



## BE PREPARED FOR QUESTIONS AND PUT-DOWNS ON GENDER

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Practicing answering questions related to gender or interrupting hurtful teasing based on gender will help you respond more easily when the situation arises. As educators, take the time to practice simple phrases. As teachers, work with your students so that they also have simple responses to gender exclusion or put-downs.

### **“Why does Martin like pink?”**

- There doesn't have to be boy colors or girl colors. Colors are colors. All people like different colors.
- Do you think it's wrong for boys to wear pink? Why's that?
- Why do you like blue, or green, (or whatever color that child likes)? Why don't you like pink?
- Did you know that pink used to be considered a boys color and blue was the girl's color?

### **“Why is her hair so short? She looks like a boy.”**

- Girls and women can have hair in many different styles and so can boys or men.
- Hair is hair. That is how she likes it.
- Why does it matter if a girl's hair is short or a boy's hair is long?

### **“Juan plays with dolls. That's weird.”**

- It's true that some boys don't like to play with dolls but some boys do! Just like some of you like to draw and some of you don't. Some of you like to play kickball and others don't. No one should have to pick and choose what they do just because they are a boy or a girl.
- The dolls are for all children in this classroom.
- Sometimes this is confusing. We get messages about some things being for boys and some things being for girls. They are just for kids!

### **You overhear a student say to another student who identifies as a girl, “You look like a boy.”**

- Why do you say that?
- There is no one way for girls or boys to act or look.
- Girls and women can have short hair. That's just how she likes it.
- Those are the kinds of clothes that she likes to wear. Why do you like to wear what you're wearing?

### **“But he's a boy, why does he dress like a girl?”**

- There are lots of different ways that boys can dress and lots of different ways that girls can dress.
- Some boys like to wear pink or to have long hair. All of these things are OK in our school.
- There are many ways of being a boy (girl), and all are okay ways of being a boy (girl).
- Those are the kinds of clothes that he likes to wear? Why do you like to wear what you're wearing?

### **“Dominic is always hanging out with girls. Why?”**

- I encourage all boys and girls to play together.
- Dominic hangs out with friends who he likes to spend time with, just like you do with your friends.
- Some boys like the activities that more of the girls are doing and therefore like to play with girls.

### **You overhear a student call another student who identifies as a boy, a “girl” in an insulting way.**

- That's not OK at our school to call someone a “girl” to insult them or make them feel bad.

- Student: “But he is always playing with the girls and with girl toys!”
  - At this school all children can play and do things together. He’s a boy who likes to play with girls and that’s OK. All kinds of toys and games are for all children.

**“Why does she always play with the boys?”**

- Those are the activities that she likes to do just as there are different activities that you like to do.
- There are many different ways of being a girl (boy), and that’s great!

**You overhear a student say, “Boys are better at math than girls.”**

- Some boys are good at math and some are not, and some girls are good at math and some are not. All kids have different things that they are good at.

**Sample language when a biological boy socially transitions to a girl.**

- Although Angela was born a boy, she has always felt like a girl inside She wants everyone to call her Angela now and she wants to be able to wear the types of clothes that she likes the most and do the activities that she enjoys.
- Sandy has always felt like a girl deep down inside. That is the way Sandy likes to dress now.

**Simple phrases students could say to each other.**

- “There’s no such thing as boys’(girls’) clothes (haircuts, toys, colors.)”
- “You can’t say, ‘Girls (boys) can’t play.’”
- If someone says, “Boys are better at sports.”  
A student could say, “No group is best. Some are good. Some are not.”
- If someone says, “Girls are better at art.”  
A student could say, “No group is best. Some are good. Some are not.”

**Ideas for talking with a student’s parents or guardians.**

- Educator: There was an incident at school today in which your child called a boy, a “girl” to intentionally hurt him. At our school we are working on not using gender in a negative way to limit our students. It is important to us that all of our students are physically and emotionally safe to learn here everyday.
- Parent/Guardian: “But my son told me that Bobby wears girls’ clothing, paints his nails, and mostly plays with the girls.”
- Educator: Some boys prefer typical boy activities, some do not. We affirm all of the interests of our students and work hard to not limit children based upon gender. It’s important for children to learn not to tease someone in a hurtful way because of how they dress or who they play with.

**When you overhear a colleague make a gender stereotypical remark about a student**

- Remark: “Andre’s parents should really try to get him to do some more sports with boys like baseball.”

Sample responses:

- Why do you say that? And then engage in conversation.
- Andre’s parents are trying to do what is best for him. He has always loved gymnastics.

*When my son was five years old, he went to a party wearing a pink shirt and sparkly blue sneakers. An adult referred to him as a girl in front of the whole group. A child in the room said, "He's not a boy. He's a boy who dresses like a girl." Most of the children in the room began laughing. Then one child said loudly, "He's my friend, stop laughing at him!" The laughter stopped immediately. If this young child could speak up and make a difference, then surely we can too.*  
– Mother of a 3rd grader.

*Ideas based on: The Gender Inclusive School by Gender Spectrum, Graciela Sleseransky-Poe, “Not True! Gender Doesn’t Limit You” by Lindsay Lamb, et al. Teaching Tolerance, and Johanna Eager*