

Session 2

Building a positive body image and gender empowerment

Rationale

People often comment on a child's looks and tease or taunt them; or in some way hold them responsible for how their body looks/ the biological sex they are born with. This erodes their self-esteem and can make them vulnerable to sexual abuse. It is important children internalize that the structure of our body is made by nature – we do not choose our bodies. We do have control over what we say and do. We can take pride in our behavior. Our behaviour brings us pride or shame and not how the body looks. This core message helps build self-respect and self-confidence. It helps children respond positively to taunting and bullying. We respect every part of our body. We can take pride in how we take care of our body and help it grow.

Gender sensitization is about instilling empathy for each human being, and building respect into the views that we hold about our own and other genders. This is critical for treating self and members of other sexes with respect

Materials required

- Marker pen
- Any sticking substance (Blu Tac / double sided sticking tape / cello tape / board pins)
- Session 2 Worksheets/charts/Posters

Objective of session 2

To impart and help children internalize the following messages:

Core Message 1: Body structure and looks are inborn. I did not choose or 'make' my body. I neither take pride in nor feel ashamed of my body's structure.

Core Message 2: I respect every part of my body.

Core Message 3: Being a girl or a boy is not a choice. We are born that way.

Core Message 4: Boys and girls are equally capable.

Core Message 5: Each person has unique mix of multiple intelligences and qualities

Core Message 1: Body structure and looks are inborn. I did not choose or 'make' my body. I neither take pride in nor feel ashamed of my body's structure.

Ask: How do you feel about your body?

How do you feel about your nose, ears, teeth, eyes, hair, height, weight etc.? Write down responses.

Examples: Picture made by someone else hanging on the wall: if someone either appreciates it or criticizes it, does it bother you? Why not? It does not bother us because we did not make the picture. We don't feel proud when someone appreciates it and don't get angry if someone says it is bad.

Discussion: Which part of the body did you make?

If you did not make your body, then who did?
God/ nature / parents

Our body amazing. It grows and heals and the organs work on their own. We have been given a body – it's up to us what we do with it.

Tips for Trainers

- Children might share that even after knowing this they feel sad when people tease them. Please affirm their feelings and talk to them post the class if children are still overwhelmed.
- Even if children have not given right answers to the questions asked, you need to take all responses. A nod for answers given by each child can add validity to the contribution of the students.
- When answers are wrong or inappropriate, these should be discussed such that children realize why they are inappropriate. In this way children will not internalize incorrect responses as correct. Be aware of your facial expression and body language especially when incorrect responses are given. Children should not feel intimidated or rejected. This will prevent them from sharing further. Welcome each response.
- Encourage children to speak up and participate by saying "Thank you for bringing that out/ pointing that out. Let us have more response"
- Incorporate a lot of hand gestures and voice modulation to capture the interest of the students.
- It would be advisable to keep your language simple and also to intersperse some words from the local language during your session as it will help students feel comfortable and understand concepts better.

Core Message 2: I respect every part of my body. Every part has a function.

Story: Deer and its antlers:

A deer lived in the forest, it looked at its reflection, was very proud of its beautiful antlers, ashamed of its thin scrawny legs, did not like them. One day a lion came chasing it. When running, the deer's antlers got stuck in between the branches, with a lot of difficulty managed to set itself free, by then the lion had got really close. Then the deer's swift legs managed to help it to escape. From then onwards the deer was very grateful for its legs for saving it. It realized that no part of the body is bad or shameful, all parts of the body are useful.

Discussion: Bring in a discussion regarding this story. All parts of our body deserve to be respected. All parts of the body are useful and have some job to do.

- **Refer to Annexure 2:1 for additional/alternate stories**

Tips for Trainers

- **Refer to Annexure 2:1 for additional/alternate stories**

Core Message 3: Being a girl or a boy is not a choice. We are born that way

Ask Children: How do you feel about you being a girl or a boy?

Check and see if there are any responses where they feel / they have been told that their gender could have been different.

Discussion: Explain that our gender is determined by our genes when we are born: XX genes for girl & XY genes for boy. No one can decide and select whether the baby should be a girl or a boy. It is like saying that a mango should be a guava or color red saying that it wants to be blue. Both the fruits / colors are beautiful and perfect in their own way, it is not possible to compare the two and say one is better than the other.

