

Gardeners of Potential

A Parents' Toolkit for Supporting
Your Children's Professional Path

 E-WIRING



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Executive Summary

This document constitutes the practical toolkit developed as part of the RE-WIRING project, which seeks to address and dismantle gender biases and stereotypes in educational and career development contexts. Specifically designed for parents and caregivers, this toolkit supports those guiding children and young people from infancy through young adulthood in making confident, informed, and unbiased decisions about their future paths.

Children's growth and self-perception are often subtly constrained by ingrained societal gender stereotypes, which can limit their exploration and potential. This resource equips parents and caregivers with the knowledge and tools to recognize these biases and actively create supportive environments where children feel empowered to pursue interests and careers free from restrictive gender expectations.

Key objectives and themes of the toolkit include:

- Understanding the formation and impact of gender biases in education and development;
- Recognizing how societal messages, media, language, and role models influence children's self-image;
- Practical strategies for identifying and challenging everyday gender stereotypes;
- Guidance on fostering inclusive, nurturing spaces at home and school;
- Encouraging positive reinforcement, mentorship, and diverse representation;
- Addressing resistance and supporting resilience in children and communities;
- Sustaining long-term change through advocacy, critical thinking, and intergenerational mentorship.

By combining research-based insights with actionable advice, this toolkit aims to empower parents and caregivers as vital agents of change, nurturing children's confidence, broadening their horizons, and helping them flourish beyond traditional gendered boundaries.

WELCOME TO THIS TOOLKIT!

Parents and caregivers are the gardeners of their children's potential, tending to the rich and varied landscape of their talents, dreams, and aspirations. Like any thriving garden, a child's growth is shaped by the environment around them.

You can give them the nourishment of encouragement, the space to explore, and the freedom to reach their goals in their own unique way.



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What is this toolkit about?

This toolkit is designed to support parents and caregivers in guiding their children and students of all ages, from infancy to young adulthood in their career development. Through practical tips and information, we invite you to cultivate an environment where your child feels free to grow into their fullest potential, rooted in confidence, nourished by support, and unshaped by rigid ideas of what boys and girls "should" or "should not" do. The world is full of possibilities, and with your care, your child's future can bloom in ways both unexpected and extraordinary.





As parents and caretakers, you strive to create the best environment for your child, one where they can establish a strong foundation and reach their full potential without unnecessary barriers.

However, much like plants that struggle when confined to small pots, children's growth can be unintentionally restricted by gender stereotypes, beliefs about which paths are more suitable for boys or girls. These assumptions, like weeds, can quietly take hold, limiting opportunities and preventing children from discovering their true strengths.

This toolkit helps you with:

- **Recognizing Hidden Weeds:** Identify the subtle ways gender stereotypes might influence your child's choices and learn how to create an environment where all interests are equally encouraged.
- **Exploring a Diverse Landscape:** Discover a wide range of educational and career paths, with real-life examples of individuals flourishing in fields they love.
- **Strengthening Roots of Confidence:** Find strategies to support your child in following their passions, even when they go against traditional expectations.
- **Cultivating Open Conversations:** Learn how to talk about these topics in a way that reassures your child they are supported, no matter where their interests take them.

While this toolkit focuses on gender in education, we recognize that many factors, such as culture, background, and personal values, shape a child's journey. The aim is not to steer children toward a particular path but to offer them the optimal conditions to realize their full potential.

What can you find in this toolkit?

Chapter 1 (p.8): Understanding Gender Bias in Education

This chapter provides a foundation for understanding how gendered educational choices form and their lasting impact. It highlights that while bias occurs widely, it can be addressed and mitigated.

Chapter 2 (p.15): How Gendered Expectations Take Hold

Explores how gender biases subtly shape children's self-perceptions through media, language, role models, and societal norms.

Chapter 3 (p.30): Identifying and Challenging Biases

Provides practical strategies to recognize and interrupt everyday gender biases, reframing conversations to open new possibilities for all children.

Chapter 4 (p.57): Creating a Nurturing and Inclusive Environment

Focuses on building supportive, bias-free learning spaces at home and school, ensuring all children feel encouraged to explore diverse interests.

Chapter 5 (p.62): The Role of Encouragement and Support

Highlights the power of positive reinforcement, mentorship, and representation in shaping children's confidence and sense of capability.

Chapter 6 (p.76): Addressing Challenges and Resistance

Equips parents and educators with strategies to handle pushback, challenge stereotypes, and foster resilience in the face of resistance.

Chapter 7 (p.84): Sustaining Change and Empowering Future Generations

Encourages long-term advocacy, critical thinking, and mentorship to ensure future generations grow free from limiting gender expectations.

Chapter 8 (p.90): Extra Resources

Find practical tools to help recognize and challenge everyday stereotypes and create an inclusive learning environment.

Chapter 9 (p.97): Get to Know Us

More information on the team and the research project.

Chapter 10 (p.99): Glossary

Look up tricky terms with simple, easy-to-understand definitions.

Chapter 11 (p.101): References

Find a list of the sources and studies that this toolkit is based on.



Chapter 1

Planting the Seeds:

Understanding Gender Bias in Education - An Introduction

Why is this important?

As parents and caretakers, you shape the environment in which children grow. Just like soil and sunlight are crucial for a garden, the messages and support children receive influence their confidence and choices, especially regarding education and careers.

Children often encounter well-meaning but limiting beliefs about suitable paths. Boys may be pushed towards fields like math and engineering, while girls might be directed to nurturing roles like nursing, teaching or arts. These pathways, though familiar, can restrict rather than support growth.

By nurturing the learning environment, you can reduce these barriers, allowing children to explore their genuine interests in any field. This freedom fosters confidence and success. Every child deserves the chance to develop uniquely, without outdated constraints.



While some children may naturally prefer traditional paths, the aim is to ensure they flourish by choice, not expectation. By challenging outdated notions, you offer your child the best opportunities to nurture their dreams. When children pursue their true strengths and interests, they thrive as individuals and contribute to a diverse world.



You will also find some technical terms, and they will always be accompanied by a 💡 for the first time we mention them. This means that you can find an explanation of these terms in a box on the same page, and also in the glossary.

Also note that words that are underlined and followed by this symbol  are clickable hyperlinks; if you open them, they will take you directly to the webpage.

Progress in de-gendering careers around the world

Understanding how gender stereotypes influence educational choices is crucial. But alongside the challenges, it is also important to recognize the progress that *has* been made.

This section celebrates some of those achievements. It is a reminder that progress is possible, and that each step forward brings us closer to a world where everyone can learn, grow, and choose their path freely. Consider the following examples to see what development has already taken place!

Worldwide wins:

Achieving gender equality and empowering women (including promoting their participation in the STEM fields) is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations organization in 2015.

Men in traditionally female-dominated fields:

- In the United Kingdom, more men are entering the nursing profession. Between 1991 and 2001, the number of qualified male nurses nearly doubled, with an increase of 96%! This shows that nursing is becoming a more accepted and attractive career path for men (Curtis, Robinson & Netten, 2009).
- Many countries are changing their parental leave systems to encourage fathers to take more time off to care for their children. For example, in Quebec, Canada, the introduction of a well-paid, father-only leave period led to a 250% increase in fathers taking leave (Lütolf, 2024).

Women in traditionally male-dominated fields:

- After the 1994 genocide, Rwanda focused on rebuilding with gender equality as a core principle. Women now hold nearly 50% of parliamentary seats (the highest in the world). Rwanda's gender-inclusive policies have encouraged women to take leadership roles in all sectors.
- In the UK and Ireland, 80% of female students say they felt encouraged to study science and tech subjects, and 87% feel like they belong in their courses. Events like STEM Women career fairs helped 91% discover new job options, showing that old gender stereotypes are starting to fade (STEM Women).
- In 2018, Iceland became the first country in the world to make it mandatory for companies to prove they pay men and women equally for the same work. Thanks to the Icelandic Equal Pay Standard (IEPS), companies with over 25 employees now need to get certified to show they follow fair pay practices. This policy shifted the burden of proof from employees to employers and introduced fines for noncompliance (Wagner, 2022).

Important disclaimers

Limitations of conceptualizing gender as binary

In this toolkit, we often refer to “boys and girls” or “women and men.” At the same time, we recognize that not all young people fit neatly into these categories; some experience their gender in a unique way.

Sometimes, we rely on the binary concept of gender , especially when discussing common gender stereotypes. These stereotypes are often built around ideas of what it means to be “a man” or “a woman,” and they can limit how young people see their options when it comes to school, work, and life choices.

By naming these stereotypes, we hope to show how they can create barriers for *any* young person, regardless of their gender identity. We also understand it can be especially challenging when these stereotypes target someone based on a gender they do not identify with.

This toolkit is designed to help you support your child, whether they identify as a boy, girl, both, neither, or somewhere in between, in exploring their own interests, strengths, and possibilities.

Binary concept of gender: The idea that gender falls into two distinct categories: male and female. This concept excludes people who do not tightly fit with either of these two labels, such as transgender or non-binary people.

There are no “right” or “wrong” choices

This toolkit is here to help young people make study and career choices that truly reflect who they are. As a parent or caregiver, you play an important role in supporting that process.

Many young people feel pressure to choose certain paths based on gender because of ideas about what’s “for girls,” “for boys,” or “for someone like them.” This toolkit aims to reduce that pressure, so every child can explore freely. At the same time, if your child chooses a path that *does* align with traditional gender expectations, that’s perfectly okay too. What matters most is that their choice reflects their interests, strengths, and what they enjoy.

Take what you need

This toolkit is flexible, there is no need to read it all at once or in order. As a parent or caregiver, you can use it in whatever way fits your situation: browse topics that interest you, revisit sections as your child’s needs evolve, or use parts of it to start conversations at home. Whether you explore it together or on your own, the goal is to support your child in discovering their interests and making choices that truly reflect who they are.



Chapter 2

The Roots of Bias: How Gendered Expectations Take Hold





Just as the health of a plant is shaped by the roots beneath the soil, children’s educational and career choices are influenced by unseen forces, subtle messages about what is expected of them based on gender. These “roots of bias” 💡 grow quietly, spreading through everyday experiences, shaping confidence, and limiting possibilities before a child even realizes it.

Bias & Gender Bias: Bias refers to a preference or assumption that influences our perceptions of people and situations, frequently operating unconsciously. Gender bias occurs when these assumptions are based on a person’s gender, affecting how we perceive and interact with individuals based on whether they are male or female.

Gender Bias: It is About More Than Just Personal Choices

When we talk about gender bias, like the idea that certain subjects or careers are “meant” for boys or girls, we are not just talking about personal preferences. These ideas are also shaped by broader systems in society: cultural norms, school expectations, workplace traditions. They influence what feels “normal” or “acceptable,” often without us realizing it.

These systems can impact the way young people see their options, and how much encouragement they receive from family, teachers, or peers. For example, careers in science, law, or business are often valued more than those in art, social care, or manual trades. This can leave some young people feeling limited, even when they are following their talents.

Choosing a path that goes against expectations is not always easy. Young people may face resistance or feel alone, because society does not always welcome change. And even later in life, outdated ideas can show up in workplaces or professional settings.

The good news? Real change does not depend on one person alone. As parents and caregivers, you can play a key role in challenging gender bias, not just by supporting your own child, but by helping shift the system as a whole.

When a young person follows their own path, even if it is not the expected one, they also help open the door for others. Their choices matter, not only for their future, but for creating a more equal and supportive environment for everyone.

Together, we can make it easier for all children to choose freely, based on who they are, not who society expects them to be.

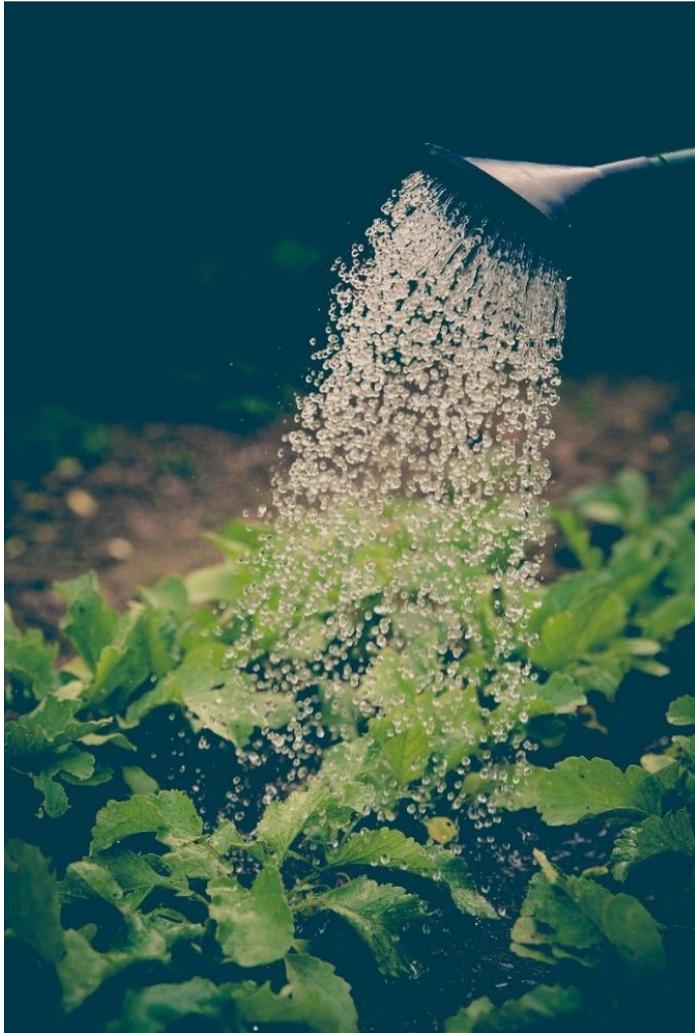
How do gender stereotypes 💡 shape interests from an early age?



