attitudes towards gender are fully formed by the age of seven.

## How do they affect children?

From an early age we learn by seeing and copying. We absorb messages from different social and cultural environments. From hearing repeated gendered messages, we start to learn what is ‘appropriate’ for girls and boys.

Research shows children’s attitudes towards gender are fully formed by the age of seven. These shape the foundations of our adulthood, influencing our attitudes, values, skills and behaviours.

**Nobody is born with certain preferences based on their gender; these are learned. It's crucial to provide all children with equal opportunities to reach their full potential.**



# Did you know?

## Research into gender stereotypes show that girls think they are less intelligent than boys...

Children's ideas about gender and brilliance begin as early as age 6, when girls are less likely than boys to believe that members of their own gender are "really, really, smart". In follow up studies, these girls were less likely to choose to play with toys that were for 'really, really, smart' children.



## Only 6% of Year 3 girls want a career in science, technology engineering and mathematics...

A 2021 study exploring the career choices of Year 3 students from 14 Australian schools discovered that only 6% of girls aspired to a career in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), opposed to 22% of boys.



## 50% of Australian men aged between 18-30, agree they should act strong even if they feel scared or nervous...

A 2024 study by the Jesuit Social Service Men's Project re-examined what it means to be a man in Australian society. The study surveyed more than 3,500 men between the ages of 18-45. When asked about acting tough, 50% of men between the ages of 18-30 agreed or strongly agreed they felt pressure to do so even if they were scared or nervous.



## 79% of Australian parents want their children to grow up without limiting gender stereotypes.

Our Watch research reveals that parents of children aged 0-3 are worried about rigid gender stereotypes and the majority of Australian parents (79%) want their children to grow up without limiting gender stereotypes.



Sources:

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/jan/26/girls-believe-brilliance-is-a-male-trait>

<https://www.impact.acu.edu.au/global/how-gender-stereotypes-limit-child-career-choice>

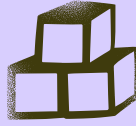
<https://cdn.jss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/05144735/The-Man-Box-2024-7.1-LR.pdf>

<https://media-cdn.ourwatch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/11/06031050/Our-Watch-Parenting-and-Early-Years.pdf>

# How are gender stereotypes harmful in early childhood?



Shames children who don't fit in them



Limits opportunities for play



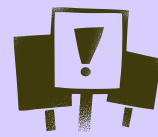
Can cause low self esteem



Fail to recognise skills and interests



Restricts emotions children can feel



Excuses anti-social behaviour

Source: OurWatch #BecauseWhy <https://www.facebook.com/OurWatchAus/photos/a.515368445200474/1976329235771047/>

## Examples of common gender stereotypes

| Feminine                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Masculine                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Stereotypes:</b><br>Sensitive, kind and caring, emotional, gentle and submissive, vain, talkative, bossy and indecisive.                                                                                                     | <b>Stereotypes:</b><br>Strong and non-emotional 'boys don't cry', logical and practical likes to be the leader, plays rough, is boisterous and likes to get dirty, aggressive, loud, brave and independent.              |
| <b>Socialisation:</b><br>Toys are focused on dolls, princesses, art and crafts.                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Socialisation:</b><br>Toys are focused on action, construction, technology, fighting and conquering.                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Gender roles:</b><br>Value is placed on appearance (being pretty), being compliant (nice, sweet gentle) is seen as a normal part of feminine behaviour and a preference for caring or submissive roles (mummies/princesses). | <b>Gender roles:</b><br>Value is placed on physical strength, aggression is seen as a normal and accepted part of masculine behaviour and a preference for taking risky and dominant roles (superheroes/action figures). |

# *A snapshot:* gender inequality in Australia

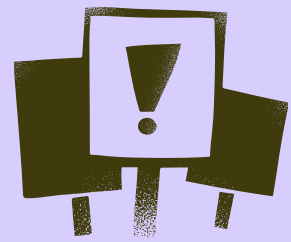
Gender inequality limits the choices and opportunities available to women and girls.



1 woman is killed every 9 days by an intimate partner.



30% of Australian men don't believe gender inequality really exists.



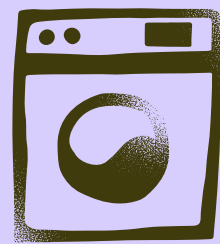
1 in 4 women have experienced intimate partner violence.



