



November 2023



A Fair Start: Gender transformative early childhood development

Early childhood is transformative

Our children deserve a Scotland free from men's violence against women. But how do we create this future?

Gender equality.

To have the best possible start, all children need a fair, loving environment. They should learn and explore without people limiting what they do, and can achieve, because of their gender.

We know that early childhood is the best time to interrupt gender stereotypes and set a child on an equal path, where they'll both expect and give fair treatment.

Gender in early childhood

Family, media, and the surrounding world teach girls and boys gender stereotypes from a very early age [1; 2].

- From birth to 24 months, children learn to distinguish between 'girl' and 'boy,' 'man' and 'woman,' and can tell whether adults think their behaviour is appropriate for their gender [2].
- From age 3 to 5, children form rigid rules and expectations about how people of different genders should look and behave [2].
- By age 5, children reach 'gender compliance,' and broadly adhere to what the world has told them someone of their gender can and cannot do [2].

"What would happen if a boy played princesses and a girl played with trucks?"

"That would be crazy!" [2]
- boy aged 4/5, Glasgow

"That would make their brains all mixed up!" [2]
- boy aged 4/5, Glasgow



Early childhood can transform Scotland and end

VAWG

We can transform Scotland by reaching gender equality and ending men's violence against women. Early childhood development is key to achieving this.

A gender neutral early childhood education is not enough [2]. We need to actively counteract gender stereotypes by creating gender transformative early years spaces. Ones which question the stereotypes children will absorb throughout their lives.

Biases and stereotypes are malleable in early childhood [3]. Early years settings have the opportunity to grant all children a loving, fair, and equal start.

We call on the Scottish Government to support childcare settings by delivering a well-resourced, holistic approach to embedding gender equality in the early years.

- **Fund and resource the early years workforce.**
- **Encourage men to become early years practitioners.**
- **Mainstream gender, racial, LGBTQ+, class and disability equality as core topics throughout pre-qualification training and continuous professional development.**
- **Mainstream gender transformative approaches in all early years toolkits, guidance and strategies.**
- **Support early learning and childcare settings to develop a 'Challenging Gender Stereotypes' policy.**
- **Resource counter-stereotypical books and toys.**



References

- [1] The Fawcett Society (2019) Gender Stereotypes in Early Childhood: A Literature Review.
- [2] Heywood, S., and Adzajklic, B. (2023). Challenging Gender Stereotypes in the Early Years, Routledge, Oxon.
- [3] King, T. L., Scovelle, A. J., Meehl, A., Milner, A. J., and Priest, N. (2021). 'Gender stereotypes and biases in early childhood: A systematic review,' Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 46:2, 112-125

Zero Tolerance is supported by



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

1 Papermill Wynd, Edinburgh EH7 4QL
E: info@zerotolerance.org.uk
Scottish Charity Number SC023484

www.zerotolerance.org.uk