From an early age, children absorb messages from books, television, toys, and everyday conversations that shape their perceptions of which subjects or careers are deemed "suitable" for boys or girls (Eccles, 2011). Over time, these subtle signals impact their confidence and interests, even when they have the capability to excel in a field (Gunderson et al., 2012). For instance, girls might underestimate their abilities in math and science, despite performing on par or better than with boys (Ganley & Lubienski, 2016). Similarly, boys might shy away from careers in healthcare, education, or the arts, as these fields are often linked to caregiving or creativity rather than technical skills (Charles & Bradley, 2009).

Gender stereotypes: Fixed ideas that say boys and girls have certain skills and should act a certain way just because of their gender.

How does confidence affect educational choices?



A child's confidence in their abilities, either strengthened by encouragement or limited by bias, plays a significant role in their academic and career choices (Correll, 2001). If girls repeatedly hear that boys are "naturally" better at STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), they might start to doubt themselves, even if they excel in those

subjects (Cvencek et al., 2011). Similarly, boys may avoid fields like psychology, literature, or early childhood education simply because they do not see many male role models in those careers, making them feel like those paths are not meant for them (Stoet & Geary, 2018).



The role of institutions, symbols, and experience in shaping bias

Bias does not develop in isolation: it spreads through the broader ecosystem of schools, culture, and daily interactions. These external influences function like environmental factors, either nurturing a child's natural growth or subtly steering it in a different direction.



Institutions

Institutions act like the structure of a garden, guiding how plants grow by determining where sunlight reaches and which areas remain in the shadows. The way schools present subjects, allocate resources, and define success can reinforce gendered pathways. Policies and cultural narratives may elevate certain careers while treating others as less prestigious, subtly steering students toward traditionally “male” or “female” fields. When educational systems fail to offer equal encouragement across all subjects, children may naturally grow toward familiar, well-trodden paths rather than exploring new possibilities.

Experiences

Teachers, parents, and peers act as the gentle hands that guide a sapling's growth, sometimes offering support, but other times unintentionally bending it in a certain direction. Encouragement, or the lack of it, plays a crucial role in determining whether a child feels confident exploring unfamiliar subjects. For example:

- A boy talented in writing may be directed toward journalism rather than literature, as storytelling may be perceived as "feminine".
- A young girl who enjoys building may be praised for "creativity" rather than encouraged to explore engineering.
- In class, a teacher calls more frequently on boys during math and science lessons, reinforcing the idea that these subjects are "for" boys.
- In the same way, a teacher might call more often on girls during reading or art activities, sending the message that these "feminine" subjects are more suited to them.



Parents Play a Key Role — But It is Natural to Be Shaped by Your Own Experiences

As a parent or caregiver, you want what is best for your child. The guidance you offer often comes from care, concern, and a desire to see them succeed. At the same time, it is only natural that your advice is shaped by your own experiences, what felt practical, secure, or socially accepted when you were making similar choices.

Sometimes, this can mean encouraging familiar or “traditional” paths, even if they do not fully align with your child’s interests or strengths. Without realizing it, gender stereotypes or generational expectations can also play a role in how certain subjects or careers are presented, as more or less suitable depending on your child’s gender.

That is why open, ongoing conversations are so valuable. By listening to your child’s ideas, goals, and concerns, and encouraging them to explore a full range of options, you create space for them to make choices that truly fit who they are. Supporting that journey, even when it looks different from your own, can make all the difference.



Teachers Want to Support Your Child — But They Are Human Too

Teachers play a powerful role in how young people learn and how they see themselves. The way they speak about different subjects, the examples they use, and the encouragement they offer can shape what feels “possible” or “meant for” a student. A teacher’s support can build confidence, but sometimes, even unintentionally, it can also steer a child away from something they might have excelled at.

Like all of us, teachers bring their own life experiences and beliefs into the classroom. This can include unconscious biases about who “fits” certain subjects or careers. Research shows that gender expectations, for example, can influence how students are graded, which feedback they receive, or which directions they are encouraged to explore.

This does not mean teachers are intentionally being unfair, just that no one is completely free from bias, and schools often reflect broader patterns in society. As a parent or caregiver, it is helpful to be aware of this. If your child feels unsure about a subject choice or discouraged by a teacher’s response, it is okay to ask questions and talk it through with them. Your support and perspective can help them feel empowered to follow the path that truly suits them.

Peers Can Influence Your Child's Choices — Often Without Meaning To

The friends, classmates, and even romantic partners in a young person's life can have a big impact on how they see themselves and the choices they consider. That influence can be positive, by offering support and encouragement, but it can also show up as subtle pressure to “fit in” or not stand out.

Young people may hear comments like:

“That subject's more for boys/girls.”

“Why would you want to do that?”

“You are too smart for that.”

“That career will not work if you want a family.”

Even when said jokingly, remarks like these often carry unspoken rules about what is “normal” or “acceptable,” especially when it comes to gender roles. Over time, these messages can lead a young person to doubt their interests or feel hesitant about making choices that do not align with peer expectations.

As a parent or caregiver, you can help by creating space to talk about these influences. Ask your child how their relationships affect the way they think about school, work, or the future. Affirm that it is okay to make choices that others might not immediately understand, and that true support means encouraging each other to follow what feels right.

When young people feel backed by both their peers and their families, they are more likely to grow into confident, self-directed individuals who feel free to explore their full potential.

Symbols

Symbols act as indicators, highlighting which opportunities appear accessible and which ones seem out of reach. Elements like gendered language in textbooks for example, using masculine generics  like "chairman" instead of "chairperson," media portrayals of careers, for example, show certain jobs, like nursing, as mostly for women, while jobs like engineering are shown as more for men. Similarly, imagery in educational materials, like science books showing mostly male scientists can establish barriers that limit access to certain fields. When students seldom see individuals of their gender thriving in a specific area, they might unconsciously believe it is not meant for them.

Masculine generics: Using male words to refer to all people, like saying "fireman" instead of "firefighter," which can make women and others invisible.

Additionally, artificial intelligence (AI) and career algorithms, which often reinforce historical patterns, can further restrict rather than broaden opportunities. AI systems, like those used in hiring processes or career recommendations, are often trained on past data, which may include biases from previous generations. As a result, these systems can reinforce traditional gender roles, suggesting careers based on outdated stereotypes. Even classroom discussions on gender equality can impact a child's sense of possibility. When bias goes unaddressed, it can subtly influence educational choices, potentially steering young people away from paths that reflect their true interests.



Why is it important to keep a variety of career- and educational opportunities open?

A well-tended garden is prepared for change, weather patterns shift, seasons evolve, and new plants take root. In the same way, the job market is always evolving, and careers that were once considered gendered are changing (OECD, 2019). Encouraging children to develop a broad skill set ensures they remain adaptable and open to future opportunities.



Important to know!

Everyone has stereotypes, even if we do not mean to (Small et al., 2007; Wilson & Brekke, 1994; Wilson et al., 2000). Our brains naturally sort people and things into groups because it is an easier way to make sense of the world — like putting books into labeled boxes. The problem is, once something is in a box, we might forget to check if it really belongs there, and that can lead to unfair assumptions, such as unconscious biases .

Stereotypes are not always negative or intentional — they develop from cultural norms , personal experiences, and societal influences.

Unconscious bias: Automatic, unintentional preferences or stereotypes about people based on their gender, race, or other traits, without even realizing it.

Cultural norms: The everyday behaviors or traditions that are seen as normal in a particular group or society.

While stereotypes can sometimes help in recognizing patterns, they often impose unnecessary limitations. Assuming that certain subjects or careers are only suitable for specific genders can unknowingly restrict our potential or deter others from following their true interests. By becoming aware of the stereotypes we hold, we can question and challenge these assumptions, making choices based on individual strengths and passions rather than outdated expectations.



Chapter 3

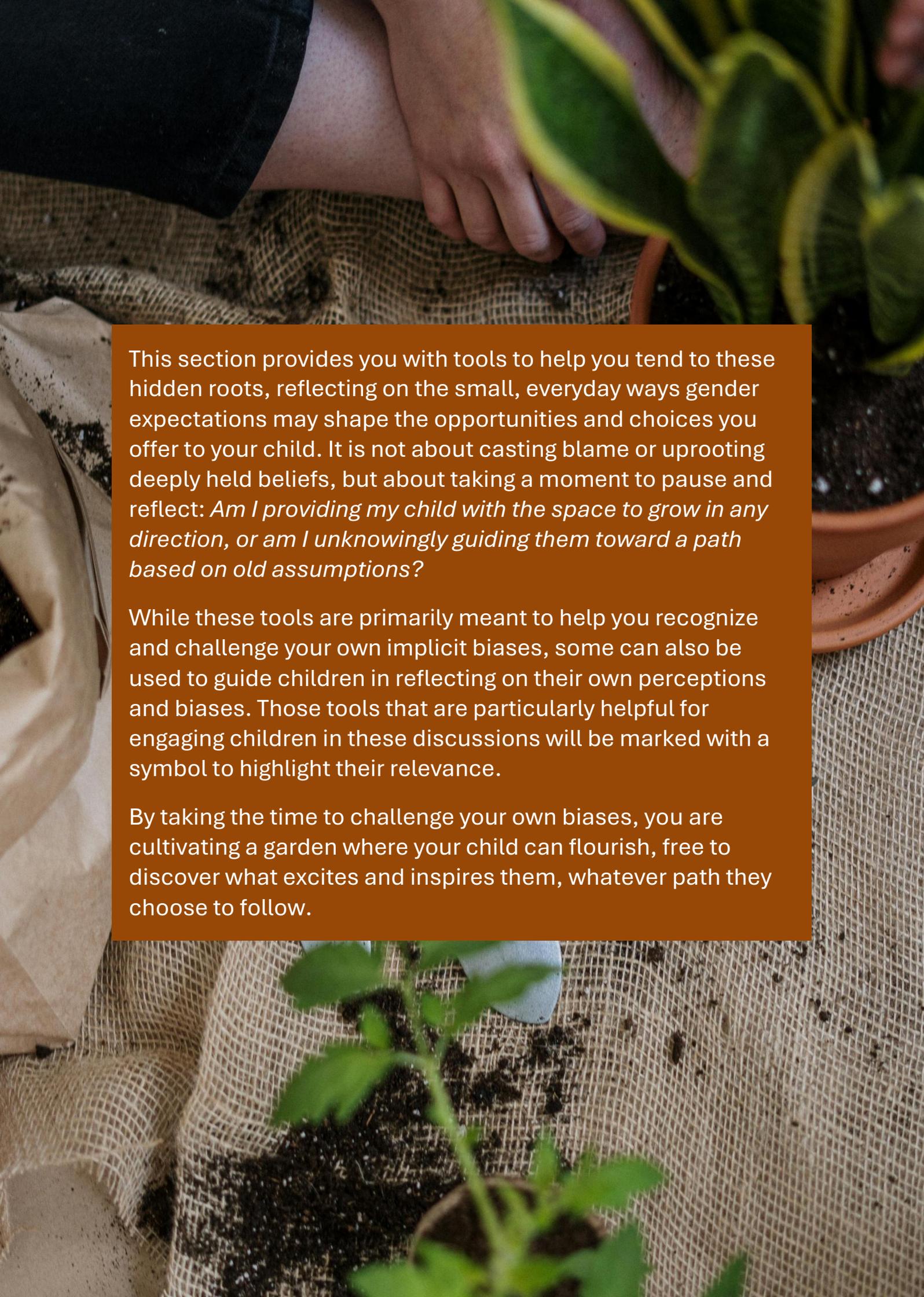
Weeding Out Barriers: Identifying and Challenging Biases



How can we challenge our biases?

We all want our children to thrive. A big part of that is giving them the freedom to explore their unique interests and talents, without the constraints of limiting expectations. However, without even realizing it, we might sometimes plant small seeds of subtle messages about what is considered "appropriate" for boys or girls. These seeds do not come from a place of harm, they often spring from the traditions we have inherited, the values we hold dear, or simply from what feels familiar and comfortable to us.





This section provides you with tools to help you tend to these hidden roots, reflecting on the small, everyday ways gender expectations may shape the opportunities and choices you offer to your child. It is not about casting blame or uprooting deeply held beliefs, but about taking a moment to pause and reflect: *Am I providing my child with the space to grow in any direction, or am I unknowingly guiding them toward a path based on old assumptions?*

While these tools are primarily meant to help you recognize and challenge your own implicit biases, some can also be used to guide children in reflecting on their own perceptions and biases. Those tools that are particularly helpful for engaging children in these discussions will be marked with a symbol to highlight their relevance.

By taking the time to challenge your own biases, you are cultivating a garden where your child can flourish, free to discover what excites and inspires them, whatever path they choose to follow.

Tending to the roots of our beliefs

It is essential to first recognize the roots of bias in our thinking before we can nurture an environment where our children can thrive without limitations. Take, for example, the **Implicit Association Test**¹ 💡 ↗. This online tool helps you discover the hidden biases in your thoughts by revealing subconscious connections between gender and career-related ideas, such as linking men to careers and women to family roles. The test only takes about 10 minutes but provides valuable insight into the biases that might be quietly influencing how we perceive educational choices.



Implicit Association: When we automatically link certain ideas or groups with others in our mind, without even realizing it.

