

How to Talk to Kids About...

WOMEN'S EQUALITY AND THE LAW

A Quick Reference Guide
for Conversations and
Activities with Kids

Key Points

- * In the United States, men and women are legally equal.
- * Everyone has the right to speak freely, to practice their religion, to gather in protest, etc.
- * In addition, the 14th Amendment requires the government to apply its rules even-handedly.
- * Numerous state and federal laws outlaw discrimination on the basis of sex.
- * Some laws are written specifically to protect women and girls.
- * Legally recognizing biological differences isn't sexist. It's common sense.

Women and Girls Are Excelling Today

- * Women are an extremely valuable part of America's economy, making up nearly 50 percent of the workforce.
- * Women today receive more college and graduate degrees than men and have achieved great success in nearly every professional field.
- * Generations ago, opportunities for women and girls were limited. But today, girls can grow up to be almost anything men can be.

* Today, people have more choices than ever! A person can choose to have full-time careers, stay home with the kids and manage a household, work part-time or even work for themselves by starting a small business.

* Today, women and girls have more opportunities than at any time in human history!

Questions and Answers

If racial segregation is wrong, isn't segregation based on sex wrong too?

Race and sex are two very different things. Although racial segregation is immoral and unlawful, sex segregation is allowed where biological differences between males and females are relevant. For example, sexism isn't the reason that schools field separate men's and women's sports teams, for hospitals to offer patients single-sex rooms, or for the government to house male and female prisoners in separate jails. They are in place to help and protect women. These policies are not bad or unlawful. Instead, they recognize actual biological differences as well as safety and privacy concerns.

But the Constitution doesn't say anything about protecting women against discrimination. Don't we need an Equal Rights Amendment to do that?

No. The Constitution already provides women those protections under the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment. The 14th Amendment was adopted in 1868 and designed to protect newly freed slaves from discrimination. Yet today, those charged with

enforcing laws interpret the amendment as protecting everyone against government action that deprives a citizen of life, liberty, and/or property without due process. Sex-based discrimination in the workplace has also been outlawed since the passage of the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

I've heard that there's a wage gap and that women only make 77¢ for every dollar that a man earns. Is that true or false?

True and false. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' latest figures, women on average do make less than men. But it's important to understand that many things contribute to the wage gap, and it isn't just because women are discriminated against. First, on average, men work more hours than women and men choose full time jobs, whereas women more often elect to work in part-time jobs. Men also work more overtime hours each week, which can earn them a lot of money, and they tend to work more hazardous jobs, which pay more than low-risk jobs. Men and women also make different life choices. The wage gap begins to appear around age 25, likely due to more women choosing to stay home with their children. In fact, in polls many moms say they'd rather be home with their kids than work outside the home. Women also often choose lower-paying work that they enjoy or feel is meaningful. That's another form of compensation. In fact, the most common jobs for women are in education and healthcare, which generally pay less than computer and engineering jobs—the most common jobs for men. Girls can grow up to be anything, but we should be grateful that our society is so prosperous that girls can choose different paths in life from boys, if they want to.

Fun Activities to Learn about Women in the Law and Further Reading

A Fun Game

The Egg Game: Give each child a real egg and a plastic Easter egg with candy inside. Ask them to break the eggs into different bowls and see what is inside. They will see that the real egg and the plastic egg are different inside and that it wouldn't make sense to always treat the Easter egg and the real egg the same. You wouldn't, for example, scramble the Easter egg and real egg together to make an omelet. Then give them another real egg of a different color. Ask them to break it and point out that the white egg and the brown egg are the same inside. It makes sense that these eggs can be cooked together.

Encourage Conversation

To help children understand the progress that has been made for women in the workforce today and how many more choices women have today, encourage your children to talk to an elderly female relative or family friend. Have your child prepare questions beforehand so that they can conduct an interview and ask their family member or family friend about what it was like when they were young and what opportunities they had in the workforce and what limitations or barriers they faced?

More Reading

For parents who want more information on this complex issue, read IWF's Policy Focus on the [ERA](#) and check out IWF's [communication's kit](#) on the wage gap.

For more

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iwf.org/how-to-talk-to-kids