

Gender Justice in ECE AUDIT TOOL

This tool offers a set of reflection questions and prompts about specific aspects of Early Childhood Education programs and practices to consider from a gender justice perspective. It is a way to identify areas where teachers, directors and administrators might want to focus their attention, and offers a structure to create a concrete plan towards change.

[Here's a link to view a version of this audit tool online, with many examples and illustrations!](#)

Section 1: Environments & Materials

classroom visuals

1. Posters, photos, and other visual material in the classroom include depictions of human children and adults with a range of visible gender expressions, body sizes, skin tones, and visible disabilities, engaged in a range of pursuits
2. Posters showing anatomical body parts are not labeled "boy" and "girl"

library

3. School library includes multiple positive books with transgender and gender-expansive protagonists that reflect our [qualities to look for in gender-expansive children's literature](#)
4. Majority of books in school library resist harmful gender role stereotypes. Books that perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes are removed, modified, or read with time to question and discuss stereotypes.

organization of space

5. Blocks, trains, and cars areas (traditionally coded male) are integrated with or adjacent to dramatic play areas (traditional coded female) such that materials including dolls, stuffed animals, play food, dress up and figurines can be integrated into building and vehicle play and vice versa. (Links: [Tokarz, http://elmscourse.org/general_course_documents/Reader/Reader_Session_14_Block_Play_Its_Not_Just_for_Boys_Anymore_article.pdf](#))

materials

6. Dolls and figurines that perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes are removed, modified, or expanded in a way that counteracts the stereotype.
7. *If* dress-up collection includes items traditionally coded female and male (i.e. dresses, ties, suit jackets, construction helmets, sparkly shoes, etc), these items are balanced with each other and with gender-neutral items (sparkly tunics, animal suits or accessories, jumpsuits, etc), and come in an array of sizes.
8. Classroom materials include a variety of enticing open-ended "loose parts," which allow children to recreate themselves dynamically. ([links to Loose Parts research](#))

Section 2: Curriculum (including Transitions, Routines, Language, Activities/Projects, and Responding to Bias)

transitions

9. I dismiss, call on, and group children in a variety of ways rather than by gender. [[link to a list of ideas beyond our examples? It would be easy to create a meme "20 ways to dismiss your class without reinforcing binary gender"](#)]

routines

10. Bathrooms and toilets are not segregated by gender.
11. When conversations about anatomy come up between children, I offer clear, clarifying, affirming information without shutting down or shaming children's curiosity. I explain that body parts don't dictate gender.
12. Extra clothes bins are labeled by type of clothing rather than by gender.
13. Children's cubbies are not segregated by gender.
14. I address my class in gender-inclusive ways instead of saying "boys and girls."

curriculum

15. I set up open-ended activities and projects that allow children to explore and create themselves through various artistic mediums.

16. When conflicts around gender or gender-based exclusion arise, I ask students if we can share the story of what happened with the class and get their help working it out. I use children's questions, curiosities, and ideas about gender to shape the curriculum and share stories that address those questions or counteract their stereotypes.
17. I use persona dolls or puppets to address gender bias in the classroom without putting individual students on the spot.
18. I intervene in moments of gender bias between children by asking questions and offering information without blaming or shaming children.
19. I support the children strategizing around solving problems of unfairness around gender. I reinforce that classroom rules we generate together might be different than rules at home or in other places.
20. I introduce children to gender resources and diverse gender narratives, expressions, and identities. I practice normalizing gender expansiveness and queerness by sharing narratives of queer and trans people that are not centered on struggle or othering.
21. I recognize the connection between gender and all curriculum topics and integrate it throughout the year.

language

22. I talk directly about **stereotypes** and practice using words like “many” rather than “all.” (A **stereotype** is a generalization about a group of people that isn't true of everyone in that group. Many times these ideas are unfair and can hurt people.)
23. I explicitly name and identify “normed” identities like heterosexual partnerships and cisgender identity rather than only talking about “other” identities like LGBTQ identities and lifestyles as examples of diversity.
24. I use inclusive or specific terms to refer to groups of children, instead of referring to groups of children by gender.
25. When I talk about people who I don't know the gender identity of, I use language that avoids assigning them a gender.
26. When I talk about animals, plants or objects, I use gender-neutral pronouns or a variety of pronouns, rather than always using “he” as a default.

