1. **Think about the vocabulary you use.**

We can all be guilty of imposing stereotypes on children. Think about how often adults comment on girls' physical appearance before other characteristics, or how we praise girls for sitting quietly, or show them value through their pretty hair or dress. To avoid this, try removing gender labels from your language. "Instead of saying, 'What a smart girl you are!' say, 'You are very smart!'" We need to remind them that it’s good for all people to be nurturing and caring toward others and be able to take each other's perspectives and be considerate- values we often impose on our girls and not so much our boys.

**1. Integrate All Toys**

This means that if you have a son, allow him the opportunity to explore what is deemed as the “girls” toy section at department stores. Don’t be so quick to steer him in the direction of those super hero masks. But to be fair, maybe after he has had the chance to peruse the latest Barbie Dolls, let him wander over to the other options.

If you give a little girl a doll, she will take care of it and remain motherly and affectionate as if that baby doll were her own real child. If you hand one to your young son, he will cradle it and be maternal and loving and treat it as if it were his own real child.

But first he needs to have the opportunity to do this, to explore a softer side of himself, and at a young age too. The earlier they can learn that there are no boundaries in playtime, the quicker they will catch on that it is entirely okay to mix their building blocks with their tea set.

believes that this mindset not only devalues feminine qualities, but also presents a disservice to boys. "We want girls to play with a chemistry set but we don't want boys to play with dolls or tea sets. But in fact, learning how to care for others, taking turns, and interacting socially might be really important values for building a better society," she says.

**2. Shop In Both Sections**

This goes for both clothes and toys, but you already know a bit about the toy situation, eh? Target [recently announced](https://time.com/3990442/target-gender-based-signs/) that it will soon be doing away with gender-based sections of their children’s departments, opting for signs that say something like “Kids Clothing” instead of the requisite “Boys Clothing” and “Girls Clothing.”

And rightfully so. The whole assumption that all boys should wear blues and greens and girls should stick to pinks and purples is simply outdated. We’ve all seen the rather tacky shirts that say things like “real men wear pink,” but maybe they’re on to something.

If we can start the notion early that boys are allowed to wear pastels *and* shades of blue and girls are permitted to opt for simply graphic tees over their frilly capped shirts, then there will be less room for gender-biased actions later.

**3. Promote Sports And Culture Together**

It may come as no surprise to see this mentioned yet again, but we cannot stress enough how important it is to make it clear to your children early on that they have the option to participate in any extracurricular activities that they are interested in. No, this doesn’t mean forcing your son into a tutu or steadfastly convincing your daughter that she wants to be an umpire, but give them the choice to try out a little of everything.

Take your son to both a football game and a ballet recital. Let your daughter experience a baseball game, and follow it up with a cheer-leading competition event. Whatever gender-themed activity you thought you had to steer clear from because your child isn’t the “right” gender, well, think again.

Give yourself some breathing room mentally and give your child the chance to choose for themselves.

**4. Promote All Colors For Both Genders**

Yes, this goes for clothing, as we mentioned before, but it also applies to pretty much everything else in life. Your first mistake may be in painting the nursery blue upon the news that you’re having a boy.

Don’t get us wrong, blue is a great color and if you really enjoy it, then by all means, go ahead. But if the only reason you chose it was because it is “for boys” isn’t the right reason. Skip ahead a few years, as you’re taking your son shopping for school supplies.

If he selects the pink pencil case, don’t be so quick to try and sway him away from it and to a more “masculine” color. We get it that you may be envisioning other kids teasing him, but the last thing you want to do is stifle him in any way.

**5. Expose Them To The Correct Terminology**

When you’re doing pretty much anything with your kids, from choosing a bike to picking out curtains, there is inevitably the mention of something being a “girl color” or a “boy bike.” This of course goes back to these ideas already being firmly implanted in us.

We get it, you can’t help but think of that as the first thing that comes to mind. But the whole idea is to train yourself to stop thinking that way as you raise your children to think freely and as neutrally as possible.

Be generous with your praises of both your daughter and son being “beautiful.” Even throw in some “pretties” now and again. The more you use such terms neutrally, the more naturally they feel.