But sometimes we can feel upset or sad about being a particular gender because of the way others treat us or comment on us.

Then what can one do?

If a person is colorblind and can't see red, it is not the fault of the red colour. It does not reduce the redness of the red colour. The person who can't see red is missing something. If a person can't tell a diamond from a stone, it does not reduce the value of the diamond.

When people taunt me for being a girl or a boy, I can use my thinking and see what can I be happy /proud of? What is it that I am doing by using my body ? What am I creating / making? How am I expressing myself? Am I learning new skills and developing my talents?. By doing all of these I am expressing my qualities and developing my intelligences. This I can be proud of. I can feel sad for the person who can't see all this in me. He/she is missing all this. It is his/ her loss. He/she also does not understand genetics and how bodies are made by nature.

Tips for Trainers

- It is possible that some children will say they don't like to do anything with their body. Give the child diverse options to make him/her aware that she/he might be liking something which he/she is not aware of as she has/he has not thought about it before. However once you have explored diverse options leave it at that rather than coaxing the child to say something. Often, children with history of abuse might be in a numb state and not be in a state to feel or like anything.
- Children might share that they feel left out as they are girl/boy.
- Validate their feelings. Say that "Sometimes people can't see or appreciate the qualities and abilities of another person, whatever be the person's gender. They may discriminate against people of a particular gender. This shows the nature and shortsightedness of those people – and not of the person they are discriminating against. Each one of us is equally human. Each one of us has equal rights – to be born and to live on this Earth with safety and dignity.
- You may also meet the children after the session

Key Message to Communicate

Being a boy or girl is not our choice.

Core Message 4: Boys and girls are equally capable

Ask children: Can you tell me what boys like to do? What girls like to do?

Make two lists. After that, ask if anyone wants to do / or does what is in the other gender's list. Make another column in between the boys & girls column and transfer the points on to this column. For e.g. if being a pilot is mentioned in the girls column earlier and a boy stands up and says that he wants to be a pilot, transfer 'pilot' to the center column.

Discussions: Are there any activities/ jobs/ work that boys are not capable of doing? Girls are not capable of doing? What builds capacity and capability?

Closure: The activity focuses on encouraging students to think critically about gender roles, gender bias, and that each person experiences the world and expresses themselves in a unique way.

Refer to Annexure 2:2 for additional or alternate activities for this section

Tips for Trainers

- Refer to Annexure 2:2 for additional or alternate activities for this section

Making Connections

If children are able to identify that they did not do anything to be born as a particular sex; and that their bodies are made by nature, they will have better self-confidence as well as respect other sexes.

Core Message 5: Each person has unique mix of multiple intelligences and qualities

No one has all multiple intelligences and all qualities fully developed

Skills are more important than looks. It is up to us to develop our skills and abilities

Ask children: Think of what are able to do with your body, what talents and abilities you have. Can you mention some of them?

List their responses.

Anecdote: Let us suppose you go to your grandparents' village and you fall sick. There is only one hospital there with two doctors. One doctor is very good looking but very rude and impatient at looking at patients. The other doctor is not good looking but is known to be very courteous and good at diagnosing and treating patients. Which one would you prefer to go to?

Discussion: We prefer the second doctor because of his qualities and skills as they are more important to us for us to become well.

Reinforcing their abilities: Ask them to write down five skills or abilities they have or which they want to develop... Singing, cooking, making friends, etc. Ask a few of them to share.

Concluding the session

Activity:

Ask children to come up and mime an activity they like to do. Others have to guess.

Or

Slow race: Ask children to line up along two opposite walls. They have to reach the opposite wall walking as slowly as they can! They can't stand still. They have to be walking – only one foot can be on the ground at any time and the other has to be moving forward.

Summarize and review the key messages:

What did you learn today? Ask students to share.

Reiterate:

Core Message 1: Body structure and looks are inborn. I did not choose or 'make' my body. I neither take pride in nor feel ashamed of my body's structure.

Core Message 2: I respect every part of my body.

Core Message 3: Being a girl or a boy is not a choice. We are born that way.

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I came here to help you learn about your -self, your body and safety. I will come again and we will learn some more things.