¹Developed by psychologists at Harvard, the University of Virginia and the University of Washinton as part of “Project Implicit”

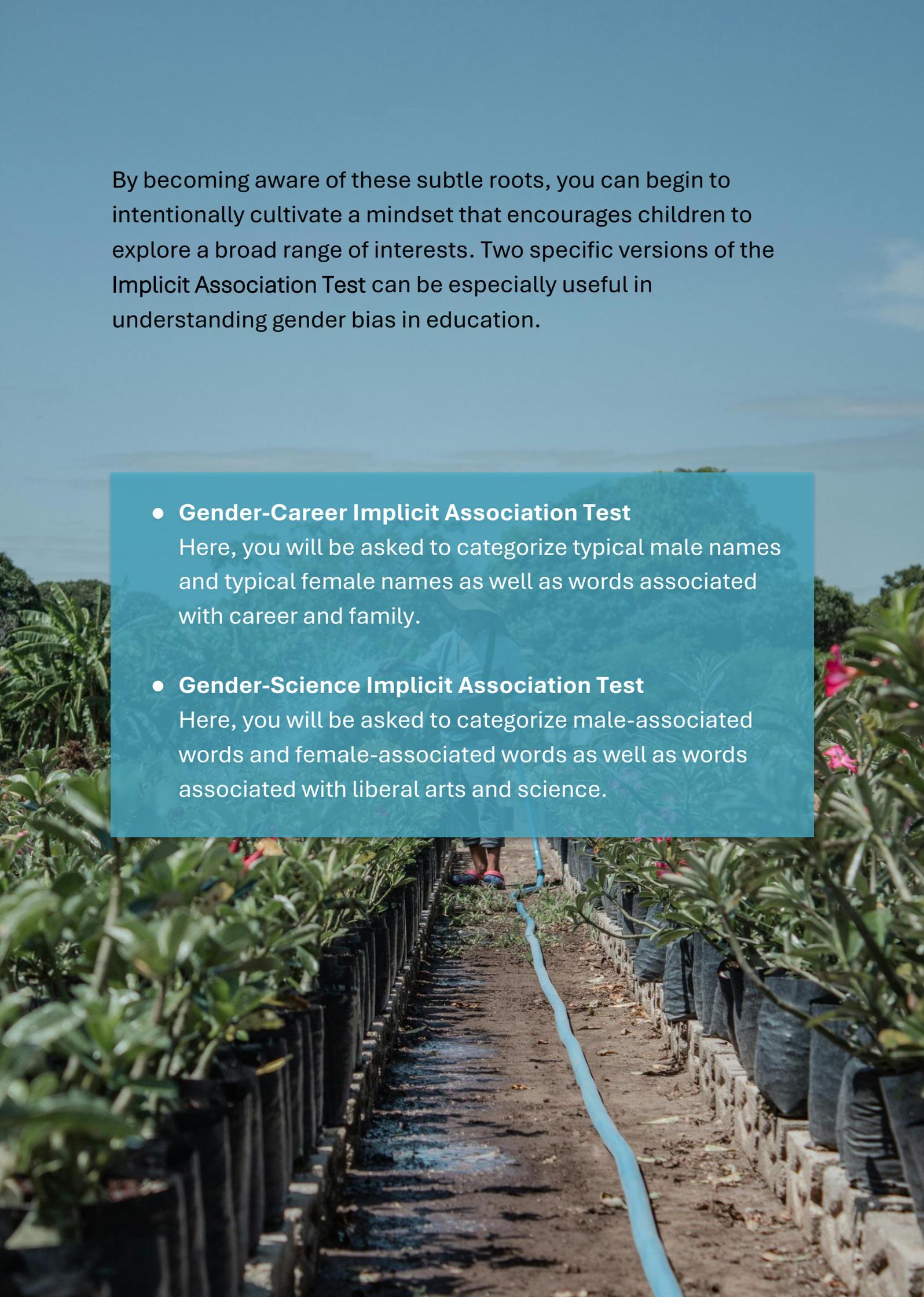
By becoming aware of these subtle roots, you can begin to intentionally cultivate a mindset that encourages children to explore a broad range of interests. Two specific versions of the Implicit Association Test can be especially useful in understanding gender bias in education.

- **Gender-Career Implicit Association Test**

Here, you will be asked to categorize typical male names and typical female names as well as words associated with career and family.

- **Gender-Science Implicit Association Test**

Here, you will be asked to categorize male-associated words and female-associated words as well as words associated with liberal arts and science.



Watering new growth: Practical exercises for reflection

Another tool in your toolkit is the **Making Caring Common Toolkit** ¹ from Harvard's Graduate School of Education. This resource offers practical exercises to help you reflect on your own biases and nurture a more inclusive mindset. One powerful tool within the toolkit is the **Reflection Exercise**². This exercise invites you to examine your experiences with difference, allowing you to dig deep into your personal history and how it shapes your present thinking. During the exercise, you reflect on thought-provoking questions like those suggested on the next page:

² Copied from Harvard's '**Navigating Social Issues in the Classroom: A Toolkit for Educators as Community Bridge Builders**' toolkit, originally adapted from Reflecting Upon on Own Biases (Learning for Justice)

- *The first time I became aware of differences was when ...*
- *As I was growing up, my caregiver(s) taught me that people who were different from us were ...*
- *As I was growing up, my caregiver(s) taught me that people who were like us were ...*
- *A time I was mistreated because of my own difference was when ...*
- *A time I mistreated someone for being different was when ...*
- *I feel most comfortable when I am around people who ...*
- *I feel least comfortable when I am around people who ...*
- *The memories I have of differences affect my teaching by ...*

Taking the time to answer these questions helps identify where the roots of bias are planted in your own life. By understanding where these biases have taken root, you can nurture more supportive practices that allow your child to grow freely, untethered by limiting gender stereotypes.

Challenging stereotypes in our surroundings

The **Brookings Gender Toolkit** is another valuable tool, originally designed for educators but adaptable for parents and caregivers. It provides practical strategies for challenging gender stereotypes in everyday conversations with children, helping you prune away old, limiting ideas. This toolkit reminds us that deeply rooted beliefs are often resistant to change, but by regularly reflecting on them, we can clear the garden of outdated notions.

There is also the **GRP4ECE (Gender-Responsive Pedagogy for Early Childhood Education) toolkit** which may offer helpful strategies for identifying and reducing gender stereotypes. This resource encourages you to explore your community's values and practices around gender. It invites you to reflect using prompts such as those suggested on the next page:





- **Write down** any traditional songs, stories, proverbs, or sayings you have heard in your family or community that reinforce gender differences. These might praise or belittle men or women, or make assumptions about their roles in society.
- **Think about** customary practices or family traditions that might reinforce male dominance or place women in submissive roles. Consider how these practices might influence your child's views of gender.
- **Identify stereotypical expectations** for boys and girls in your family or community. Do these expectations limit how your child is encouraged to behave, express themselves, or explore their interests?

- **Reflect on stereotypical qualities** you may associate with boys and girls, such as being kind, strong, nurturing, or dominant. Do you notice patterns in the way these qualities are assigned to boys or girls?
- **Ask yourself:** Are these qualities something people are born with, or are they learned from society? How might these stereotypes shape the way you treat your child or the way your child interacts with others?
- **Consider how you can change:** Reflect on how adjusting your own beliefs, attitudes, and practices can create a more supportive environment for your child, free from limiting stereotypes. How can you encourage your child to explore a wider range of interests, activities, and roles?





- **Engage in creative reflection:** Draw a picture or make a simple craft to represent a scene of children in your community or family doing various activities (e.g., playing, working, learning).
- **Discuss** with your family:
 - Why did you depict boys or girls doing certain activities?
 - Why did you avoid showing them doing other activities?
 - What can you do as a parent to encourage your child to engage in a broader range of activities and challenge traditional gender roles?

These reflective exercises can help cultivate an environment that allows children to explore a wide range of interests and roles.

Challenging masculinity norms & engaging men and boys

Societal norms surrounding masculinity often pressure boys and men to conform to rigid ideals of strength, independence, and emotional stoicism. The belief about precarious manhood, the idea that manhood is fragile and must be constantly proven, might compound these pressures. Traditional masculinity ideals - such as the expectation to be strong, dominant, or unemotional - can create barriers that prevent boys from fully expressing themselves. In educational contexts, these beliefs can lead boys to behave in certain ways to seek peer approval, even if these behaviors conflict with academic success (Halldórsson & Ólafsson, 2009; Holfve-Sabel, 2011). Just as gender stereotypes limit opportunities for girls, they also shape and sometimes restrict boys' choices and self-perception.

One powerful resource for engaging men and boys in this work is **A Call to Men** [↗], an organization dedicated to promoting healthy manhood by challenging harmful beliefs about masculinity. By reflecting on how societal expectations shape ideas about what it means to be a man, *A Call to Men* offers tools that can help break down stereotypes, allowing boys and men to cultivate more inclusive and open-minded choices as they grow. This work is not just about making space for boys to flourish, it is about helping everyone understand that being a man does not mean adhering to restrictive, harmful beliefs.

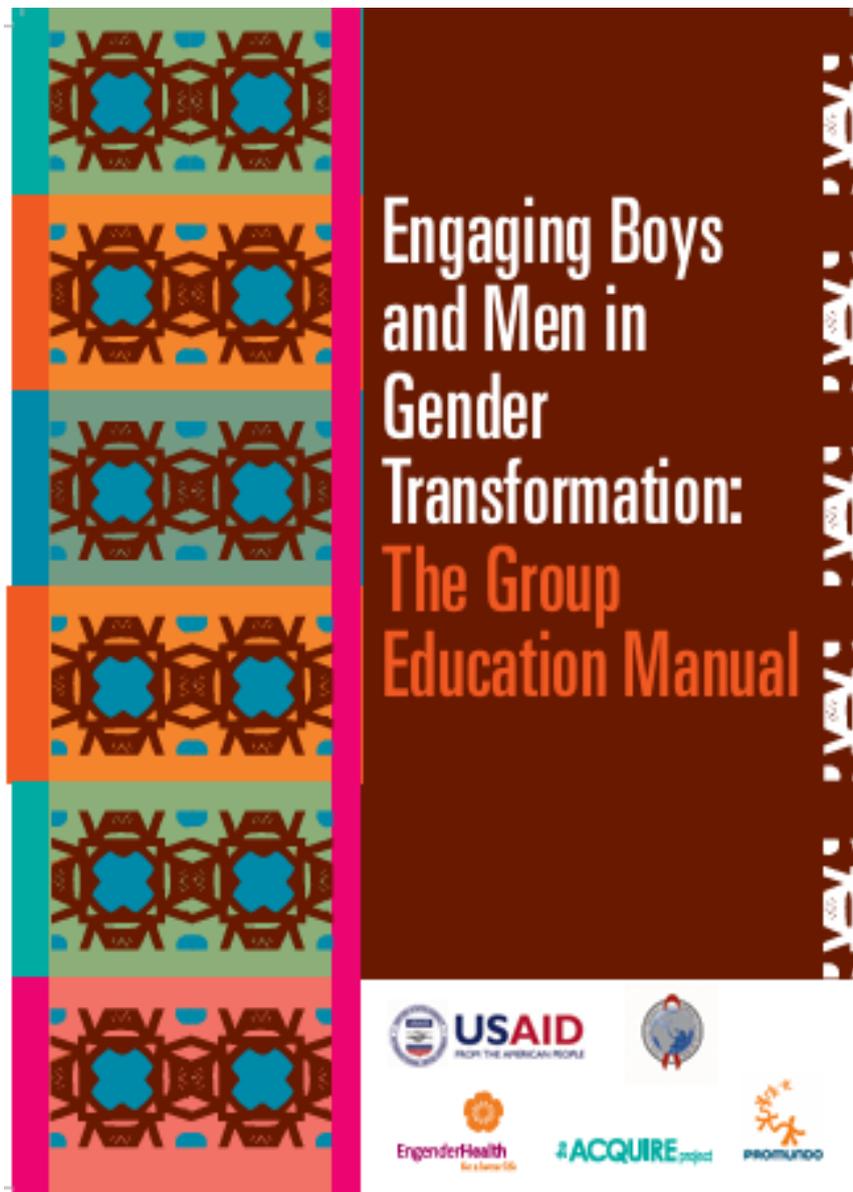
The logo for 'A Call to Men' consists of a solid orange square. Inside the square, the words 'A CALL' are stacked above 'TO MEN' in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The text is centered within the square.

**A CALL
TO MEN**



A Call to Men introduces the concept of the "**Man Box**" ↗ , a metaphorical structure that outlines the narrow set of behaviors and traits society often expects from men. The Man Box encourages traits like dominance, toughness, and emotional restraint while discouraging vulnerability and emotional expression. These societal expectations can prevent boys from connecting with their feelings in healthy ways and may lead to behaviors that contribute to inequality and harm. The Man Box also promotes the dangerous idea that women and marginalized groups are less valuable, which undermines social equity.

The **Engaging Boys and Men in Gender Transformation Manual** is another helpful tool for parents and caregivers seeking to foster an inclusive environment for their children. Much like pruning away dead leaves and branches that block light, this manual encourages reflection and critical thinking about the roles gender plays in our lives. It offers exercises that help families reflect on societal expectations and challenge traditional masculinity.



The Act Like a Man/Woman Self-test³

You can also challenge yourself and uncover hidden biases by taking the "**Act Like a Man/Woman**" self-test.

To begin, create two columns titled "Act Like a Man" and "Act Like a Woman."

<i>Act Like a Man</i>	<i>Act Like a Woman</i>
...	...
...	...
...	...

Next, take five minutes to write down anything that comes to mind for each, behaviors, roles, or expectations you associate with each gender. This is for your eyes only, so allow yourself to freely jot down whatever thoughts surface!

Continue on the next page after these five minutes.

