

ANNEX 2

TIPS FOR PARENTS OF ADOLESCENTS TO SUPPORT GENDER-RESPONSIVE PARENTING

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This section covers tips and messages for parents¹ of adolescents of all gender identities on key aspects of gender-responsive parenting. These should be further adapted as per regional and country contexts.

Gender socialization occurs through different channels. Children and adolescents are socialized at multiple points through their lives by individuals such as parents, peers, teachers, faith leaders, and celebrities, as well as by institutions such as schools, places of worship and the media. Adolescence is a significant developmental stage marking the transition from childhood to adulthood. It is characterized by an emerging sense of self-identity, exploration of personal interests, beliefs, values and goals, increased independence and autonomy beyond the family, growing responsibility, increased engagement in risk behaviours, emerging awareness of sexuality, amplified significance of peers, intensification of gender stereotypes, and shifting relationships with parents and caregivers, who play an important role in adolescents' development.

Gender roles and expectations become more deeply entrenched during adolescence, often restricting girls' oppor-

tunities and choices, and forcing boys into stereotypical masculine behaviour. Parents, teachers and other adults can be significant influencers in this. How adolescents see themselves and their abilities plays an important role in their self-development as they transition to adulthood. Gender stereotypes and biases can hold adolescents back from participation, interaction and learning, and from realizing their full identity and potential. Gender roles and identities also influence how adolescents later in adulthood participate in all aspects of life, including in education, civic engagement and the economy through the kinds of jobs that they undertake. For example, young women often tend to stay away or be excluded from senior leadership roles and from STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics)-related fields.

Additionally, social, cultural and religious factors influence what is considered acceptable and unacceptable sexual behaviour in society, and these factors evolve over time. Values and attitudes imparted by families and communities are major sources of information about sex and sexuality and influence personal behaviour and decision-making.

¹ Note: The term parent is not limited to biological parents but extends to any guardian or caregiver providing consistent care to children and adolescents. This includes adoptive or foster parents, siblings, grandparents, other relatives and young adolescents, who are also parents.

Parenting during this period provides opportunities to promote positive gender socialization messages prior to adulthood, for example, to reduce exposure to gender-specific risk factors, to encourage shared responsibility for prevention of pregnancy, HIV and STI infection, prevention of gender-based violence, and to promote positive sexual and reproductive health behaviours and menstrual health. The following summarizes some of these key tips.

Mitigating stereotypes and biases that hold adolescents back from meaningful participation, interaction and learning, and from realizing their full identity and potential

Tips & messages for parents:

- Provide holistic, accurate and practical information on gender and sexual identities, as well as sexual and reproductive health, while also promoting positive, inclusive gender portrayals and behaviours. Refrain from strongly assigning and asserting gender identities onto your adolescent(s). Instead, encourage them to develop their own sense of identity and agency in a respectful, nurturing, accepting environment.
- Empower and provide adolescents with opportunities to develop core assets such as communication, decision-making and problem-solving skills, for practice and use in the home, among their peers and in the community.
- Show love and affection freely and discourage toxic/stereotypical masculine behavior (e.g. saying that boys who cry are weak). Encourage adolescents to be emotionally open, honest and accepting and encourage them to express their feelings.
- Show interest and engage with your adolescent(s)' ideas and activities. Where possible, support them to further explore areas of interest e.g. study subjects, sports, art, activism, etc.
- Actively support the development of your adolescents' self-esteem and confidence through frequent communication and encouragement. Refrain from asserting beauty standards and body-image on girls and boys and emphasize that beauty comes in all shapes and forms.
- Provide a safe and nurturing environment.
- Allow adolescents to be true to themselves, despite the pressures from peers and social media.

Actively seek to include fathers or other male caregivers in activities to promote positive parenting, to raise awareness of the impact of harmful gender socialization on their adolescent children, and to model gender equitable behaviours in their homes

Tips & messages for parents:

- Model gender-equitable behaviour and roles at home that positively challenge gender stereotypes, e.g. doing activities traditionally connected to the opposite gender like fathers cooking in the kitchen and sharing caregiving and household responsibilities.
- Be a positive role model for adolescents, including in non-traditional gender roles such as women in STEM or construction jobs; men as care-related professions such as nurses and teachers, etc.
- Avoid language or jokes that can reinforce gender stereotypes intended to be derogatory, e.g. 'he cries like a girl', 'she's such a tomboy', 'she's too bossy', 'he's too soft', etc.
- Participate in parenting training and education programmes to develop skills and enhance awareness about addressing internal gender biases.

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Providing a safe and nurturing environment

Tips & messages for parents:

- Consider how to meet adolescents' emotional needs and provide support accordingly. For example, encourage adolescents to translate anger and frustration into problem-solving, positive communication and constructive physical activity rather than use aggression or bullying.
- Model healthy, respectful and safe sex behaviours and practices. Have open conversations with adolescents, discussing with them about the various risks of violence online, in public and in private spaces, and making sure they feel you offer a 'safe space' for them to talk.
- Use positive discipline and work with your household to ensure a violence-free environment at home. All forms of violence against children as well as against or amongst adult family members are unacceptable and must be prevented and reported to relevant authorities as appropriate. Seek professional help as needed.
- Monitor use of digital games and social media content. Work with your adolescents to minimize the playing overtly violent or sexualized digital games (and helping your adolescent understand why these are harmful in the first place). Work with them to replace such digital games with constructive physical activities, such as sports and outdoor games.

- Seek out information on mental health and sexual and reproductive health, as well as support from peers, relevant professionals and parenting groups as needed. Seek parenting training and psychosocial support if required.
- For adolescent mothers, special consideration needs to be applied to ensure that their mental and emotional well-being, as well as capacity to care for their children, is supported. It is important that they have a nurturing, accepting environment, and access to services to help with childcare.

Resources:

- UNICEF Gender Socialization Sharepoint Page (internal)
- UNICEF PD Parenting Working Group Sharepoint Page (internal)
- UNFPA, 2018: International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education
- UNICEF Innocenti Research Brief, 2017: Gender Socialization during Adolescence in Low- and Middle-income Countries: Conceptualization, Influences and Outcomes
- UNICEF, 2020: Caring for Caregivers during the Covid-19 Crisis

Forthcoming resources:

UNICEF, 2021: Parenting Programmes of Adolescents Guidance Note