

# TRUCKS FOR GIRLS & dolls for boys?

Blue is for boys, pink is for girls... boys work in storerooms, girls are the cashiers... Whether we realise it or not, there are a lot of gender stereotypes in our society. **Maria Theresa Portelli** from the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) writes on how stereotypes influence us from birth and how parents can choose not to reinforce them.

**G**ender stereotypes are an oversimplified concept about the social roles of males and females. Stereotyping is instilled in all of us from birth and continues as children grow: Boys are encouraged to play with trucks and action figures while girls get dolls and play kitchens.

Within the family, subtle gender differences between how mothers and fathers act could be imparting important lessons to children about what it means to be male and female. The kids might pick up on the fact that daddies are more assertive and mummies are more passive, and incorporate that into their own behaviour over time. Such differences may teach children indirect lessons about gender roles and reinforce gender-type patterns of behaviour that they then carry into situations outside of the family.

Often traditions and stereotypes affect the careers of women and men through

influencing their choice of educational paths. For instance, mathematics, science and technology are perceived as "boys' subjects", which results in fewer female pupils taking them at school.

Gender stereotypes generate assumptions about the different occupations or sectors in which men and women work. For example, in a supermarket, it is often presumed that the cashiers will be predominantly female and storeroom workers male. These assumptions can have a negative impact, as they restrict the range of options that women and men have open to them when looking for a job or planning a career.

Gender stereotypes may therefore convey negative messages to children. If parents or legal guardians do

not want children to be caught up in gender stereotypes, they should take certain steps. What if we decided to cross the gender boundaries? What if decisions and opinions were influenced by one's skills and abilities rather than one's gender? Changing male-female stereotypes is a continuous challenge. From

a young age, stereotypical statements and attitudes are to be avoided to enhance equality of opportunity



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for both genders rather than attaching specific roles to each sex.

To this end, family responsibilities and child-rearing should be shared so that every member can participate actively within the family. As to employment of men and women, employers are to seek and assess the abilities of individuals rather than attach one job to one sex and not the other based on stereotypes. Even family-friendly measures, such as reduced hours and telework, are to be accessible to both men and women at the workplace.

In our everyday life, we can all contribute towards moving away from stereotypes by reflecting on our actions and keeping ourselves from imposing our perceptions and beliefs on others. ●

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The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) offers training sessions on issues related to equality, including on gender stereotypes. NCPE can be contacted on 2590 3850 or [equality@gov.mt](mailto:equality@gov.mt)

