

Support children's sense of identity



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.

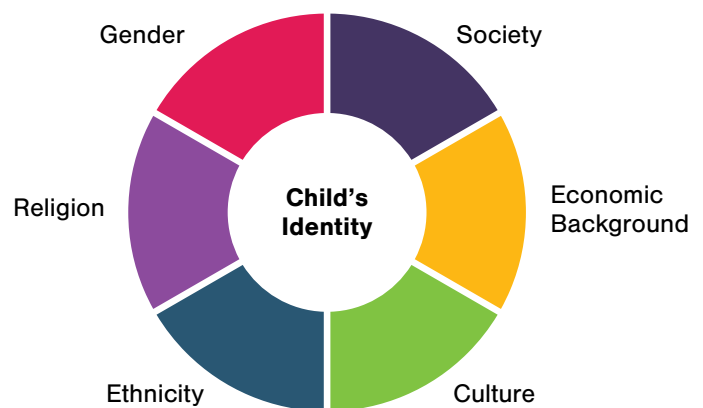
What is 'identity'?

A child's identity is an expression of how they see themselves and how they want to be seen by others. Identity is fluid, not fixed, and changes throughout a person's life.

Identity is influenced by family, culture, community and experience. Consequently, professionals working with children play an important role in the formation of a child's identity.

The [Australian Early Years Learning Framework](#) states that relationships are the foundations for the construction of identity – 'who I am', 'how I belong' and 'what is my influence?'

Strong, reliable attachments with early childhood professionals and peers can help children feel a sense of belonging. Once they feel part of the early childhood setting, they are better able to play and learn alongside their peers.



Gender identity

Gender is an important part of identity. Children often associate themselves with particular gender roles from an early age. This is influenced by messages they receive from parents, family, friends, books, toys, advertising and the media. Children construct their own gender identities through their play and interactions with others.

Providing an environment that is safe and supportive makes it easier for children to express their gender identity in ways that make sense for them, and to actively experience and experiment with a range of other identities.

Tips on helping children be proud of their identity

There are many ways you can support children to form and strengthen their identities:

- Purposefully build strong relationships with each child so they feel welcome, safe, accepted and supported
- Intentionally plan activities and use toys and resources that provide children with opportunities to experience, and experiment with, different roles and identities
- Deliberately plan experiences that allow children to explore identity through playing positively with others
- Observe children's play. How do their interactions support each other's identities? How do they respond when they feel their peers have gone against gender norms?
- Encourage acts of fairness, respect, acceptance and celebrations of diversity



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