

Gender Detective Activities

Language detective

Aim: To investigate the use of sexist or gendered language (language that makes assumptions about men and women, or boys and girls)

Suggested time: 10 minutes at the start to introduce the activity and talk about gendered language. The activity itself can then be done over the course of a week. Children could have a simple 'Gender Detectives Notebook' or piece of paper, and write down any examples when they hear them.

Notes for parents: sometimes sexist or gendered language is in everyday speech and is unconscious or unintentional, so this activity is not about pointing the finger or finding fault with anyone. It's about becoming aware of how gendered language is all around us, and then catching ourselves when making assumptions or using certain expressions. You may find that children pick it up more quickly than adults!

Gendered language can sometimes be well-intentioned but it can still have a negative impact on children because of its underlying assumptions. For example, frequently praising girls for being helpful or pretty, and boys for being strong or clever, can emphasise difference between girls and boys – and can also give children the message that being pretty or strong are the most important things about them.

Activity:

Over a week, write down any gendered or sexist language you hear or read:

- from people around you at home (don't name any names!)
- on the radio, when watching TV or videos online
- in video games you are playing
- in messages or video conversations with friends (don't name any names!)
- in books you read

Examples of gendered or sexist language to get you started: 'man up', 'girly', 'we need a strong man to open that', 'I can't do that with these nails', 'boys will be boys', 'mankind' instead of 'humankind', 'fireman' instead of 'firefighter'.

Discuss with your child:

Does sexist or gendered language matter? Discuss some examples of what has been heard and noted down. What assumptions lie behind this language? How does this language make you feel? How might it make others feel?

Follow up: now you and your child are aware of gendered language, consider repeating the exercise in a couple of months. Has anything changed in your family, or in how you or your child talk to friends?