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**Growing Up
Equal**



= PROMOTING EQUALITY = BETWEEN GIRLS AND BOYS IN THE CLASSROOM



WORKSHOP
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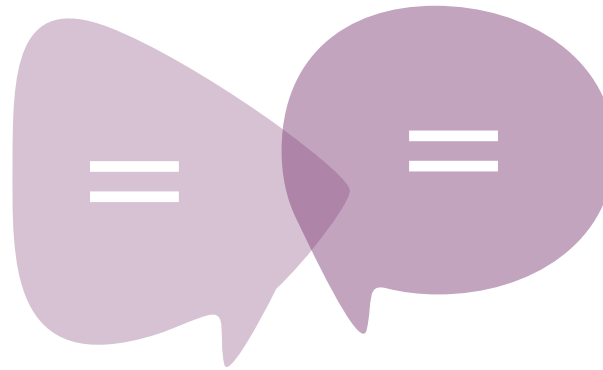
Promoting equality between girls and boys in the classroom

This resource material is mainly based on international research in the influence of the school environment on the formation of certain behaviors in girls and boys, as well as on their gender-related self-esteem and goal-setting.

Children begin to notice the differences in social expectations for girls and boys from the kindergarten and preschool periods, and in the early grades they sense the different

ways in which teachers interact with girls and boys, and this has a major impact on their ability to develop and set educational goals. The different treatment of girls and boys also creates long-lasting effects in other areas of their lives, usually limiting their self-esteem and perception of the opportunities that are available or appropriate for them. This trend is particularly evident in the shortage of women pursuing STEM education and careers.

The assimilation of gender norms occurs unconsciously, and their reproduction in school practice is also unconscious by the participants in the learning process. This phenomenon is referred to in psychology as 'stereotyping' and 'gender prejudice'. The process is unconscious and difficult for the individual to control. Each person forms different biases because of the way the brain works and categorizes the people and phenomena one



encounters into different groups. Psychology has found that a person feels more comfortable when surrounded by things that are familiar to them and that fall into clear categories. Unconscious biases/prejudices form around personality aspects that characterize an individual, such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, and others.

Although the formation of gender bias is a normal psychological process, current research on education and socialization highlights the need to combat traditional unconscious expectations of women and men if we are to open up new spaces for girls and boys to be more equal. Achieving equality in the classroom is possible and happens when teachers begin to consciously observe and analyze

their interactions with girls and boys.

Achieving equality between girls and boys at school is a goal of the education systems in the EU member states. At the same time, a number of field studies have shown that some common and unconscious practices in the classroom can sustain inequality.

How can you promote equality between girls and boys in the classroom?

First, let us clarify the basic concepts that concern the treatment of girls and boys without prejudice and restrictions arising from traditional gender norms. These are the concepts of ,equality between girls and boys' and ,equity between girls and boys'.

Equality between girls and boys

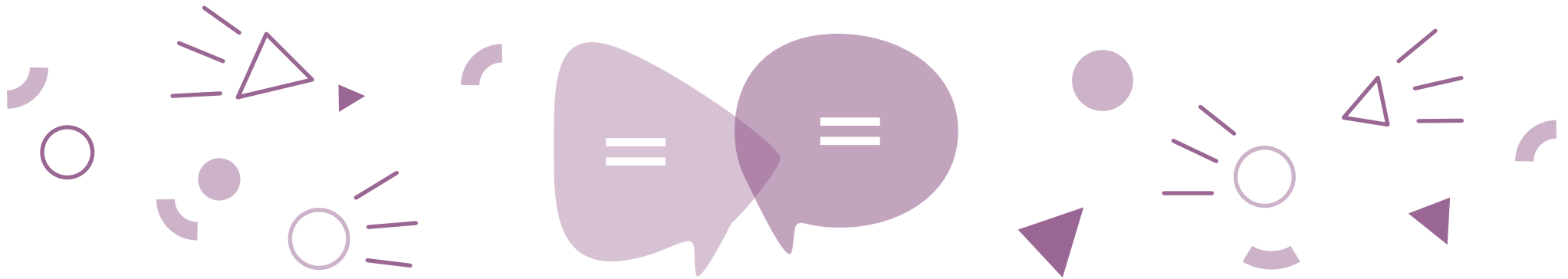
Equality between men and women is based on the notion that all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their personal capacities and make choices without the constraints imposed by stereotypes, outdated understandings of the relationship between biological sex and female/male fulfilment, and prejudice. Equality between girls and boys means that the different behaviors, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favored equally. It does not mean that women and men should become equal, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities should not depend on whether they are born male or female.



