

Teaching for care



These tip sheets are designed to help all professionals who work with young children to promote respect and gender equity in their work.

Supporting children to have respectful and equitable relationships when they are young can help them grow into resilient, caring and well-functioning young people and adults and is a key step towards preventing family violence and all forms of violence against women. This involves nurturing children and helping them learn the skills to acknowledge and accept difference, resolve conflict and solve problems. It is also about challenging gender stereotypes, so children of all genders grow up feeling heard, valued and respected.

What is care?

Caring means being sensitive to, aware of and responsive to other people's needs. When providing services for children, care can be something we just do every day, without really thinking about what it means. Care can take the form of meeting essential needs, such as providing food, a place to rest, giving comfort when a child is upset

or unhappy, or creating an environment where children feel accepted and safe. However, emotional and social needs are also important aspects of care. As well as having their physical needs met, children also need to feel valued, respected and heard.



Who can provide care?

Everyone – adults and children – can be caring. While any professional working with children has a legal and ethical responsibility to provide a caring environment, they don't have to do this alone. Children can also contribute to a culture where everyone demonstrates care and empathy. Everybody benefits when children learn to care for others and for themselves.

Caring and positive learning environments help promote connections between children. We know that feeling connected to others contributes to better health and

wellbeing for children. It also creates an environment where children learn to trust each other and respect each other's rights and differences.

One of the gendered messages that circulates in society is that women and girls are 'naturally' more nurturing and caring than men and boys, but everyone has the capacity to care. Teaching all children to develop a caring disposition contributes to their capacity to engage in respectful and equitable relationships, both as children and later in life.

Tips for teaching with care

There is no single way to teach children how to care and be responsive to the needs of others. Professionals should work with children in ways that reflect the uniqueness of their families and communities. Consider adapting these strategies for your service:

- Model care, empathy and respect in all of your interactions with children, colleagues and families
- Reflect on whether you offer and provide care for girls and boys in the same ways. Do you give girls a hug but expect boys to 'toughen up'?
- Work together with colleagues and children to plan how to respond to children who are still learning how to show care, compassion and respect
- Be intentional in the books you offer. Choose stories where people of all genders show empathy and care for others
- Take time to set up spaces and materials in ways that encourage diverse groups of children to share, play together and develop caring dispositions



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