

for: International Women's Day, 8th March 2020

Persona Doll Training UK – Working towards equality and hearing women's voices

Persona Doll Training builds capacity and supports all who work with young children, - which is mainly women - not only to build a culture of respect but to also build positive relationships in families and in communities. Our training develops self-esteem and confidence in women and children so that all those likely to face discrimination can stand up for themselves, 'not look away', support each other, speak out against prejudice and abuse and to seek help if needed. Simultaneously the approach challenges negative stereotypes for girls and boys.

Gender is one of the first social categories children become aware of. By the time they are three years old, they have formed their gender identity and are aware that certain behaviours, activities, toys and interests are typical for boys and girls. Although children play an active role in shaping their gender identity development, their knowledge about gender comes from many sources of socialisation, including parents, peers and teachers.

We encourage parents, schools and early years providers to create playful environments where children interact positively across the gender divide and provide children with non-stereotyped toys and activities during early childhood. In this way children are helped to develop skills to interact effectively in mixed-gender groups and to gain a better understanding of gender differences and similarities. Parents, educators and practitioners are encouraged to pay attention to the stereotypic beliefs children express regarding each gender, as some may foster negative behaviours and attitudes against the other gender.

We know that stereotypes put pressure on people to conform and that different cultures have different stereotypes. We work to break down existing stereotypes and support women and children to realise that they don't have to conform to stereotypes. Stereotypes can be a cause of bullying and the Persona Doll approach supports teachers to address bullying, and to understand that they have the power to change things. Children also talk about their feelings and build confidence and a sense of self and a positive identity of their culture and gender. This helps to break the cycle of inferiority that many girls feel 'less than' and boys feel 'macho' and aggressive. We challenge parents, fathers especially, to be aware that putting pressure on boys to be 'macho' and girls to be 'subservient' is destructive to girls and boys.

The Persona Doll approach uses large, life-like, cloth dolls with their own individual identities, life histories, family and cultural backgrounds, likes and dislikes, fears and abilities. It builds on universal traditions of story-telling which are taken a step further

- into interactive discussion and dialogue with a focus on the importance of hearing children's and women's voices.

Persona Dolls are a tool for inclusion, anti-bias and social development with children and adults. Teachers, childcare workers, care givers, and family and community workers use the dolls. Our approach is respectful and participatory, ensuring that adults engage in personal anti-bias development as well as awareness raising amongst the children. Abuse, sexual violence, racism, xenophobia, culture and faith, language, gender; sexuality and homophobia, disability and poverty issues are addressed, while promoting positive values, emotional literacy and problem solving.

Please see the free downloadable pdf on our website for International Women's Day about a Childhood Centre in Jenin.

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