



gretchen's
house

So you want to know more about...

Men in Childcare

My Guy

Societal expectations have long funneled women to “nurturing” jobs such as teaching, social work, and nursing, which typically pay less than many traditionally male-dominated fields that require similar education and experience. Business positions and the trades, for example, tend to pay more than teaching jobs. Because of this wage disparity, the early childhood field suffers particularly from a lack of male teachers. But that doesn’t mean they don’t exist! Male teachers are a valuable and vital force in early childhood classrooms.

To appreciate men’s importance in the daily lives of young children, we have to look beyond stereotypes that suggest men are more athletic, less touchy-feely, and more mathematical and scientific. Nonsense! **Any** teacher can help a young child play football, learn emotional control, and explore math and science.

It is important for **both** boys and girls to have positive male role models and to see men doing “nurturing” tasks like daily care and clean-up. It is particularly important for active, hands-on boys to see active, hands-on

teachers of their own gender using appropriate means to channel their energy, solve conflicts, and build relationships.

Whether your family functions along traditionally gender-stereotyped roles or takes a more egalitarian approach, your child will benefit from seeing all kinds of people—men & women, short & tall, black & white, creative & methodical—doing all kinds of tasks. We want our classrooms, and the people in them, to reflect all the best things your child can hope to achieve.

Dads in the Classroom

Do you ever look around your child’s early childhood center and wish there could be more men participating? We’d love to have you around. And attending field trips isn’t the only way to get involved in your child’s program! Consider:

- Coming in to share a story or song, for special events or on a regular basis;
- Helping your teacher prepare book orders or other classroom projects;
- Becoming a “room parent,” to coordinate teacher appreciation and other events;
- Documenting special events with photos and/or video;
- Coordinating class projects such as book or can drives.

Together, we’re better!

Further reading

- *Real Men or Real Teachers?*
by Phil Sargent
- *Uncommon Caring: Learning From Men Who Teach Young Children,*
by James R. King
- www.menteach.org

Mars and Venus?

Do male teachers communicate differently than female teachers? Sometimes. But it is more useful to talk about different communication styles in general rather than linking these to gender.

Some teachers are more blunt than others. They may not realize that they are, or they may be more direct in order to convey important information. If a direct communicator says something that offends or confuses you, here are some ways to handle the situation.

- Put the remark in context. Was it unusually blunt?
- Assess your own filters. Are you feeling defensive for other reasons? Are you just tired?
- Wait a day to respond. At the time of the conversation, say, “Hmm. I need to think about that. Can we talk about this tomorrow?”
- After you’ve had time to reflect, if you still think the message was rough, say so. Try: “When you said, _____, I felt _____. I might have responded better if you had said it this way: _____.” Or, “I do very well with messages phrased like this: _____.”

Remember that some people are not very emotional in their speech. Pay attention to their interactions with children and you may find that their behavior is much gentler and warmer than their speech with parents.

On the other hand, too much tact can obscure important communications. If your child’s teacher phrases everything positively, it can be hard to know when he or she is asking for help or if your child’s behavior actually is “normal.” Some teachers are rarely communicate negatives face-to-face.

When dealing with an indirect communicator, be sure your own communications are relaxed and friendly. Sometimes people overcompensate when they feel nervous. A brief but friendly chat—getting to know your teacher on a more personal level—can put everyone at ease.

With **any** communication that concerns you, try clarifying the underlying message. “It sounds like you’re saying _____. Is this what you mean?” and “Is this a problem?” and “What would you like me to do?”

In an ideal world, we’d all strike a balance between these two ends of the communication spectrum. But we are who we are: parents **and** teachers. Conveying your own communication style and needs, and understanding your teachers’, will help you relate better to **all** the adults in your child’s life.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do you do background checks on male staff before hiring them? We obtain criminal records checks and Family Independence Agency clearance on **all** new employees.

I don’t want a male teacher changing my daughter’s diaper or supervising her toileting. It would be odd if female teachers weren’t allowed to do these things with young boys, wouldn’t it? We refute the notion that men who choose to work with young children are somehow abnormal. Diaper changes, handwashing, dressing to go outside, etc., are important times for children to bond with caregivers. So are sitting on laps to read a story and hugging hello and goodbye. These are normal interactions with children. Our children’s bathrooms at the center are unisex, though kindergarten and older kids don’t use the bathroom at the same time. When older children travel, we make sure to have male and female adults present so all children will be supervised.

I’m concerned that my son’s teacher may be gay.

Are you thinking that a gay man is more likely to molest a child? Or are you afraid your child might try to emulate his teacher? We are an inclusive, anti-bias community. Our operating assumption is that being homosexual is not something that can be taught (or untaught). It’s true that your child may imitate the gestures/affect of his male teacher. He will imitate everyone in his classroom. He’ll try to kiss other girls and boys in the classroom—that’s something **all** children do. It doesn’t mean he’s being encouraged to be gay. Discouraging or overreacting to children’s normal impulses **can** cause children confusion. The **Gender Equity Purple Page** has more information.

I wish you could move my child to the classroom with the male teacher. We wish we had more men in our classrooms, too. You can help. Make time to join the group for activities, field trips, and special events.