³ Adapted from the [Engaging Boys and Men in Gender Transformation](#) toolkit

After these five minutes, you should have some answers written in these two columns. Then you can take some time to analyze these answers. Common answers can look like this:

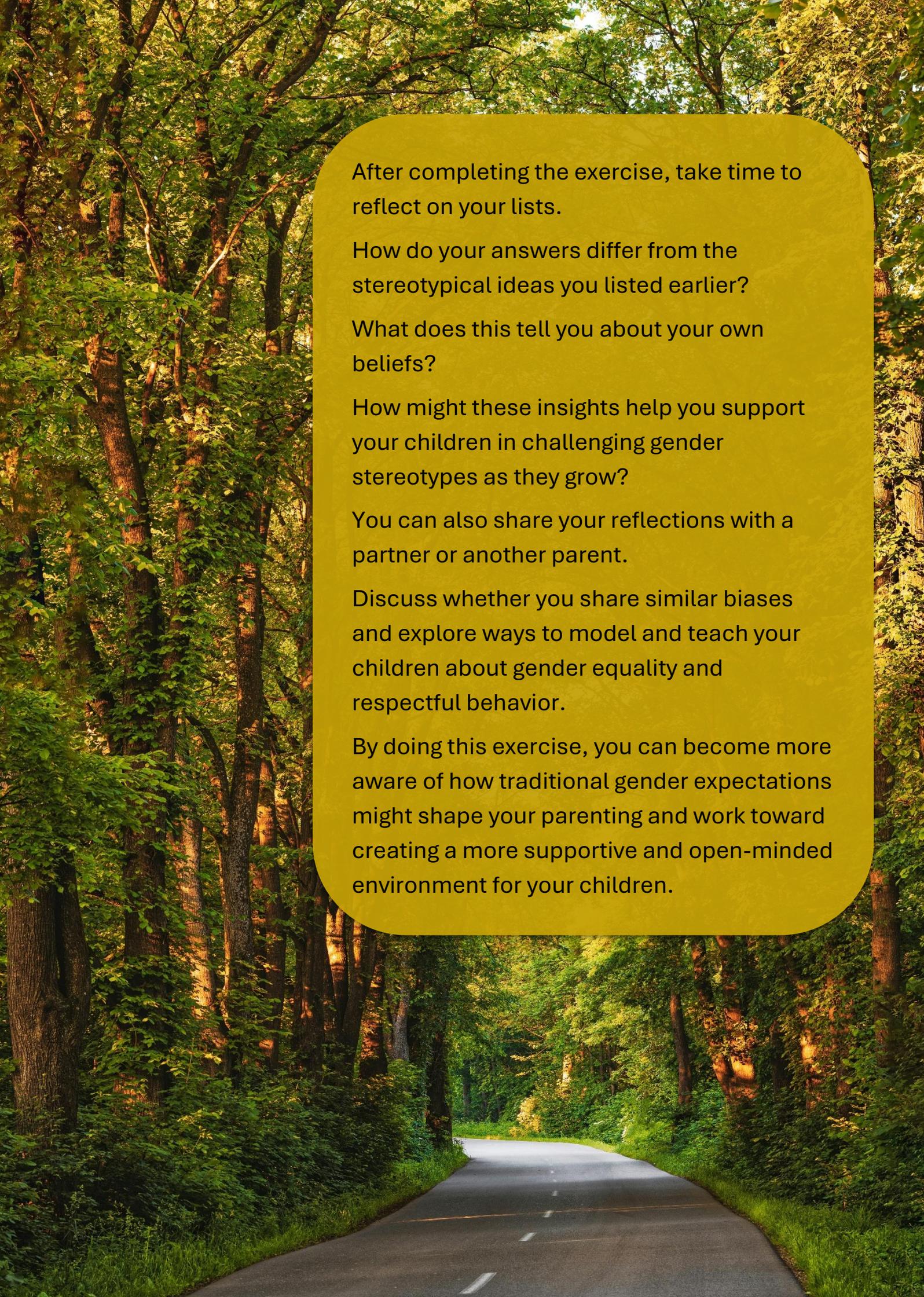
<i>Act Like a Man</i>	<i>Act Like a Woman</i>
<i>Be tough</i>	<i>Be passive and quiet</i>
<i>Do not cry</i>	<i>Be the caretaker and homemaker</i>
<i>Be the breadwinner</i>	<i>Be smart, but not too smart</i>
<i>Take risks</i>	<i>Do not complain</i>
<i>Do not ask for help</i>	<i>Be pretty</i>
<i>Do not talk about problems</i>	<i>Produce children</i>
<i>Make decisions for others</i>	<i>Be seen, not heard</i>

These ideas are not unusual, but they can limit both men and women in ways that prevent them from living authentically. Recognizing them is the first step in challenging these stereotypes.

For the next part of this self-test, you can imagine a world where men and women hold equal opportunities. In this world, what does it look like to act like a man or to act like a woman? Again, take five minutes to fill in two new columns, now named ‘Transformed Men’ and ‘Transformed Women’. Here, you can repeat the task you did earlier but now envision you describe male and female behaviour in a gender equal world.

After the five minutes are up again, take a look at what you wrote down. For example, your list can now look something like this:

Transformed Men	Transformed Women
Be loving	Be loving
Act caring	Act caring
Be an assertive communicator	Be an assertive communicator
Express emotions constructively and when appropriate	Express emotions constructively and when appropriate
Speak out in favor of gender equality	Speak out in favor of gender equality
Challenge others to recognize their harmful gender norms and change themselves	Challenge others to recognize their harmful gender norms and change themselves.



After completing the exercise, take time to reflect on your lists.

How do your answers differ from the stereotypical ideas you listed earlier?

What does this tell you about your own beliefs?

How might these insights help you support your children in challenging gender stereotypes as they grow?

You can also share your reflections with a partner or another parent.

Discuss whether you share similar biases and explore ways to model and teach your children about gender equality and respectful behavior.

By doing this exercise, you can become more aware of how traditional gender expectations might shape your parenting and work toward creating a more supportive and open-minded environment for your children.

Additional resources for cultivating understanding

There are many resources available to help deepen your understanding of how gender influences children's learning and development. These materials provide valuable insights and support, helping to create an environment where children can grow free from the limitations of stereotypes and reach their full potential.



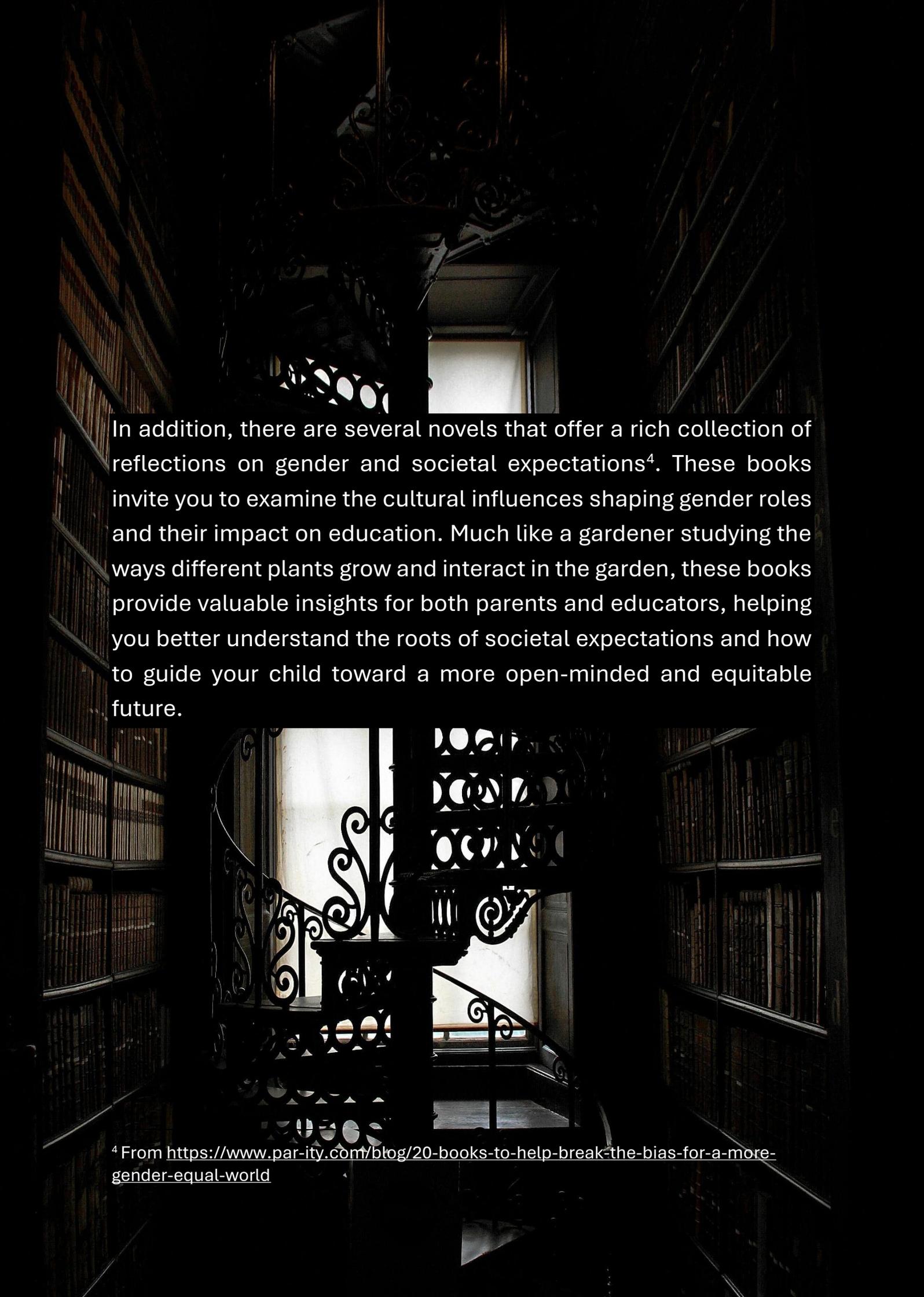


One such resource is the [European Charter for Equality's Salary Book Series on Masculinity and Gender Equality](#) [↗], a collection of

insightful publications designed to help challenge traditional masculinity norms and promote gender equality in education.

This series offers academic perspectives on reshaping societal views on gender, allowing you to dig deeper into the soil of these important topics. Whether you are looking to better understand how to foster equality in education or challenge outdated norms, these publications provide the knowledge needed to cultivate a more inclusive and balanced approach. The series covers the following topics for further reading:

- [Masculinity and Gender equality](#) [↗]
- [Masculinity and Mental Health](#) [↗]
- [Masculinity and Gender-Equal School](#) [↗]
- [Masculinity and Gender-Equal Parenting](#) [↗]
- [Changing Violent Men](#) [↗]



In addition, there are several novels that offer a rich collection of reflections on gender and societal expectations⁴. These books invite you to examine the cultural influences shaping gender roles and their impact on education. Much like a gardener studying the ways different plants grow and interact in the garden, these books provide valuable insights for both parents and educators, helping you better understand the roots of societal expectations and how to guide your child toward a more open-minded and equitable future.

⁴ From <https://www.par-ity.com/blog/20-books-to-help-break-the-bias-for-a-more-gender-equal-world>

Recommended Reading to Challenge Gender Stereotypes

About women's experience with bias:

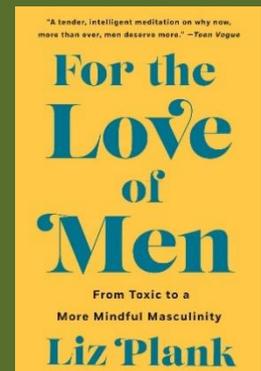
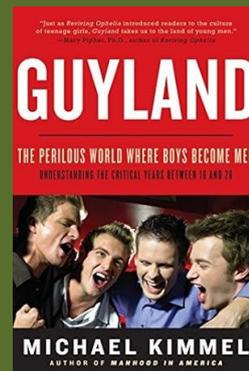
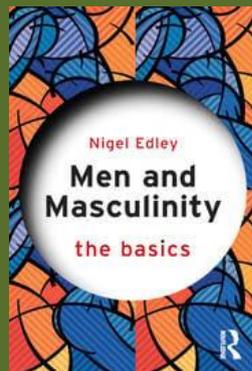
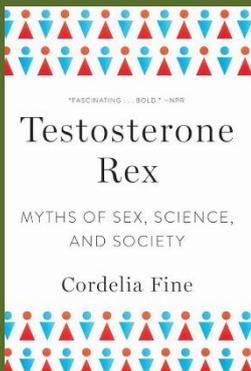
- *Delusions of Gender* by Cordelia Fine
- *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf
- *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan
- *Women & Power: A Manifesto* by Mary Beard
- *Pope Joan* by Donna Woolfolk Cross
- *Anonymous Is a Woman: A Global Chronicle of Gender Inequality* by Nina Ansary
- *Bringing Down the Duke* by Evie Dunmore
- *The Education of an Idealist* by Samantha Power