Equality between girls and boys

Equity means treating girls and boys fairly in accordance with their personal needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but considered equal in rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities.

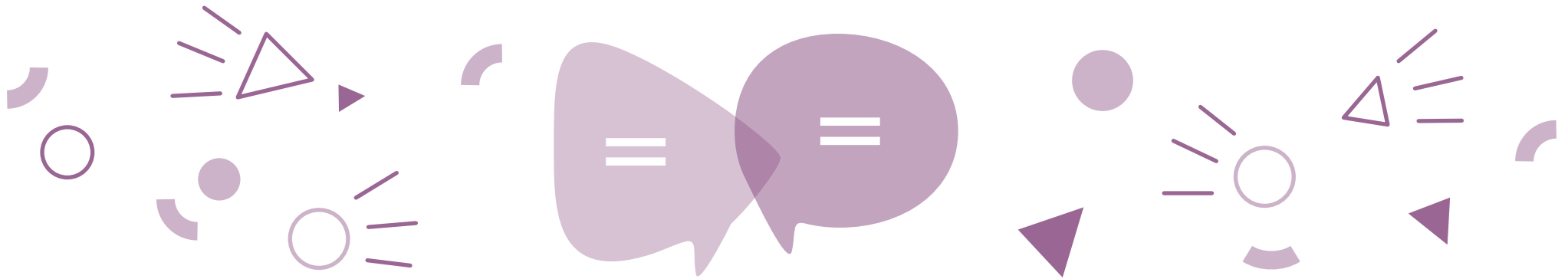
How is equity between girls and boys different from equality between girls and boys? We can see equality between girls and boys as the end goal, and equity between girls and boys as the means to achieve it. Equality between girls and boys is about promoting equity in education and challenging the stereotypes and prejudices that have historically limited students' potential. When we achieve equity for girls and boys, all students will be free to pursue their education without fear of discrimination or harassment because of their gender.



Integration of the principle of equality for girls and boys

An integrated approach to equality for girls and boys requires an assessment of existing education policies and practices in terms of their long-term impact on girls and boys. Taking an integrated approach to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs ensures that girls and boys benefit equally and inequalities are not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve equality between girls and boys.

Every teacher can take active steps to promote equality between girls and boys and the fair treatment of girls and boys based on their needs, not on traditional notions of gender roles.



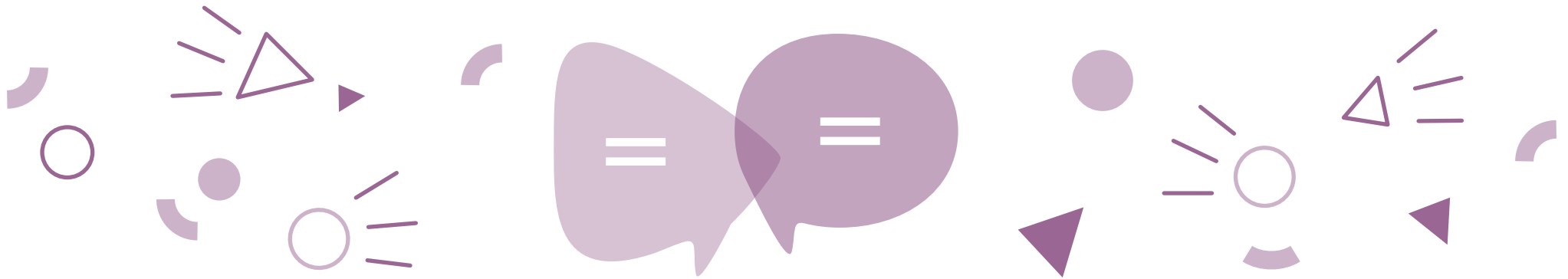
1. Do auto-monitoring

Taking the above trends into account, do your best to offer more gender-neutral responses to students. If you can't judge whether you are treating girls and boys fairly and equitably, there are a few things you can do: ask for feedback from the students themselves or from other colleagues; record yourself on camera while teaching and leading classroom conversations, and analyze the video. In this way you will better understand your own methods of communicating with students.