Exposure to violence against mothers or other caregivers causes long-term harm to children.



Family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children.



Women do more unpaid housework than men even when they are the primary earner.

Source: <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/status-women-report-card-2023#youth-and-young-adulthood>

Source: [OurWatch, Change the Story.](#)

Source: [Safe and Equal 2023 Fast Facts](#)

# How gender stereotypes impact futures

## Evidence also shows that gender-based violence starts with gender inequality

Gender inequality promotes behaviours and attitudes that lead to one in three Australian women experiencing physical violence in their lifetime.

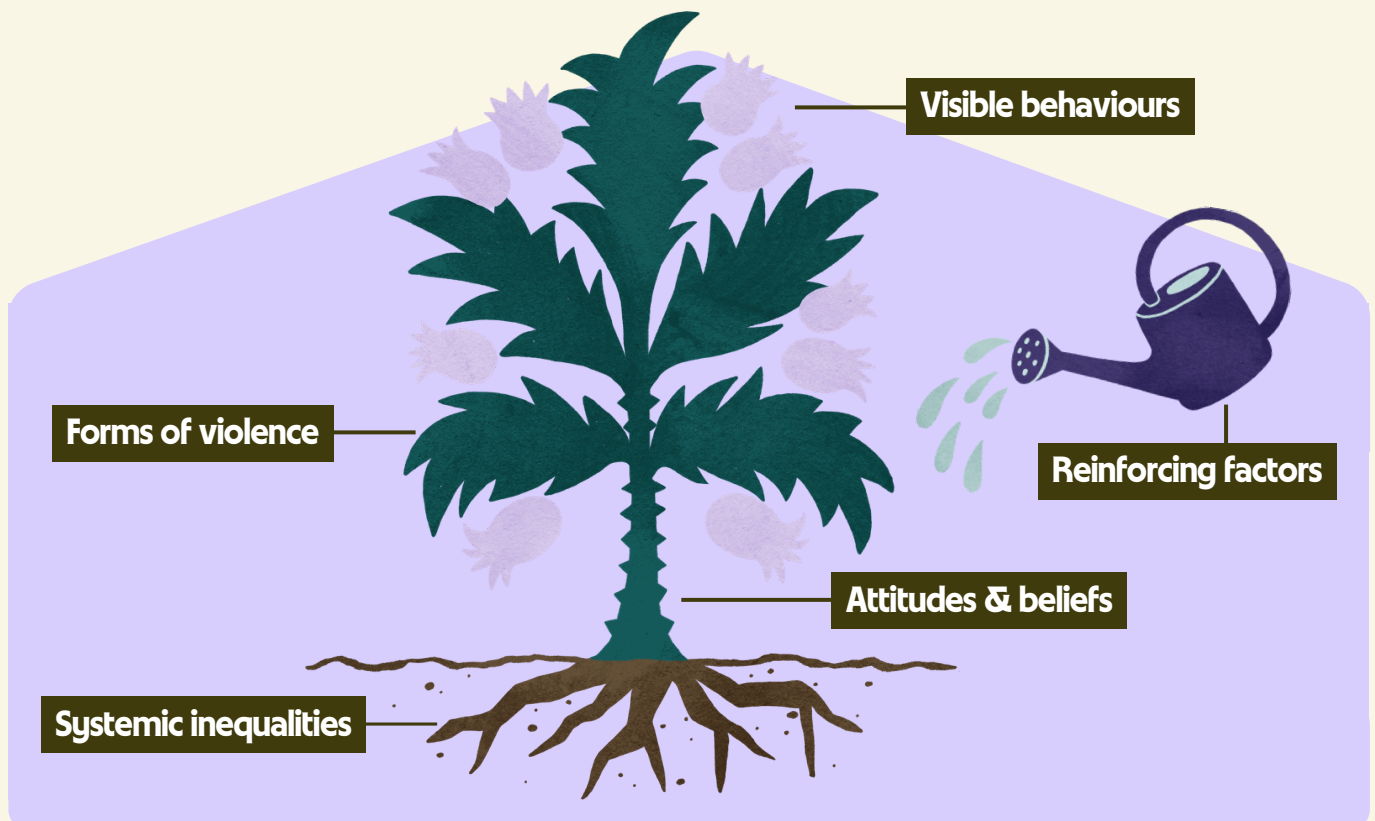
Gender-based violence happens in a society and in relationships where there is a power imbalance between men and women.