Annexure 1:1

Bamboo and the crooked tree

Once upon a time there was a bamboo tree and a crooked tree. Both were great enemies. They never liked each other. The bamboo always said that he is tall, green and handsome and he is strong. Many people use him to make all good things. They also use them to make their house. The crooked tree was hurt, very very hurt. Listening to the bamboo tree the crooked tree felt that he was of no use. The crooked tree was so sad that he did not allow any body to come near him. He did not want to talk to any one. One day a bird came and sat on the crooked tree. The crooked tree got angry. He said move away! don't sit on me! The bird asked why? The tree said because I am ugly and crooked, I am useless. No one likes me. The bird said but you have nice and green leaves. The crooked tree said so what? What would my green leaves do? The bird said you can feed the hungry animals, your leaf can be used for many things like making clothes for the naked, it can be made into utensils, children can play with your leaf. But its only the leaf but I am crooked, and no one likes me. They all want to chop me. The bird said your dry twigs and branches are used to burn and create heat during the winters. You produce warmth to the people dying in winters. Your twigs can also be used as paint brush to paint beautiful pictures. The wood from your tree is also used to scare away the wild animals so that people remain safe and more over you are the shelter of the travellers like us. Some sit on you some beneath you. You are the protector of us all. Therefore you are special. No matter what other's say no matter how early you realize, the fact is you are special and the things that you can do no one else can do. SO you are unique too. Now look around. You are the only one with such special shape. No other tree has got such a wonderful shape. You are not crooked but different and there is a beauty in this difference.

Tree said to the bird, 'oh, yes I am different and special and unique, I did not realize that I was of so much importance'

Bird said, ' Yes we all tend to many times under estimate ourselves and do not realise how special we are and what wonders we can do.

Annexure 1:2

Activity Gender

The activity focuses on encouraging students to think critically about gender roles, gender bias, and that each person experiences the world and expresses themselves in a unique way. In their handouts, participants write their responses to the following prompts:

Boys like (activities, things)

Girls like (activities, things)

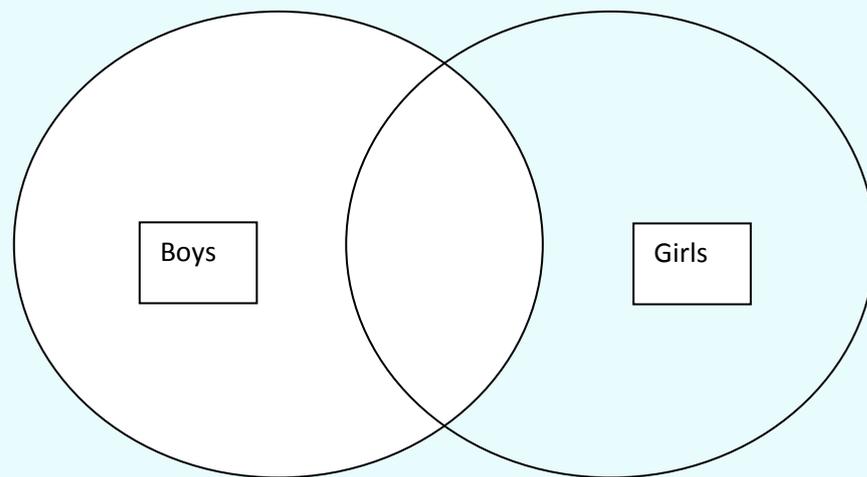
Boys are (qualities)

Girls are (qualities)

Boys want to be (roles, careers)

Girls want to be (roles, careers)

Facilitator asks the group for responses and writing them on post-it notes, places them in the relevant circles in the following Venn diagram:



With further discussion about gender stereotypes, facilitator helps the group understand these roles, activities and qualities as universal and not restricted to any gender. Facilitator may use statements like 'But a boy/girl may like that too', 'There are sometimes boys/girls who might like to do it' (e.g. cross dressing), 'Do you think these ads are true for *every* boy and *every* girl?'

Each item is discussed and moved to the overlapping part of the circles to emphasize that it applies to all people, not a specific gender. Discussion may be closed by asking for examples of gender specific messages students receive (Boys are strong, girls are delicate) and reinforcing that it's ok to express oneself differently from others and we need to respect other people's choices as well.