2. Gather feedback from colleagues and students

If you want to get objective feedback from the students themselves, introduce an anonymous comment box. At the same time, you can also collect feedback from your colleagues. Ask them questions such as:

- Do you notice any differences in the way I treat boys and girls?
- Have I made you feel comfortable or uncomfortable about your gender at any point?



3. Use gender-neutral language as far as possible

You can also vary the language in your lessons to help expand students' horizons beyond gender stereotypes. For example, in the tasks you set you can challenge students' expectations by including a female construction worker or soldier, a male midwife or nurse, and other occupations that are usually associated with a particular gender.

When speaking informally and jokingly to the class as a whole, avoid using generalizing colloquial expressions such as 'come on boys' which can make female students feel excluded. Instead, use gender-neutral pronouns such as 'everyone'.

In any case, do not allow stereotypical characteristics and comparisons such as "you swear like a truckdriver" "you cry like a girl," or "you act like a princess" in the language you use. This language creates preconditions that can limit students' understanding of the roles of girls and boys.

4. Encourage students to make sense of contemporary norms about women and men and their manifestations in school

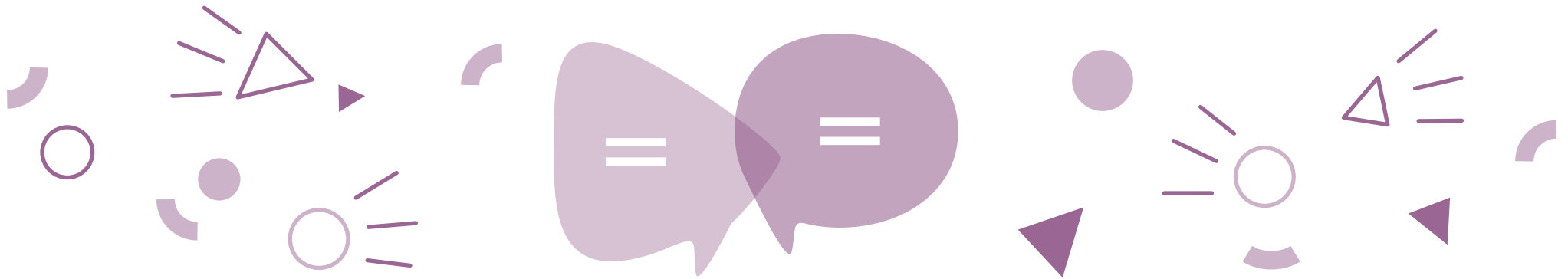
Organize the following game in class: girls interview boys about what it is like to be a boy today and what you have to deal with in this role at school. Boys interview girls on what it is like to be a girl today and what you have to deal with as a girl at school. All the possible answers of the girls are recorded on one sheet of flipchart paper and all the possible answers of the boys on another. The answers are then analyzed and grouped by similarity. The teacher helps the students to outline the main expectations of girls and boys at school, and the main challenges that one or the other has to deal with.

Pay special attention to the different expectations of appearance and behavior towards girls and boys. Analyze which girls are most liked and which boys are most liked. What qualities does a girl need to be liked and what qualities does a boy need to be liked. Discuss the differences. Discuss what challenges those girls and boys who do not have the “liked” qualities have to deal with. Discuss with the class how specific expectations of girls and boys create problems with self-perception, self-esteem, self-assertion, and goal setting.

This activity could be built on by asking students to interview their adult relatives to learn how the roles of women and men have changed over time. What was obligatory for their grandmothers that is not obligatory for young women today and what was obligatory for their grandfathers but is not obligatory for young men in modern times.