Section 3: Play

27. I track where children play and avoid play, and I help them expand their range of play into different parts of the classroom.
28. I notice when children are segregating by gender or limiting themselves to

certain types of play based on stereotypical gender norms, and...

29. When I notice that children are segregating or limiting themselves based on gender norms, I help children expand their type of play, play narratives, and playmates.
30. I take children's play seriously, and I observe how children are exploring gender in their play
31. I allot ample time for free play in the daily schedule.
32. I am aware of subtle messages I am giving about which fantasy roles and types of play are appropriate or inappropriate for children of different genders. I work to encourage all types of roles and play.
33. I intervene when children exclude others from play based on gender and other social identities, physical attributes, etc.
34. I intervene when certain play areas become known for gendered types of play.
35. I intervene when children display gender bias. Gender bias includes: limiting or enforcing each other's gender expression or identities in play, making negative comments about a person's appearance or capabilities, and using stereotypes to inform beliefs. I follow up to address bias in other ways in the curriculum.
36. If an adult makes a comment about children's play that reveals heteronormative assumptions, I address it in a diffusing way and check in with the adult later.

Section 4: Relationships

between teachers/staff and children

37. I treat children with care and respect. I pay attention to what children do and say, and value their contributions to the classroom.
38. I allow children to explore genders beyond the gender binary; I don't insist on all children being a boy or a girl.
39. I affirm children's gender identities (**their inner sense of who they are**) and expressions (**how they display their identity outwardly through style, behavior, etc**), without drawing undue attention to choices, expressions and identities that cross social norms.
40. I approach children as equal partners in co-creating a culture of gender creativeness and exploration.
41. I believe that children are the experts on their own gender and experiences and respond to children accordingly. I trust children every day; even if what they said yesterday was different, what they're saying today is not wrong.
42. I allow children to set the pace on if/when they want to share their gender

identity with others. I never "out" a child without their explicit consent and having dialogue with the family.

43. I notice how I am treating children differently based on gender, and I make sure I actively contradict the stereotypes so that ALL children get a variety of positive attention from me.

between teachers/staff and families

44. I treat parents and family members with respect. I pay attention to what family members do and say, and value their contributions to the classroom.
45. I take the time to ask/learn from families about their family structures, traditions and norms; I stay respectful and stay curious; and I don't assume that families will respond to all situations based on their structures, traditions and norms.
46. I am willing to adjust my curriculum each year in response to the needs of families.
47. I provide resources about the language I plan to use around gender at the beginning of the year, solicit feedback, and begin conversations with families who have questions, concerns, and input.
48. I approach relationships with families as partnerships in supporting the health and growth of their children together.
49. I resist holding the role of "expert" in how children should or do experience gender.
50. I remember that gender identity is just one aspect of a child, not their whole being. When I talk with families I tell them many things about their child; I do not focus exclusively on gender.
51. I introduce families to gender resources.
52. I share ongoing information about read-alouds, conversations, and conflict that emerge in the classroom around gender, including the language I use to respond.
53. When conflicts arise, I listen to family members' opinions and feelings without judgement. I validate these feelings and attempt to uncover underlying motivations.
54. I talk about the strengths that come from children's gender expressions and identities rather than "problems" associated with them.
55. I advocate for children's gender health and well-being.
56. I utilize the support I have (school mission, NAEYC norms) to support my professional responsibility to address gender justice with colleagues and families.

between teachers/staff and each other

- 57. I instigate and encourage discussion about children's gender exploration with my co-workers.
- 58. I work to create a classroom culture in which teachers communicate with and understand one another.
- 59. I foster continuity and consistency in the way teachers respond to children's gender exploration.
- 60. I use methods of observation and documentation to reflect on children's gender exploration, taking notice of language they use to describe themselves and each other, and I share and discuss my observations with my co-workers.
- 61. I solicit feedback and support from students, parents, and colleagues on how my gender bias shows up in the classroom, recognizing that this is an ongoing process.