## Diversity, inclusion and intersectionality

There are many intersecting forms of oppression and discrimination that influence and affect the prevalence of gender-based violence.

The All In program also aims to promote inclusive and culturally safe spaces by

addressing different forms of discrimination and bias. These include racism, ableism, sexism, class discrimination, and – for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women – the significant impacts of colonialism.



# What does gender equality look like in early childhood?

Early childhood is a key developmental period when children begin to learn about gender. The gender stereotypes children absorb from the world around them can shape attitudes and expectations in adulthood.

If girls grow up watching movies only seeing male superheroes, they may think their gender isn't naturally strong and courageous or capable of being a leader in society.

If boys grow up being told not to cry and to 'be a man' they may think their gender isn't allowed to be vulnerable and instead learn to bottle up their emotions.

Challenging these harmful gender stereotypes from a young age helps build more gender equal societies and allows children to grow up without being limited by restrictive and harmful expectations.



# Building safe and healthy futures for all children

The purpose of the All In is to promote equal, healthy, respectful and safe relationships for all children.

Working alongside educators and families in the early childhood space, All In aims to challenge harmful gender stereotypes. All In gives educators and families the tools to help children reach their full potential, and together, build more equal and safe futures for the next generation.

**“Parents can play an important role in promoting gender equality and building children’s resilience to rigid gender stereotypes in early childhood, a key action to prevent violence against women”**

-Quote from: <https://www.sbs.com.au/voices/article/how-can-parents-promote-gender-equality/tnx3kwxkm>



## Why are equal, healthy, respectful and safe relationships important in the early years?

Evidence shows that rigid gender stereotypes contribute to gender inequality. Gender inequality is one of the key drivers or causes of gender-based violence.

By promoting equal, healthy, respectful and safe relationships in the early years,

parents and educators can help prevent gender-based violence for the next generation.

Gender-based violence is a serious and widespread problem in Australia but it is preventable if we work together.

# The gender equality checklist

This checklist will help you identify your child's understanding of gender equality by starting important conversations about stereotypes.

|                                                            |  |
|------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| Can boys be ballerinas?                                    |  |
| Do girls have jobs in construction?                        |  |
| Is it ok for boys to cry?                                  |  |
| Are there sports that are only for girls or only for boys? |  |
| Can boys have long hair?                                   |  |
| Is it ok for girls and boys to play together?              |  |
| What are boys better at than girls?                        |  |
| Can boys like princesses and dolls?                        |  |
| How would you feel if someone called you girly?            |  |
| Can girls be superheroes?                                  |  |
| Can girls do anything?                                     |  |
| Can boys do anything?                                      |  |
| Should girls and boys be treated the same?                 |  |
| What jobs are for Mummies?                                 |  |
| What jobs are for Daddies?                                 |  |

# 5 tips for discussing *harmful gender stereotypes* *with your children*

When speaking to young children about harmful gender stereotypes, it's important to approach the conversation with empathy, openness and age-appropriate language.



## 1. Be a role model

Model equal, fair and caring behaviour and challenge gender roles. Show children they can engage in a wide range of activities and pursue their interests without limitations.



## 2. Promote diverse role models

Introduce children to examples of role models who defy gender stereotypes. Find books, movies, and TV shows featuring strong, positive representations of people of all genders.



## 3. Discuss emotions and empathy

Encourage empathy, understanding and kindness towards others and teach children that everyone's feelings and experiences matter. It's ok for people of all genders to talk about feelings.



## 4. Encourage inclusive play

Provide opportunities for children to play with a wide range of toys and activities, regardless of gender. Let them know that all children can enjoy different types of play.



## 5. Foster open communication

Create an open and non-judgmental environment where children feel comfortable discussing their thoughts and experiences about gender or anything else!

By actively engaging in conversations about harmful gender stereotypes, you can help children navigate societal expectations, foster equality and promote a more inclusive future.

# LEARN MORE

[wagec.org.au/all-in/](https://wagec.org.au/all-in/)

# FIND SUPPORT

[wagec.org.au/get-help](https://wagec.org.au/get-help)

# ABOUT WAGEC

[wagec.org.au](https://wagec.org.au)



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WAGEC acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