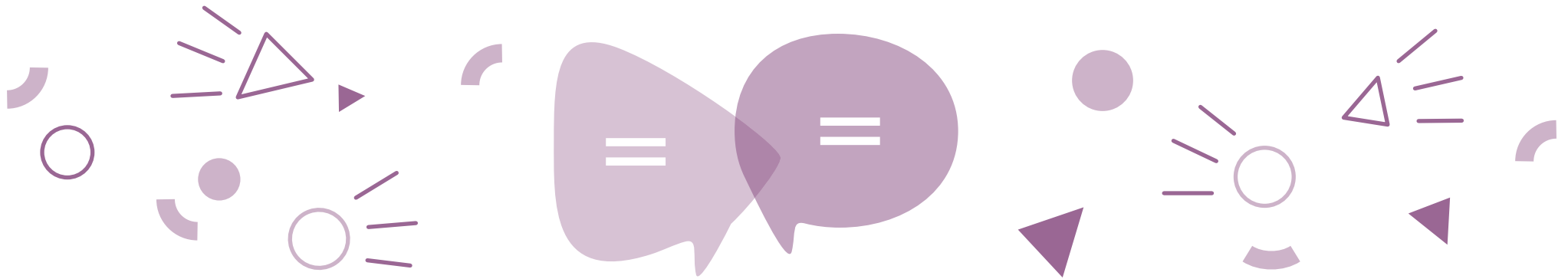
Other ideas for activities can be found in the resource material “Exercises” in the Resources section of the Growing Equal project.





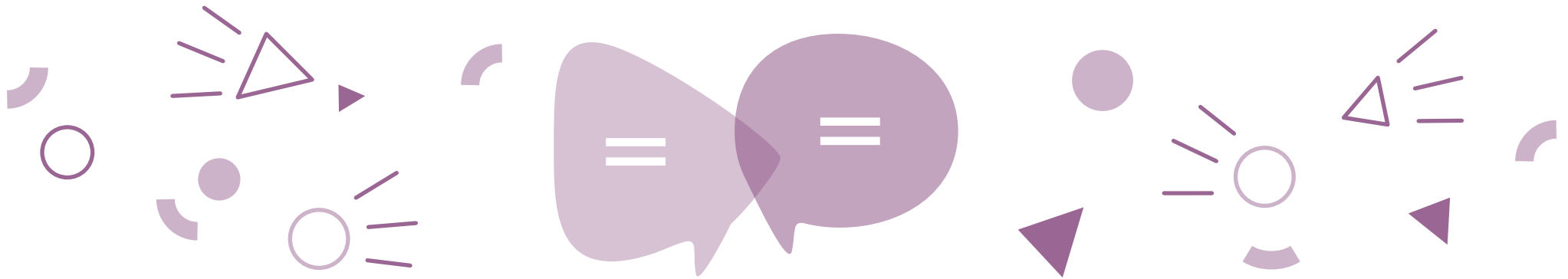
5. Help students not only recognize restrictive gender norms but also challenge them

Making sense of gender stereotypes is not enough. Students must also be supported in actively challenging the stereotypes that limit them. First, they need to acquire the necessary vocabulary and approach to expression. Teachers should encourage those who are frequently criticized or ridiculed for not conforming to gender stereotypes to develop the self-confidence to respond appropriately to criticism. For example, when a boy is called a “sissy” in a situation where he cannot do the required number of pull-ups on a bar in PE, he should be supported by the teacher to state openly to those who ridicule him, “whether I am a man does not depend solely on the number of pull-ups I can do”. If, at the same time, a girl is called a “tomboy” for achieving a higher score in long distance running than most boys, she might comment on this in the following way “running fast doesn’t make me any less of a girl, it just makes me the leader of the long distance running group”.



Project-based learning creates opportunities to purposefully create a balance of boys and girls in small groups to complete specific projects. This builds a number of useful qualities, improves co-operation between girls and boys, and creates solidarity. The tasks the teacher sets each group can be purely academic, with lessons about equality between girls and boys implicit and explicit. By working together, girls and boys can – if they receive the necessary support from the teacher – better understand the nuances of individual behavior, rather than stereotyping ‘girls’ and ‘boys’.