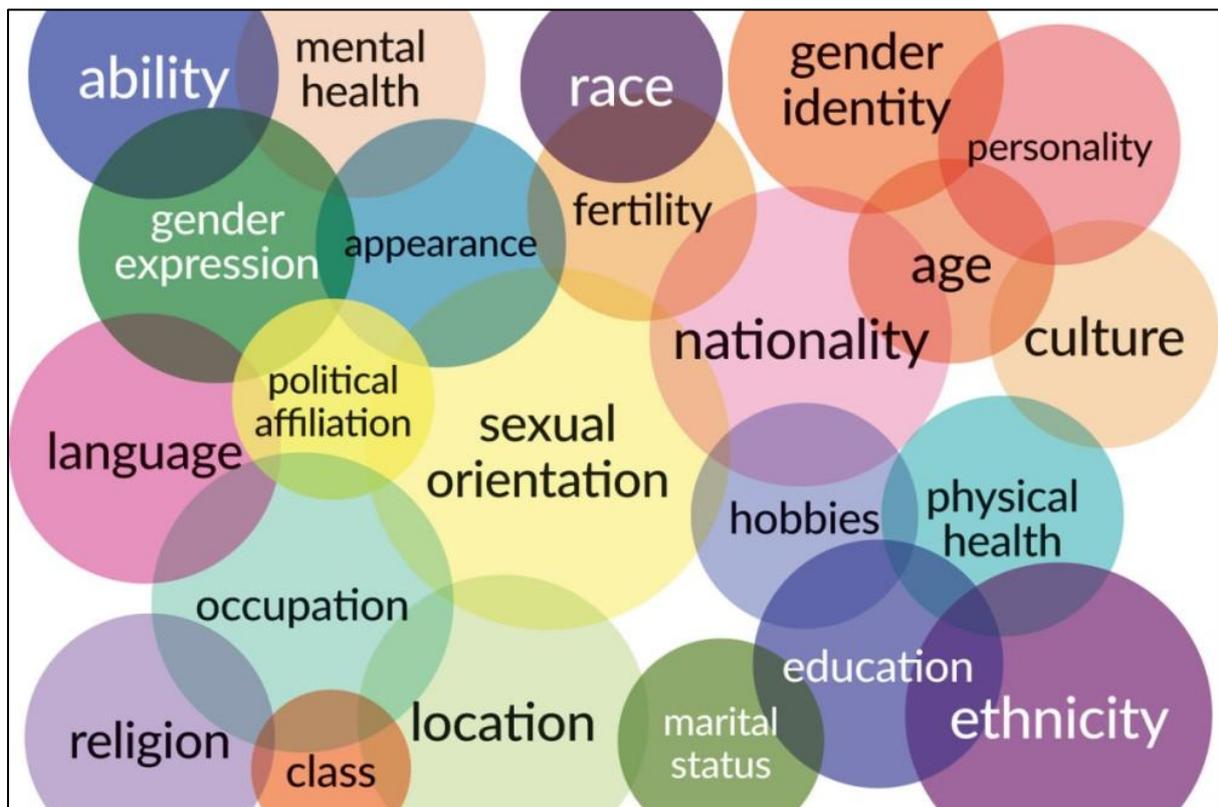
Navigating Masculinity: Insights for Parents:

- *Testosterone Rex* by Cordelia Fine
- *Men and Masculinity: The Basics* by Nigel Edley
- *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* by bell hooks
- *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* by Michael Kimmel
- *For the Love of Men: From Toxic to a More Mindful Masculinity* by Liz Plank



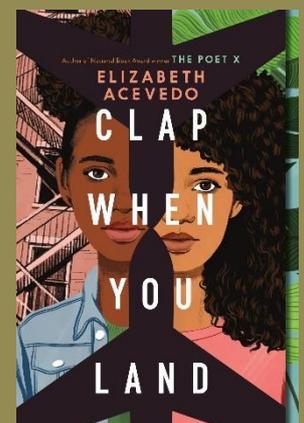
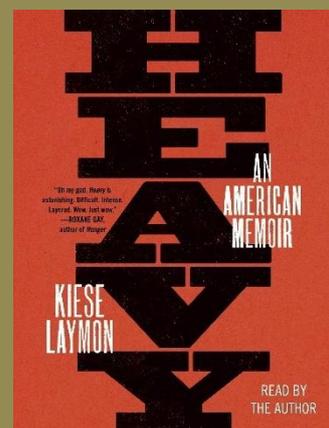
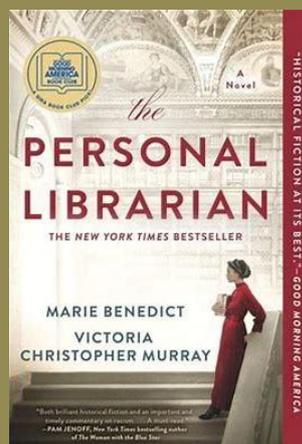
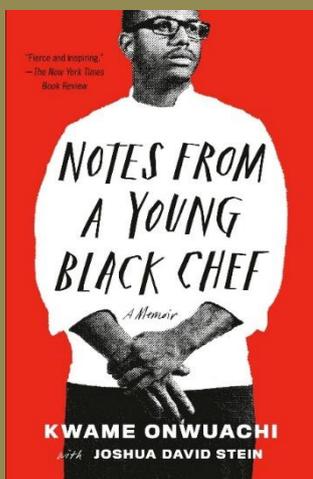
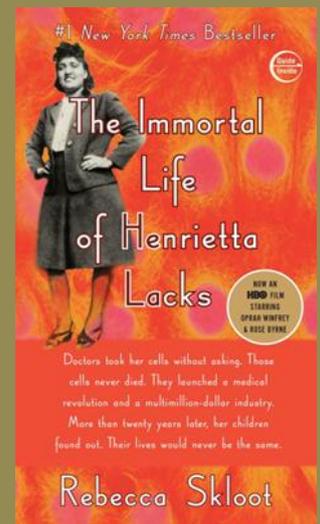
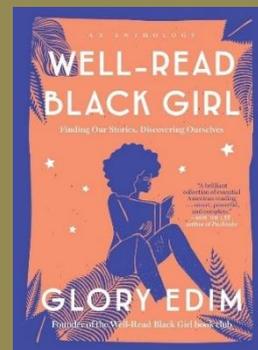
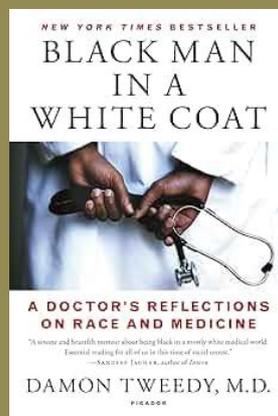
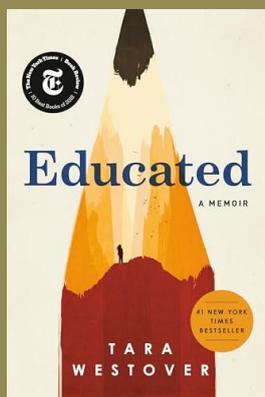
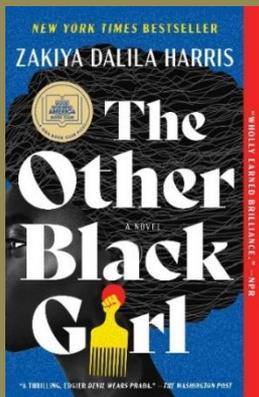
About intersectionality:

Promoting gender equality in education is essential, but inequality extends beyond gender and must be addressed in all its forms. Educational opportunities and outcomes can vary greatly across income levels, geographic areas, ability status, sexual orientation, and ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds (Ullah, 2019; Urban Institute, 2018; Zeng et al., 2014; Francis, 2017; Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). An intersectional approach, reveals how overlapping factors such as class, ethnicity, and gender create distinct challenges (Crenshaw, 1989). Without considering these varied identities, educational policies may not fully achieve true equality (Cho et al., 2013).



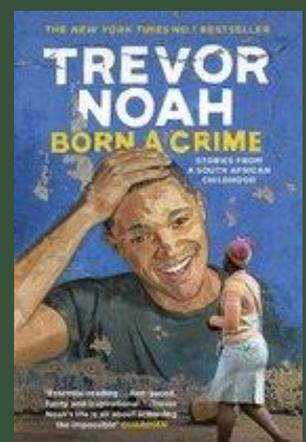
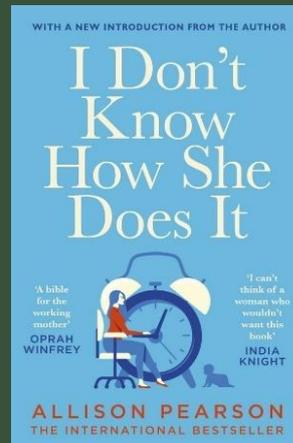
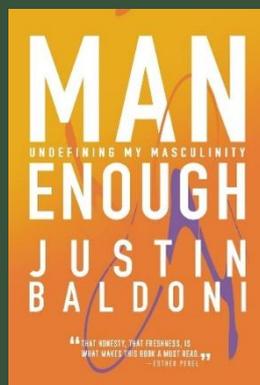
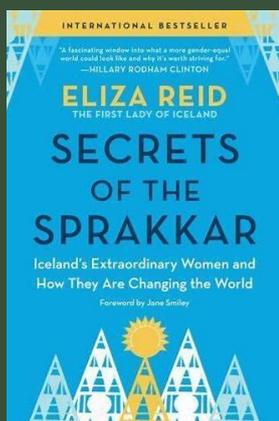
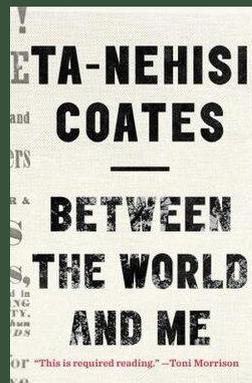
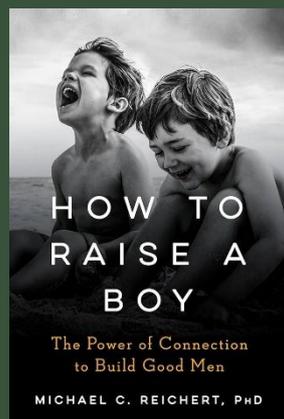
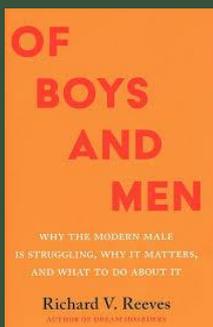
Expanding Perspectives: Books on Identity, Gender, and Representation:

- *Notes from a Young Black Chef* by Kwame Onwuachi
- *The Personal Librarian* by Marie Benedict and Victoria Christopher Murray
- *The Other Black Girl* by Zakiya Dalila Harris
- *Heavy: An American Memoir* by Kiese Laymon
- *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot
- *Clap When You Land* by Elizabeth Acevedo
- *Educated* by Tara Westover
- *Black Man in a White Coat: A Doctor's Reflections on Race and Medicine* by Damon Tweedy
- *Well-Read Black Girl* curated by Glory Edim



Reading for Parents: Understanding Gender and Guiding Children:

- *Of Boys and Men* by Richard V. Reeves
- *Secrets of the Sprakkar* by Eliza Reid
- *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates
- *I Don't Know How She Does It* by Allison Pearson
- *How to Raise a Boy* by Michael C. Reichert
- *Becoming* by Michelle Obama
- *Man Enough: Undefining My Masculinity* by Justin Baldoni
- *Born a Crime* by Trevor Noah





Chapter 4

Providing the Right Soil: Creating a Nurturing and Inclusive Environment

Resources for inclusive and gender-sensitive practices: Nurturing a garden of possibilities



SP LEARNING FOR JUSTICE

The Learning Center Magazine & Publications Educator Resources About LFJ GET THE LFJ NEWSLETTER

Education Justice Series Offers Back-to-School Resources

As children head back to school, we offer new and updated resources for affirmative practices that benefit all students and help ensure more inclusive public schools that foster excellence and equity.

Just as educators rely on evidence-based methodologies to create inclusive learning environments, having access to well-researched resources can help you navigate gender-sensitive parenting and education effectively.

One such resource is the [Learning for Justice](#) website, which serves as a powerful tool for parents and caregivers looking to better understand and address gender biases. These materials provide actionable strategies to identify and dismantle stereotypes that may unconsciously influence your child's academic and career aspirations. By using these resources, you can ensure that your child is exposed to a broad spectrum of opportunities, unencumbered by outdated societal norms.

Beyond merely identifying bias, *Learning for Justice* equips caregivers with practical interventions to counteract these influences in everyday interactions. Research in developmental psychology underscores the profound impact of early socialization on cognitive and emotional growth, reinforcing the importance of fostering an environment where children feel empowered to explore diverse academic disciplines and career pathways.