**6. Share Chores With Your Spouse**

As your children grow, it is important for them to see both genders in every type of role in the home. If you and our spouse are the same gender, then it is still plenty important for your children to simply see housework and responsibilities shared.

Don’t designate the more masculine of you two to take out the garbage and open jars because you are a “big strong man.” Let your children see Mom putting together that new kitchen table while Dad is folding laundry in the living room.

Gender stereotypes play such a huge role in the home that this is almost a no-brainer, and it really does take little effort to simply share the work, regardless of who society thinks is the stronger of you two.

**7. Let Them Be Themselves**

Even if it is questionable, or weird. If your son is adamant in his interest in getting his nails painted while you are working on yours, then give in without a beat. Like we said, there is no scientific evidence to say that doing so would hurt him. On the contrary, it would be promoting him to be himself and follow what he feels is natural to him.

If your daughter truly wants to wear those striped leggings with that polka-dotted tunic and bright orange sneakers, then guess what? She’ll be fine too. There is always the worry, of course, that their peers may find them off putting or even resort to name-calling.

But, guess what? Kids will do those sorts of things no matter what. Allowing your child to follow their imaginations and hearts is setting the foundation for them to not become those kids.

**8. Don’t Use The Logic Of “You’re Supposed To. . .”**

Once again, this promotes the idea in your child’s head that because they are a certain gender, they “should” be interested in something or someone. It sets the stage for your child denying themselves of a certain happiness that comes with being yourself and being confident as a result.

Instead of telling your child what they are supposed to be doing, as told by society, give them choices so that they can decide for themselves what they should *really* be doing, based off of their own inner thoughts and feelings.

**9. Remember That You Are Leading By Example**

It is one thing to put these sorts of tips to use and to even follow through with them when it comes to your child, but the moment you succumb to these gender-biased rules and stereotypes yourself, you’re setting yourselves back a few hundred steps.

Don’t let your daughter catch you pouting to your husband that something is too heavy and you need his “manly arms.” And be sure to refrain from ever telling your wife – in front of your kids or not – that she’s good at cooking because she is the woman and that it’s simply a compliment. Such things only perpetuate the society-generated stereotypes that you as parents should be working hard to quell.

Is this the be all end all list of tips to raise your child to be perfectly perfect? Of course not. But helping them form an open mind about themselves and everyone around them is certainly a decent start.

**1. Make gender less important …**

“I don’t typically use the label 'gender neutral,'” says [Christia Spears Brown](https://psychology.as.uky.edu/users/csbrow6" \t "_blank), a professor at the Centre for Equality and Social Justice at the University of Kentucky. “But I do focus on how kids can be free of restrictions based on gender norms.” We all fall foul of imposing stereotypes on children. Think about how often adults comment on girls' physical appearance before other characteristics, for instance. To avoid this, try removing gender labels from your language. "Instead of saying, 'What a smart girl you are!' say, 'What a smart kid you are!'" says Brown.

**2. ... but point out sexism in the world around them.**

"At the same time, and just as importantly, gender must be talked about more," says Brown. Parents must teach their children about sexism and stereotypes, she says. “Help kids recognize stereotypes whenever you spot them and know how sexism shapes the world we live in. Those conversations should start from the beginning. This is the only way children know that the gender divisions we see are not due to innate differences in abilities, but a result of a stereotyped culture.”

**3. Remember that toys do not have a gender.**

Studies suggest that girls and boys show preference for playing with toys that are typed to their own gender [by as early as nine months](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/icd.1986/full) -- a behavior that is likely influenced as much by adults initiating and rewarding stereotypical play as biology.

The kinds of toys your child plays with are vital for their development -- they can have a serious impact on their cognitive abilities, career interests and many aspects of their physical and psychological development. “Toys teach kids skills,” says Lisa Dinella, associate professor of psychology at Monmouth University, New Jersey, and principal investigator of the [Gender Development Laboratory](https://www.monmouth.edu/school-of-humanities-social-sciences/psych-research-labs.aspx). “Blocks and board games teach counting and spatial skills, dolls let children role play nurturing."