Section 5: Administration & HR

- 62. School has a mission or values statement that clearly expresses a value in human diversity and differences.
- 63. School has a mission or values statement that expresses a commitment to addressing injustice and supporting young children in being justice makers.
- 64. Family intake forms use gender-inclusive words like "family members" instead of "mom and dad." Forms are inclusive of diverse family structures, and flexible about the numbers of primary caregivers in a child's life.
- 65. Family intake forms allow parents/guardians to express their own and their child's gender in their own words, beyond binary F/M choices. Forms include opportunities to share someone's preferred name.
- 66. Diversity including gender diversity is celebrated among teachers and staff and viewed as valuable in hiring decisions. At the same time, teachers and staff are conscious about not tokenizing members of marginalized identity groups.
- 67. HR practices are inclusive of gender diverse employees, and administration has taken care to put in place gender-inclusive policies.
- 68. School provides professional development resources to support employee's continual learning and development, including ongoing education about gender diversity by people and/or organizations with this expertise.
 - a. Administrators provide posters/other visual material to teachers that they can display to signal to families that they are welcoming of LGBTQ+ families and children.

69. Administrators partner with teachers, families and children to develop individualized game plans for supporting transgender and gender expansive children; especially working to respect children's wishes around names, pronouns, whether or not a child is "out" to other children and faculty/staff, and other administrative and logistical factors
70. Program policies do not limit teacher's interactions with children based on the gender of the teacher.

Section 6: Self-Work

Reflecting on my own gender identity, expression and journey...

71. ...What do I love about my gender?
72. ...When was a time I felt really affirmed or a sense of belonging in my gender?
73. ...What are some obstacles I've faced in trying to authentically express and represent myself?
74. ...What are some ways that others have forced me to fit into their beliefs and expectations about gender?
75. ...What are some ways society's gender norms have limited me or hurt me?
(**gender norms** are the often unspoken social rules that dictate how we should behave and express ourselves based on our gender. **gender norms** vary across and within cultures. For example, in the US there is an old expectation for white women of high social standing to be soft-spoken and graceful, while white working class women are expected to be brash and tough.)
76. ...Has there been a time when I felt a disconnect between how someone sees my gender and who I know myself to be?

Reflecting on my beliefs, expectations, and understandings about gender...

77. ...What are some ways I've forced others to fit into my beliefs and expectations about gender throughout my life?
78. ...What are some conscious and subconscious reactions I have when my expectations about gender are disrupted?
79. ...Which of society's expectations about gender have always felt easy and natural for me to go along with without questioning?
80. Am I willing to lean into and sit with feelings of discomfort when my beliefs and expectations about gender are disrupted?

81. Am I willing to approach those who challenge my beliefs, values and concepts of gender with curiosity rather than judgement?
82. When I listen, am I open to being affected or changed?
83. Do I believe each child in my care is the expert on their own gender, and am I ready to follow their lead and to support them in their journey?
84. What are some aspects of my gender expression, behavior, identity and journey that break gender norms? How can I highlight these in my program as strengths?
85. How do I and my students benefit from understanding gender diversity, confronting stereotypes and knowing ourselves? How does this impact cisgender as well as transgender and gender expansive students?
86. Who can I ask to be a buddy/accountability partner to support me in this work, if I don't already have one? (It could be someone I work with, or someone I check in with on a regular basis.)
87. How will I continue my learning about gender, including seeking out a diversity of first-person perspectives about gender?
88. What are some language habits I'll work on changing (example: using people's preferred pronouns, referring to groups of people in gender-inclusive ways, replacing gendered terms like "fireman" with inclusive terms like "firefighter," etc)? Acknowledging that it is very difficult to change language patterns I've used my whole life, and knowing that it's for the health of the children in my care, how will I practice these changes?

Section 7: Classroom Culture

89. Children show comfort in exploring and trying on different gender identities and/or expressions.
90. Children demonstrate an understanding that gender doesn't have to be fixed or permanent.
91. Friendship, play, and social interaction amongst children of different genders is part of the classroom culture.
92. Children validate and support each other's gender expressions and identities, including using requested names and pronouns.
93. Children recognize gender bias and stereotypes in the classroom and in the world, and understand that they hurt people.
94. Children respond to gender bias in supportive, constructive ways, and seek to right wrongs.
95. Children have words for genders besides "boy" and "girl," and use them.
96. Children ask newcomers to share their gender pronouns rather than making assumptions.