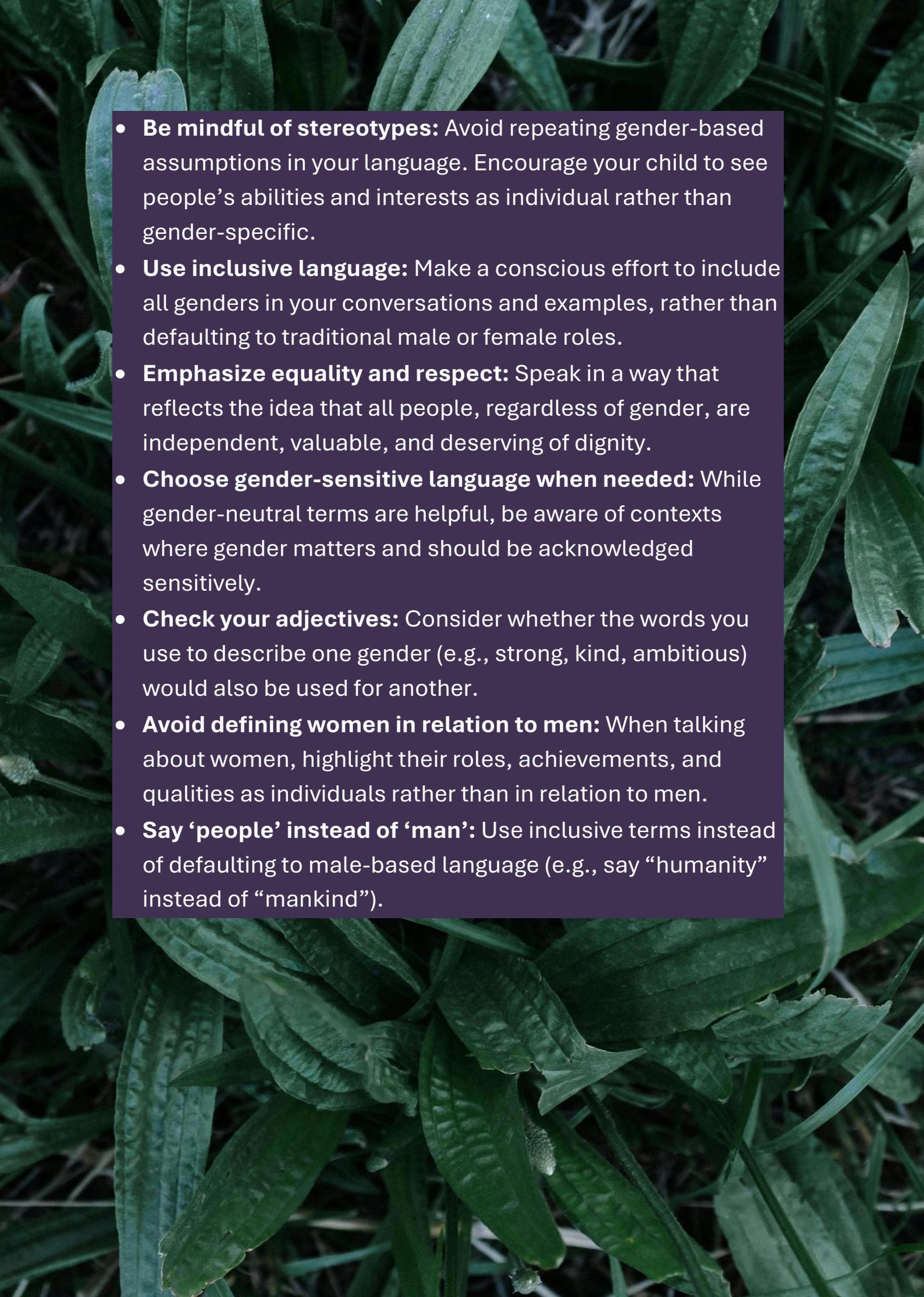
Also, using gender-sensitive language is a simple yet powerful way for you, as a parent or caregiver, to help your child make educational choices without the influence of gender stereotypes. By being mindful of your words, you can encourage your child to explore all kinds of interests and careers, regardless of traditional gender roles.



The [European Institute for Gender Equality's Sensitive Communication Checklist](#) ⁵ offers helpful guidelines for using language that promotes equality. Use this checklist to see how you can best support your child using gender sensitive communication⁵:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you recognise stereotypes and avoid repeating them through your language?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you actively seek ways of being inclusive to both women and men?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does your language reflect the idea that women, men and those of a non-binary gender are independent persons of equal value, dignity, integrity and respect?
<input type="checkbox"/>	When using gender-neutral language, have you considered whether there might be hidden gender elements to the discussion that mean you should be using gender-sensitive language instead?
	Tip! Policymakers and law-makers should almost always try to use gender-sensitive language, rather than gender-neutral language.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you avoid terms that may be patronising or belittling to one gender?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Would the adjectives that you use to describe one gender be equally applicable to another gender?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Did you check your document for gender-biased language?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have you avoided describing women solely in relation to men?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you avoid using 'man' or 'he' to describe the experiences of everyone?
<input type="checkbox"/>	When describing professional occupations, have you used gender-neutral terms, such as chair, spokesperson and headteacher?

⁵ Adapted from The European institute for Gender Equality's Sensitive Communication Checklist

- 
- **Be mindful of stereotypes:** Avoid repeating gender-based assumptions in your language. Encourage your child to see people's abilities and interests as individual rather than gender-specific.
 - **Use inclusive language:** Make a conscious effort to include all genders in your conversations and examples, rather than defaulting to traditional male or female roles.
 - **Emphasize equality and respect:** Speak in a way that reflects the idea that all people, regardless of gender, are independent, valuable, and deserving of dignity.
 - **Choose gender-sensitive language when needed:** While gender-neutral terms are helpful, be aware of contexts where gender matters and should be acknowledged sensitively.
 - **Check your adjectives:** Consider whether the words you use to describe one gender (e.g., strong, kind, ambitious) would also be used for another.
 - **Avoid defining women in relation to men:** When talking about women, highlight their roles, achievements, and qualities as individuals rather than in relation to men.
 - **Say 'people' instead of 'man':** Use inclusive terms instead of defaulting to male-based language (e.g., say "humanity" instead of "mankind").



Chapter 5

Sunlight and Water: The Role of Encouragement and Support



In this section, you will find tools and activities that help your child branch out into new areas of exploration. From simple, playful activities for younger children that encourage open-minded growth, to thoughtful challenges for older kids that spark deeper introspection, these exercises are designed to help them blossom into confident individuals, unencumbered by outdated gender expectations. Whether your child is just starting new interests or is cultivating a more sophisticated understanding of the world, these activities will help them grow strong roots based in their true abilities and passions, not traditional gender roles.



Cultivating critical thinking⁶

This exercise is like pulling weeds from your garden, an important step in ensuring that nothing stifles the growth of your child’s critical thinking. It invites you to reflect on the media that surrounds you and your child, recognizing the weeds of gender stereotypes that may be unknowingly planted. Here is how you can start to cultivate a more inclusive garden of thought:

Step 1: Choose your media

Select a few examples of media that your child interacts with frequently, this could include TV shows, movies, advertisements, or even social media. Choose examples that will provide ample room for discussion and growth.



⁶ Exercise based on the Learning for Justice’s “Studying Gender Roles in Literature and Life” (<https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/studying-gender-roles-in-literature-and-life>)



Step 2: Examine the stereotypes

Spend a few minutes examining your selected media. As you review, look for the gender stereotypes that may be woven into the fabric of the story. Do the roles presented reinforce traditional expectations, or do they open up possibilities? Ask yourself these questions:

- *Are men and women portrayed in different ways? (e.g., Are women shown mainly for their appearance while men are shown for their actions or accomplishments?)*
- *Are there any specific behaviors that are expected of boys or girls? (e.g., "Boys should be tough" or "Girls should be nurturing.")*
- *How are men and women expected to look? (e.g., Do they have unrealistic body types?)*
- *What role does physical appearance play in how a person is valued? (e.g., Are people judged by how they look more than what they do or think?)*

Step 3: Reflect and discuss

After you have made your observations, take time to reflect, either on your own or with others. Think of it as tending to your garden by clearing away the excess so the healthy ideas can flourish. Use these questions to guide the discussion:

- *Why do you think these stereotypes are still present in the media today?*
- *How might these messages affect your child's view of themselves and others?*
- *Do you think these stereotypes limit both boys and girls in different ways?*



Step 4: Take action — Planting seeds of change

Now that you have identified the weeds, it is time to plant seeds of change. Here are some ways to encourage your child to question stereotypes and promote diversity



- **Switch it up:** While watching TV or a movie, point out when a stereotype is being used. Discuss how you would like to see the story grow in a different direction. Ask your child how they would rewrite the story to make it more inclusive.
- **Create your own story:** Work together to write a short story or skit where characters do not adhere to traditional gender roles.
- **Challenge the media:** If you see an advertisement or a post that perpetuates stereotypes, have a conversation with your child about it. Ask them what they think, and challenge them to come up with a more inclusive idea.

Step 5: Make it a habit — Encouraging growth year-round

Encourage your child to keep an eye out for these messages and make it a fun, ongoing activity. Create a "stereotype-spotting" journal, tracking the stereotypes you notice and how you plan to address them.

Bonus: Have fun with it!

Remember, growth is not just about pulling out the weeds, it is about celebrating new blooms! When you see examples of gender equality in the media, such as a girl portrayed as an engineer or a boy as a nurse, celebrate these moments with your child. The more you nurture this mindset, the more your child will grow into someone who challenges outdated gender norms.

A different exercise that could help your child recognize gender stereotypes they may hold is the *Act Like a Man/Woman* exercise discussed earlier on page 36. Scroll back to find the instructions for this exercise!

Exploring diverse seeds: Exposure to non-traditional career paths

Children thrive when exposed to diverse role models and career paths, especially those outside traditional gender norms. By exploring a wide range of options, children can imagine themselves in careers they may have never considered, free from the restraints of what is “appropriate” for their gender.

Books are a powerful way to expose children to diversity and challenge gender stereotypes. They can introduce characters who break traditional norms, showcase role models excelling in fields typically dominated by the opposite gender, and inspire children to pursue their interests without limitations. By reading diverse stories, children learn that talent and passion are not defined by gender, encouraging them to explore a wide range of possibilities. The Open University has made a [list of children's book suggestions](#), including:

- 
- *Dogs Don't Do Ballet* by Anna Kemp and Sara Ogilvie
 - *The Paper Bag Princess* by Robert Munsch and Michael Martchenko
 - *The Night Pirates* by Peter Harris and Deborah Allwright
 - *Princess Daisy and the Dragon and the Nincompoop Knights* by Steve Lenton
 - *I'm a Girl* by Yasmeen Ismail
 - *10,000 Dresses* by Marcus Ewart and Rex Ray
 - *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson, Peter Parnell and Henry Cole
 - *The Sissy Duckling* by Harvey Fierstein and Henry Cole
 - *Donovan's Big Day* by Leslea Newman and Mike Dutton
 - *The Great Big Book of Families* by Mary Hoffman and Ros Asquith
 - *Picnic in the Park* by Joe Griffiths and Tony Pilgrim

Another great way to broaden perspectives is by following YouTubers and influencers who share their experiences in careers that defy gender norms. These creators offer real-life insights and inspiration by documenting their journeys in non-traditional fields. For example:

Iris Tabea showcases her work as a female software engineer balancing work and travel. You can find her on [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).



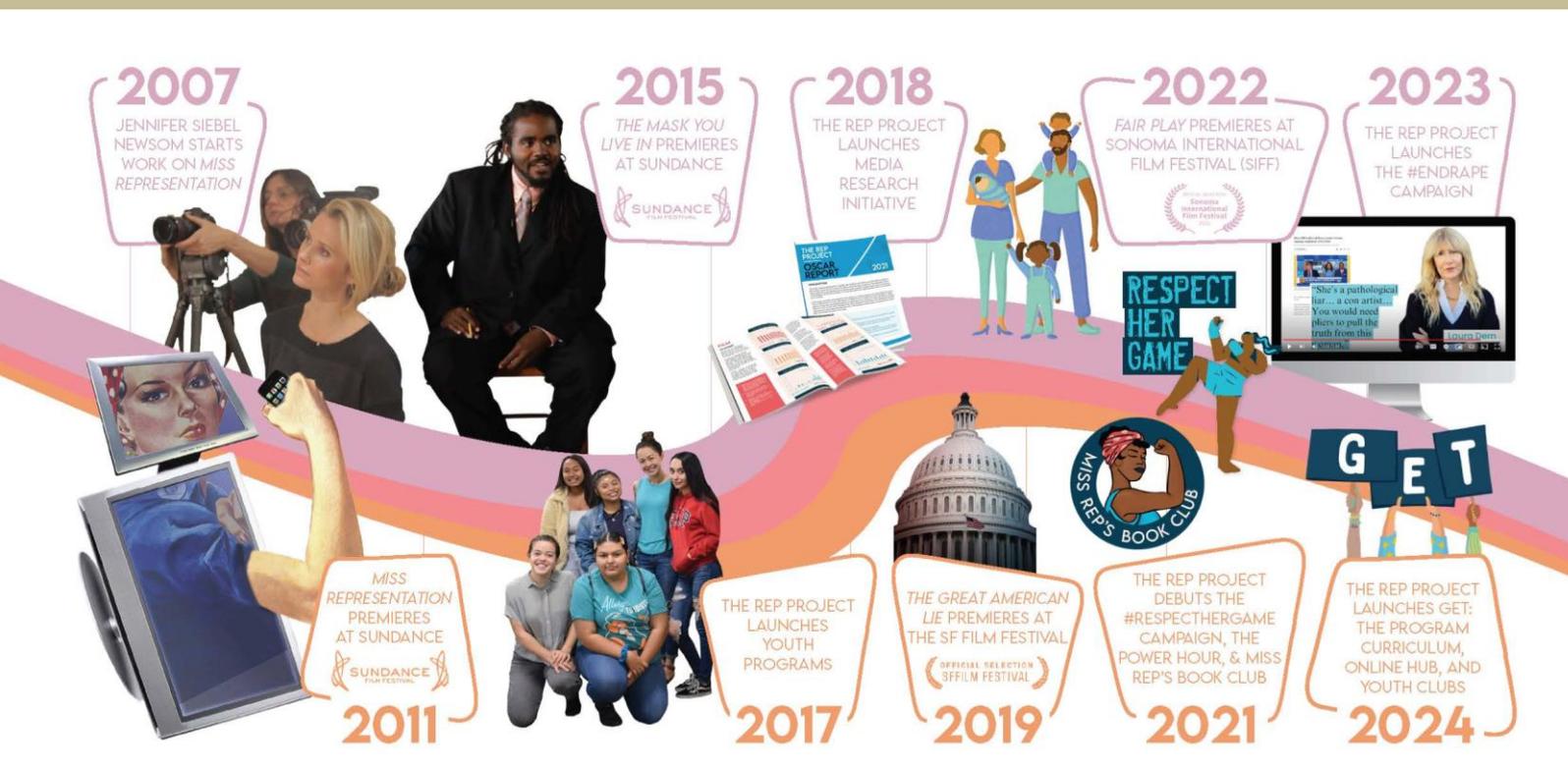
Lilly Singh uses comedy to challenge gender stereotypes and promote inclusivity, and the **women in STEM** playlist from the Museum of Science highlights the contributions of women in science, technology, engineering, and math. You can find her on [YouTube](#) and [Instagram](#).