Studies also show that children [remember more information about toys they deem suitable for their own gender](https://asu.pure.elsevier.com/en/publications/influence-of-sex-stereotypes-on-childrens-exploration-and-memory-), than those for the opposite sex. "When we gender stereotype certain toys as ‘boy toys’ or ‘girl toys’, we limit the skills they develop,” says Dinella.

So how do we go about encouraging a variety of play? Color and labeling affect the choice of toys that children interact with -- this is [particularly evident in girls](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0193397314000689). But it can be used to our advantage: “Our research on pink and blue toys shows that just changing the color of a toy changed the kids’ interest in the very same toy,” says Dinella. Shops are starting to catch on: In 2015, Target eliminated its pink and blue aisles, and just under half of British toy shops recently surveyed segregate their toys by gender.

**4. Protect your children from the “pink and blue tsunami” as early as possible.**

“We are only just becoming aware of how plastic and moldable our brains are, and how they can be changed by experiences, but also by attitudes such as stereotypes,” says [Gina Rippon](http://www.aston.ac.uk/lhs/staff/az-index/rippong/), professor emeritus of cognitive neuroimaging at Aston University, UK. She tells parents to watch out for the “pink and blue tsunami,” in which the constant stressing of differences between boys and girls will change their brain and their behavior.

The brain has a life-long capacity to change and rewire itself, but it is at its most malleable [up until around the age of seven](https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/the-timing-and-quality-of-early-experiences-combine-to-shape-brain-architecture/). “This is why gender neutrality matters,” says Rippon. The things we learn during this critical period can dramatically shape our development -- so the earlier you can open your child up to a world in which all opportunities are equally available to them, the better.

**5. Do not try to erase gender.**

The goal is not to erase gender, but to reduce the impact of gender stereotypes that accompany gender labels, says Dinella. For some parents, the importance of gender neutrality is connected to their child’s gender identity, she says, but for others, the goal is about allowing all children to explore all interests, hobbies and career paths.

"It is probably better to emphasise the irrelevance of gender," says Rippon, "by making sure choices and opportunities aren’t restricted by gender."

**6.** **Encourage boys and girls to play together.**

“It is important for kids to be comfortable playing with all people, even if they are different from them in one way or another,” says Dinella. “Think about all the times in life when working together with others would benefit them -- in school, in the work place, in personal relationships.”

Brown agrees: "Have [children] play in mixed-gender play groups, sports activities and birthday parties."

**7. Let them express themselves -- and feel safe in doing so.**

"My top tip would be to support diversity in relation to gender identity and gender expression. Keep possibilities open for young people, despite the tendency to want to think about gender in concrete and categorical terms," says [Angeline Dharmaindra](http://gids.nhs.uk/who-we-are/angeline-dharmaindra), a clinical psychologist who works at the NHS Gender Identity Development Service, London. “Children and young people do and should be able to explore how they express their gender from an early age. Dressing up and role play activities may involve choices which don’t always conform to gender stereotypes and may appear unconventional, but it is important for children to be able to explore and experiment in a safe environment.”

Sports classes needn't be segregated. Credit: Shutterstock

**8. Make difference a positive attribute.**

“It is important to see exploration around gender as something which is positive and for adults around children to convey that it is OK to be different,” says Dharmaindra. “Highlight the idea that there are lots of different ways to be male and female.”

**9.** **Introduce them to "Purple Rain."**

Expose children to a wide variety of role models. "This may include individuals who challenge stereotypes in terms of their careers -- male nurses and dancers, female mechanics and engineers, for instance,” says Dharmaindra. “This may also include individuals who express their gender identity in a more gender fluid or gender-neutral way, such as Eddie Izzard, Prince or Jeffree Star.”

**10. Focus on your child as an individual.**

Studies suggest that there is [no such thing as a "male brain" or a "female brain"](https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn28582-scans-prove-theres-no-such-thing-as-a-male-or-female-brain/). Brain scans show that sex differences in brain anatomy do exist, but on an individual level, [most of us have a mix of features that are characteristic of both](http://www.pnas.org/content/112/50/15468). So while there may be some biological differences between genders, we need to think more carefully about how much weight we give this -- and when gender is simply irrelevant. “We need to focus on people as individuals," says Rippon, "rather than pirates, princesses, Martians or Venusians."