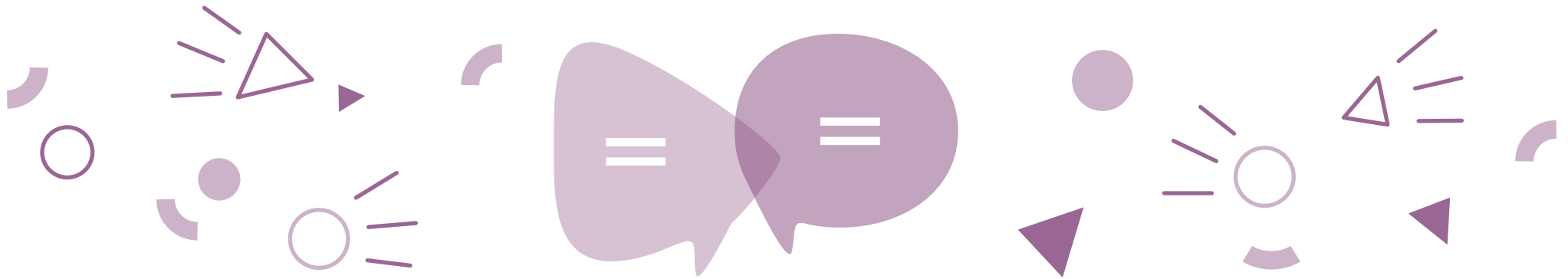
Some of the assignments may also relate to the topic of equality between girls and boys and the benefits of integrating women at all levels of management in a company or organization. In all assignments, the teacher should ensure a balanced distribution of roles in the team, taking into account the age characteristics of the group.



6. Become a role model

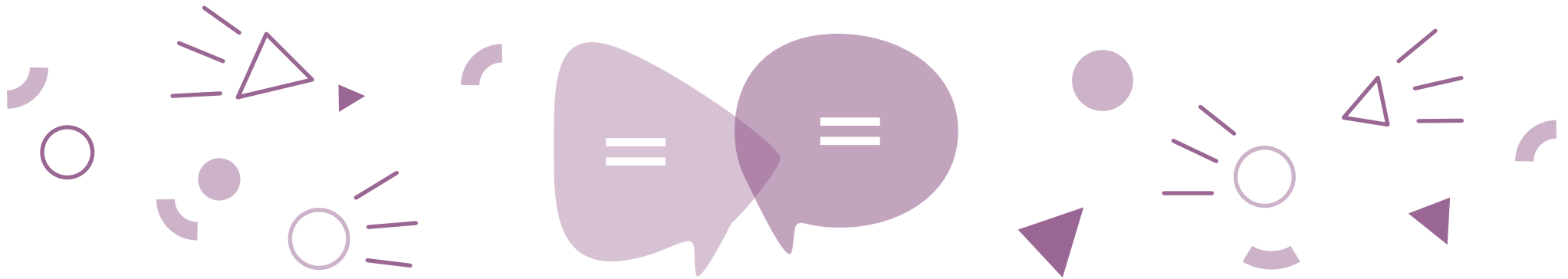
Learning by imitation is a proven model of gender role acquisition in young children. Each teacher, once aware of his or her own gender preconceptions, can try to help break down gender-based prejudices through his or her own behavior.

Both during the learning process and during informal conversations with students at school, the teacher should empower all students to believe in their potential to achieve their dreams, whether they are boys or girls. For example, in a lesson on the development of astronautics, the teacher might emphasize that female participation in space missions is on the rise and any woman may want to become an astronaut. The teacher can find appropriate arguments in each situation that gender (whether male or female) is a strength, not a weakness. It is important for the teacher to use inclusive language that shows that occupations and life goals are not gender-determined.