Melvin is a clinical social worker and psychotherapist who works in schools. Through his channel, he shares what it is like to work in social work. You can find him on [Instagram](#).



Books, videos, and social media influencers can all help challenge gender stereotypes, but other resources can also provide valuable support in broadening perspectives. [The Representation Project](#) is an organization that uses media to combat limiting stereotypes and inspire social change. Through films, research, and educational materials, they empower both children and adults to question and overcome gender-based biases, fostering a more inclusive mindset.





Reading and sharing testimonials from people working in gender-atypical professions can also be a powerful tool.

For example, **MenTeach** [↗] promotes male participation in education and provides stories and resources for men pursuing careers in teaching. Speakers from organizations such as the **American Association for Men in Nursing (US)** [↗], **Mannen Netwerk Verpleegkunde** [↗] (NL), or **Men into Nursing Together** [↗] (UK) can also help challenge stereotypes and provide real-world role models. Similar associations exist in many countries for both men and women working in fields traditionally dominated by the opposite gender, offering valuable insight and encouragement for those interested in non-traditional career paths.

euro guidance ABOUT US INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY GUIDANCE SYSTEMS RESOURCES EVENTS CONTACT US Q MEMBERS AREA

GOOD PRACTICES

Resources / Good practices / Gender-conscious study and career guidance

Gender-conscious study and career guidance

Gender-conscious study- and career guidance needed

Upper secondary schools are strongly gendered. In study preparation programs, boys dominate among applicants for technical programs, while girls dominate among applicants for humanities programs.

In vocational preparation programs, boys dominate among applicants for electricity and energy, construction and civil engineering, as well as vehicles and transport.



In addition to the resources mentioned, there are several other guides that can further support efforts to challenge gender biases and encourage exploration of non-traditional career paths. For example, the **[Gender-Conscious Study and Career Guidance guide](#)** offers targeted activities and discussions to help students recognize how gender stereotypes influence their decisions and explore alternative career options. The **[Novorésumé Gender Equality in Career Guidance Toolkit](#)** and the **[booklet for Gender Inclusive Careers Guidance](#)** provide additional strategies and insights for promoting equality in career exploration.

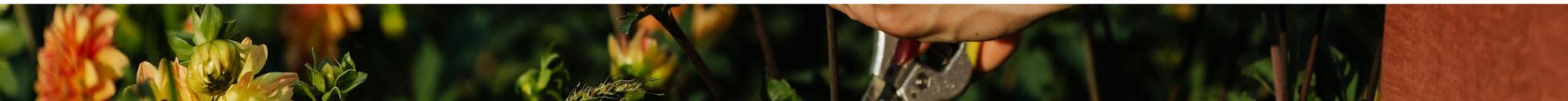


You can also explore the [**Preventing Gender Bias Guide**](#) [↗], a Harvard initiative that offers practical strategies to address gender bias and stereotypes. This resource provides tips for creating bias-free environments both at home and in the classroom. One of the standout recommendations is exposing children to nontraditional gender roles through diverse books, movies, and activities — an approach that is especially useful for parents and educators working to break down limiting gender expectations.



Chapter 6

Pruning with Care: Addressing Challenges and Resistance

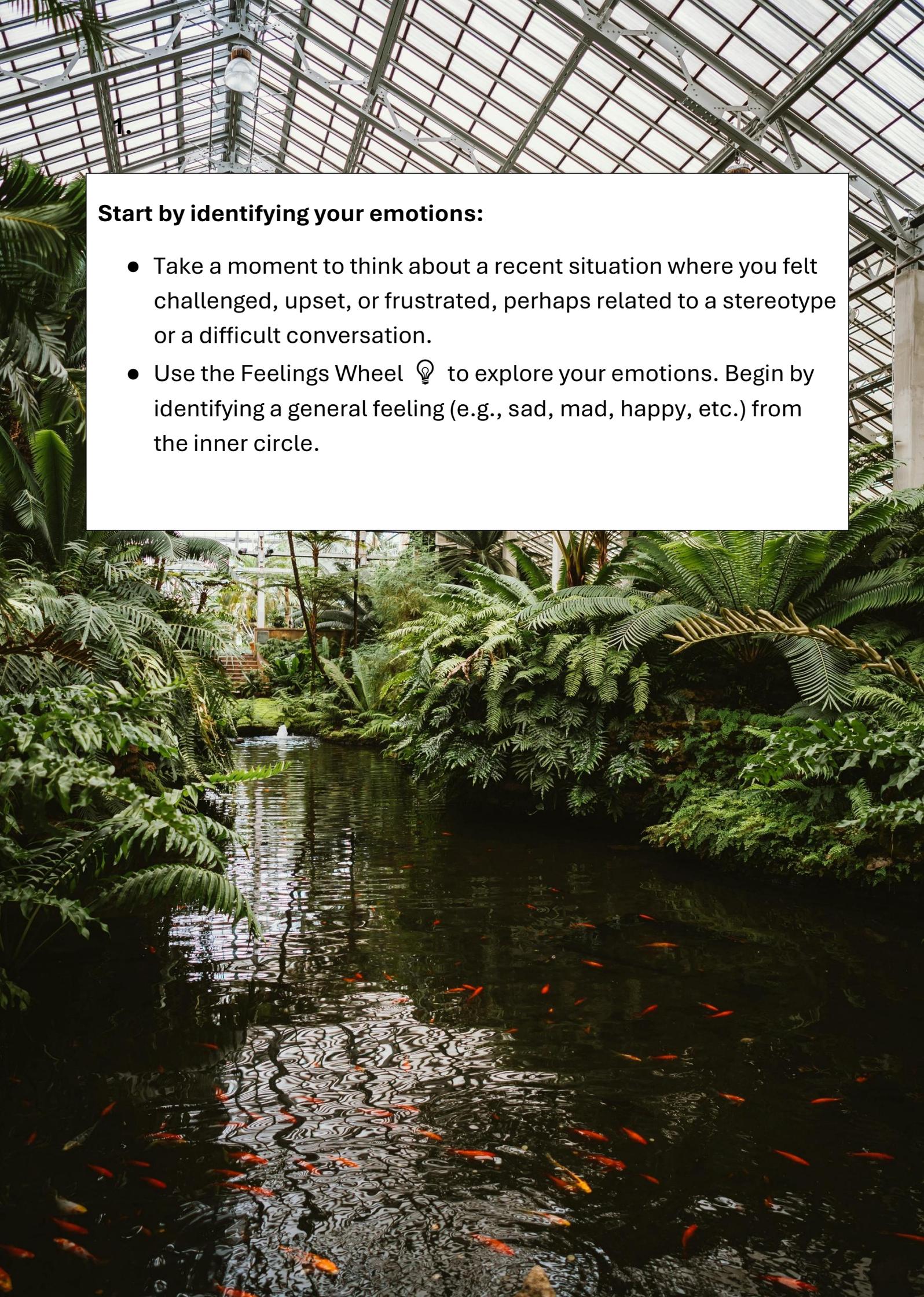


Just as a gardener carefully prunes branches to foster healthy growth and encourage a plant to flourish, addressing challenges and resistance to gender inclusivity requires careful thought and intention. When children or adults face pushback or express stereotypical views, it is essential to respond in ways that nurture growth and encourage openness. In this chapter, we explore how to guide children and peers through difficult conversations, help them process resistance from their environments, and build resilience to ensure lasting change.

When children, colleagues, or family members express stereotypical views, it can be difficult to know how to respond.



The **Making Caring Common Project** [↗](#) from Harvard University offers resources such as a **worksheet to help identify** [↗](#) **emotions in the body** [↗](#) to help parents and caregivers open a conversation about emotions. Another tool that this project offers is the **Feelings Wheel** [↗](#), which is an exercise that helps children and adults recognize and articulate their emotions. This can be especially useful when processing experiences related to gender stereotypes, resistance, or other difficult situations.

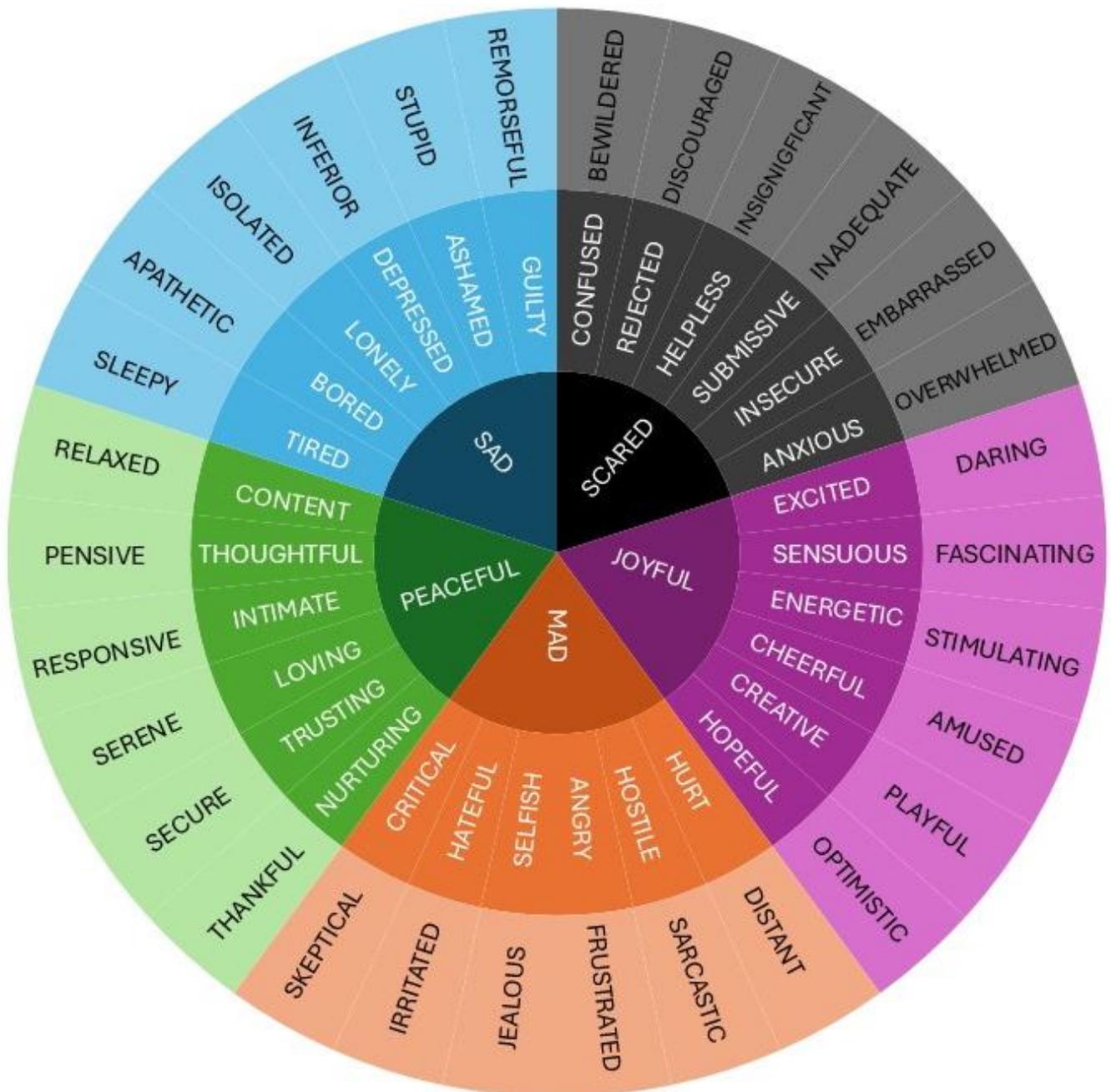


1.

Start by identifying your emotions:

- Take a moment to think about a recent situation where you felt challenged, upset, or frustrated, perhaps related to a stereotype or a difficult conversation.
- Use the Feelings Wheel  to explore your emotions. Begin by identifying a general feeling (e.g., sad, mad, happy, etc.) from the inner circle.

The Feelings Wheel is a visual tool that helps people identify and articulate their emotions by organizing them into categories and subcategories.



2. Dig deeper:

- Once you have identified a basic emotion, move toward the outer circles of the wheel to find more specific feelings that describe what you were experiencing. For example, if you chose "angry," you might narrow it down to "frustrated" or "irritated."
- Ask yourself: *What exactly am I feeling? Is there another word that better describes how I feel?*

3. Reflect on the situation:

- After identifying your emotions, take a few moments to reflect on the situation:
 - Why do you think you felt this way?
 - What triggered these emotions?
 - How did these emotions impact your behavior or thoughts?

4. Express your feelings:

- Now, take a few minutes to write or share your feelings aloud. If you are doing this with a child or group, create an open space for everyone to express their emotions without judgment.

5. Discuss Coping Strategies:

- After expressing your feelings, discuss ways to cope with these emotions. Use the Feelings Wheel to identify positive emotions or strategies that can help shift your feelings (e.g., "calm," "hopeful," "encouraged").
- Ask: *What actions can you take to move from a negative emotion to a positive one?*

This exercise helps children (and adults) build emotional awareness and resilience. Understanding your feelings allows for better responses when facing gender biases or societal pressures and strengthens your ability to handle pushback with clarity and confidence.

For parents and caregivers, helping children handle pushback from peers, schools, or communities can be especially difficult. Resources like *Workshop 6 'Mijn emoties uiten'* from the **EquiSchools toolkit** provide valuable guidance on how to express emotions without reinforcing gender stereotypes. By emphasizing the importance of emotional expression free from judgment, you can help your child navigate societal pressures and stand firm in their beliefs. Do note that the EquiSchools toolkit is written in Dutch!





Culturally relevant programs also play a significant role in reshaping perceptions and addressing stereotypes. Programs like the [Manhood Development Program](#) offer valuable lessons in challenging harmful stereotypes, particularly in marginalized communities. This program has been successful in redefining black masculinity by challenging mainstream representations of Black males as “hard” or “anti-school.” Through intentional activities, such as modeling positive behaviors and critiquing existing notions of masculinity, these programs help create a supportive, inclusive community for growth.

Mentorship programs such as the [Umoja Mentoring Project](#) further assist by connecting children with mentors who model positive masculinity. These programs are especially impactful for young African American boys, helping them develop a broader, more inclusive understanding of masculinity while navigating societal expectations.



Chapter 7

**Thriving Garden: Sustaining Change and Empowering
Future Generations**



Just as a well-nurtured garden continues to thrive and bloom year after year, lasting change in gender equality requires ongoing care and dedication. Beyond challenging stereotypes in the present, parents and caregivers can take steps to ensure that future generations grow up in an environment that fosters confidence, inclusivity, and leadership. This means advocating for equitable education, encouraging open conversations about identity, and providing young people with the support they need to reach their full potential.



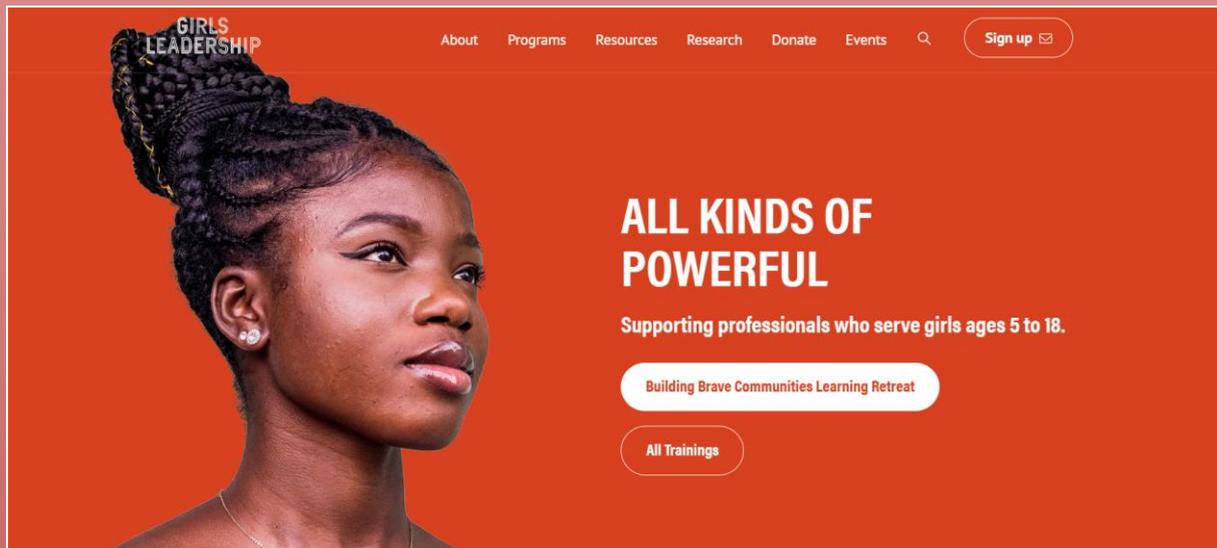
One powerful way to create lasting change is by ensuring that all children have access to quality education. Free platforms like [Khan Academy](#) or [UNESCO's Learning Portal](#) offer invaluable resources that help bridge educational gaps, particularly for girls who may face systemic barriers to learning. By introducing children to these platforms, parents can provide them with the tools to explore a wide range of subjects and pursue their academic interests without limitations.



At the same time, fostering gender inclusivity goes beyond academics. It's important to create spaces where boys feel free to explore their identities without the pressure of rigid masculinity norms. Open discussions about gender expectations help boys recognize that they are not confined to narrow definitions of strength or success. By providing non-judgmental, supportive environments, parents and educators can empower boys to develop emotional intelligence, embrace diverse interests, and form healthier relationships with themselves and others.

Encouragement and support are also key in shaping children's confidence. Setting high but achievable expectations reinforces the belief that they are capable of success, regardless of societal expectations tied to gender. Whether a girl aspires to be a scientist or a boy wants to pursue a career in teaching, ensuring that they feel supported in their ambitions helps them navigate challenges with resilience and determination.

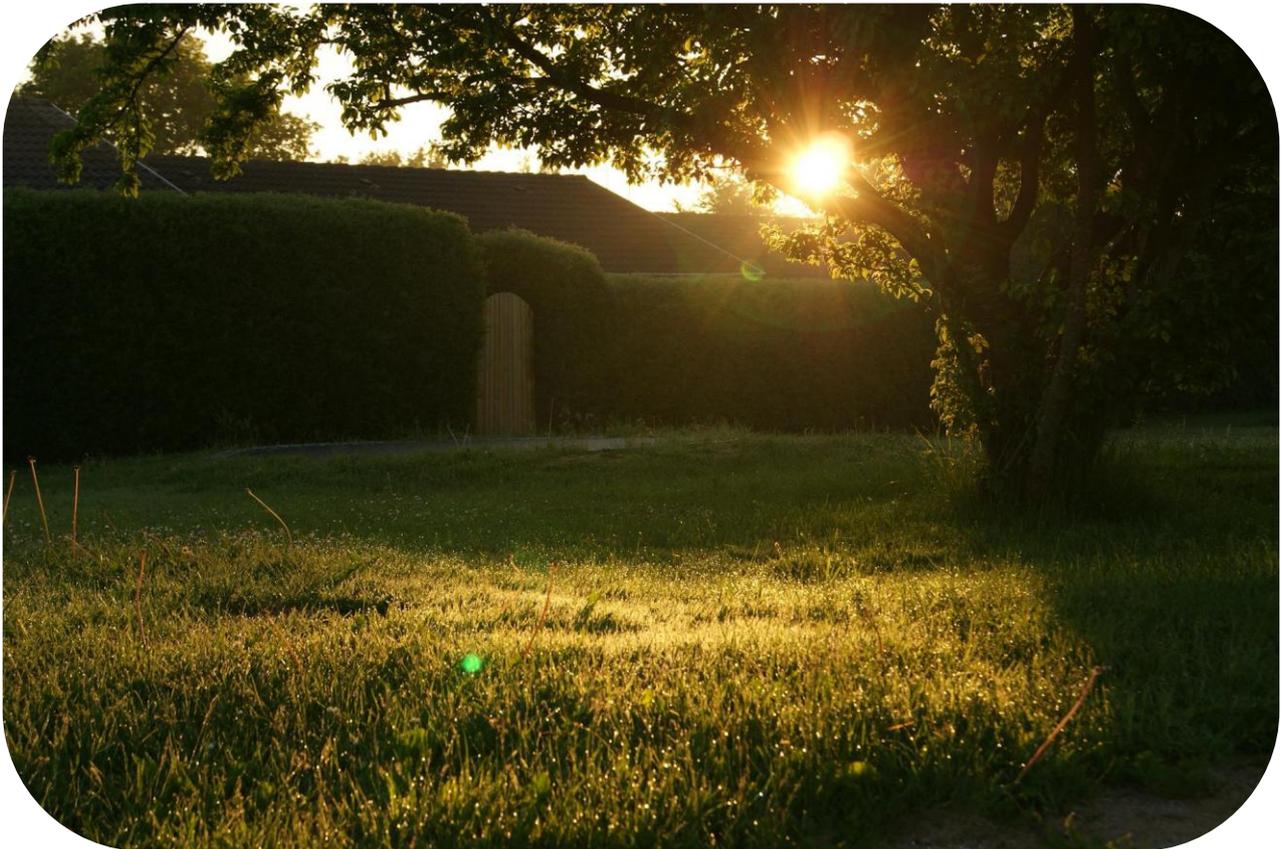




For girls in particular, programs like [Girls Leadership](#)  can play a key role in fostering confidence and self-expression. Their resources help young girls challenge gender norms, articulate their beliefs, and step into leadership roles. Parents and educators can use these materials to encourage girls to advocate for themselves, embrace leadership opportunities, and develop the skills to navigate a world where gender biases still exist.

By combining access to education, open conversations, encouragement, and leadership development, parents and caregivers can help cultivate a future where children grow up with the confidence to break free from stereotypes.

Just like a thriving garden, change flourishes when nurtured with care, creating a world where every child, regardless of gender, can reach their full potential.





Chapter 8

Extra Resources



What other information is out there?

In this chapter, you will find additional resources to support you in recognizing and challenging stereotypes in everyday situations and in organizations around us. These materials offer practical ways to create an encouraging environment where all feel free to be themselves.

Take a look at the following toolkits that also cover topics such as gender and stereotyping in the home, education and organizations. They are not all tailored to parents and guardians specifically, but they might all contain helpful information and valuable insights.

Just click  on the name of the toolkit to be automatically redirected to their website!



Gender Out of the Box

Another step-by-step guidance to help explain complex topics around gender equality in a clear, practical, and engaging way. It is designed to support parents, teachers, and others working with young people in creating inclusive environments and promoting gender awareness.

Toolkit for Sex, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression

This toolkit helps children explore gender beyond stereotypes, using activities that show interests like colors or toys are personal, not tied to gender. It encourages kids to see there are many ways to be themselves.

De Grote Gender Show

RoSa vzw's *De Grote Gender Show* is a video series that explains gender and gender stereotypes in a simple, accessible way, perfect for children, parents, and educators. The videos promote understanding of gender norms, equality, and inclusion. Please note that the content is in Dutch.

Learning and teaching resources for educators and independent learners

You will find guides, clear concept overviews, practical tips, readings, and useful tools, all to help tackle gender stereotypes in education. It also includes sample syllabi and supporting resources.

Gender Responsive Pedagogy Toolkit (GRP4ECE)

Primarily for educators, but also helpful for parents and caregivers, the Gender Responsive Pedagogy Toolkit (GRP4ECE) offers practical, low-cost strategies to create inclusive early childhood classrooms. It includes self-assessment tools, gender-responsive teaching methods, and age-appropriate activities to challenge stereotypes.

The Imagine Toolkit

In this toolkit, you will find practical tools, activities, and guidance to help engage boys and young men in preventing sexual harassment and violence against women and girls, by promoting respect, empathy, and healthy relationships.

Checklist and instructions for gender training needs assessment

Here, you will find a self-assessment checklist that helps organizations identify their strengths and training needs when it comes to creating lasting change. It is a practical tool for reflecting on existing knowledge and skills, and for planning what support might be needed to grow further.

Educational toolkit to help fight gender stereotypes in secondary school

You will find practical guidance and examples to help address gender stereotypes with students aged 14–15. It offers support for teachers in creating a learning environment where all students can develop their interests and talents.

Social work in England: State of the nation 2023

Find insights and real-life experiences from parents, professionals, and community members, gathered through conversations and engagement events. Their stories and input have helped shape each chapter, offering a grounded and personal view on key topics, shared in their own words.

Gender-responsive education: toolkit for teachers, teacher educators, school managers and curriculum developers in Africa

Find practical tools and guidance designed to help schools in Ethiopia and Ghana promote gender equality in upper primary and junior secondary education. It offers ideas for school leaders and teachers to integrate gender awareness into everyday teaching and school activities.

Gender-Responsive Pedagogy Toolkit for Teachers and Schools

Practical ideas, strategies, and resources to help create a gender-responsive learning environment in early childhood education. Designed for teachers and anyone working with young children, it offers adaptable guidance that can be used right away in classrooms and schools.

Rethinking Research Assessment: Unintended Cognitive and Systems Biases

Learn about seven common personal biases that can influence decisions and how these biases also show up in systems and structures. It also offers practical strategies to help create fairer, more inclusive environments by reducing the impact of bias.

**Talent Development
of Boys: A Guide for
Professionals In and
Around Education**

Learn how unequal gender treatment can also limit and harm boys, why it is important to address this early on, and how to take practical steps in education through interventions and adjustments that support all students fairly.



Chapter 9

Get to Know Us

Get to know us better!

This toolkit has been prepared as part of the international Horizon Europe project “RE-WIRING - Realising Girls’ and Women’s Inclusion, Representation and Empowerment”.

We use a science-based approach to answer questions such as:

- How can we make lasting changes to eliminate and reverse gender inequality?
- What are the key factors that create power differences between men and women in society?

You can learn more about the project by visiting [our website](#). There, you can find additional information on how we deal with [de-biasing education](#). You can also listen to [episode 3](#) of our podcast, where we talk more about gendered educational choices. You can also find more detailed reports on our work on our output overview: <https://re-wiring.eu/outputs/>.



Chapter 10

Glossary

Bias

Bias refers to a preference or assumption that influences our perceptions of people and situations, frequently operating unconsciously.

Binary concept of gender

The idea that gender falls into two distinct categories: male and female. This concept excludes people who do not tightly fit with either of these two labels, such as transgender or non-binary people.

Gender bias

Gender bias occurs when these assumptions are based on a person's gender, affecting how we perceive and interact with individuals based on whether they are male or female.

Gender stereotypes

Fixed ideas that say boys and girls have certain skills and should act a certain way just because of their gender.

Masculine generics

Using male words to refer to all people, like saying "fireman" instead of "firefighter," which can make women and others invisible.

Unconscious bias

Automatic, unintentional preferences or stereotypes about people based on their gender, race, or other traits, without even realizing it.

Cultural norms

The everyday behaviors or traditions that are seen as normal in a particular group or society.

Implicit Association

When we automatically link certain ideas or groups with others in our mind, without even realizing it.



Chapter 11

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We used Generative AI assistance (ChatGPT) as a language assistant to tailor our content to the readers of this toolkit.