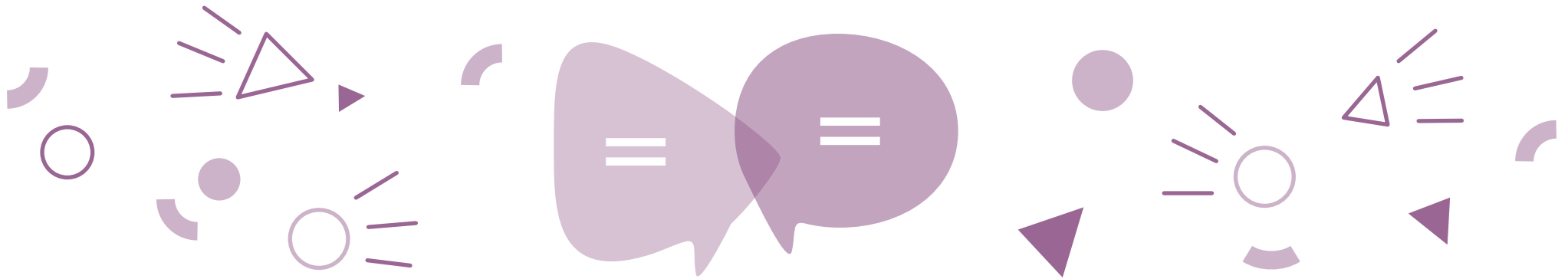
7. Celebrate International Women's Day in an appropriate way

International Women's Day is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The day is also a call to action to achieve equality between girls and boys. You can use the "Notable Bulgarian" exercise described in the Resources section to talk about women's contributions to Bulgarian culture, history, science, and sports. In conducting the exercise, engage students in thinking critically about societal expectations of women and how the courage of some women is changing those expectations and creating a wider space for women in public life.



8. Teach students to recognize their own gender biases and prejudices

Show your students that language can reinforce gender-based prejudices. The common use of some job titles only in the masculine (e.g.: manager, director, supervisor) and others only in the feminine (nurse, midwife) contributes to this. Teach your students how not to associate gender with certain personality traits and qualities. Challenge them to avoid making assumptions about someone's abilities, occupation or personality based on her/his gender.



9. Involve students in a school audit on gender and gender equality

In the “Resources” section of the **growingupequal.frgi.bg** website, we offer you a tool for auditing school practice with regard to equity between girls and boys and promoting gender equality. When planning such an audit, it is good practice to involve pupils from the outset. Their participation in the process is one of the conditions for realizing its importance and for changing thinking and attitudes towards gender.

10. Pay attention to intersections

We cannot talk about equality between men and women if we are not willing to talk about racial, religious and cultural differences. At the same time, we must not turn a blind eye to differences and inequalities arising from sexual orientation or gender identity.

Gender and sexuality are very sensitive topics in Bulgarian schools. Many teachers do not feel comfortable talking about gender and sexuality at all, thus not creating enough space to share current issues related to this topic that are of concern to students. If a teacher is a classroom teacher, he or she should definitely create a space in the classroom to discuss such topics. If the class teacher does not feel sufficiently prepared to talk about such topics, he/she can invite the school psychologist/educational counsellor or an external speaker (in consultation with the school management) to provide the necessary knowledge and background for his/her students to critically reflect on these issues. Opportunities to promote equality between girls and boys in school are manifold and are part of everyday school practice. They would do well to be actively explored and exploited. The audit of school practice presented in the Resources section, referred to in the previous section, can help to do this.

This material is inspired by:

- *Briggs, S. How to Teach Students About Gender Equality. Retrieved from opencolleges.edu: <https://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/features/gender-equality/>.*
- *Elesapiens. Strategies to promote gender equality in the classroom. Retrieved from elesapiens.com: <https://www.elesapiens.com/blog/strategies-to-promote-gender-equalityin-the-classroom/>*
- *Klein, S. Handbook for Achieving Sex Equity Through Education. Retrieved from eric.ed.gov: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED290810.pdf>.*
- *TeachThought. 6 Ways You Can Promote Gender Equality In Your Classroom. Retrieved from teachthought.com: teachthought.com/education/6-ways-can-promote-gender-equalityclassroom/.*
- *United Nations. Gender Equality: Why it Matters. Retrieved from un.org: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Goal-5.pdf>.*
- *Welcoming Schools. Affirming Gender in Elementary School: Social Transitioning. Retrieved from welcomingschools.org: <https://www.welcomingschools.org/pages/affirming-gender-in-elementary-school-social-transitioning/>*



