

Should Children Be Raised Gender Neutral?

For a long time I believed in raising my children gender neutral. I believed that teaching my daughters girly things, and my sons boy things is pushing them away from who they naturally are and into something I want them to be.

I no longer hold the same views. Of course, it is possible to push your children in a direction that isn't them ... however, I find that you could be doing a great disservice to a child by not gently guiding them in certain directions. Let me elaborate.

Imagine you just got a job. Your first day your boss comes up to you and says "Do whatever, just be productive". You will feel lost. You know there are expectations, cultural norms, rules, etc you can't just murder people. Your boss might have desired to make you feel free, but you likely will feel like you were put into a very uncomfortable situation. You now have to experiment to find all of the rules, expectations, and norms.

You need a framework. The best places to work make their rules, expectations and norms known ... but also offer a lot of flexibility in order to accommodate different methods and preferences.

Another example ... One time I was training a new CSR, and due to emergency circumstances, I wasn't able to train her well. I taught her how our service worked, but I didn't get the chance to teach her how to frame the information in order to communicate effectively with a potential customer. Several days into doing her job I overheard her selling our service to someone. She asked them "Do you want a monthly, bimonthly, or quarterly service?" early in the call. It might seem like a good question ... but the question is highly problematic. The customer has no idea what they want or need in this regard. They don't know how the service works and they don't know what would effectively take care of their problems.

We both created the same problem. I didn't give her enough information and guidance in order for her to feel comfortable in her job, and she didn't guide the customer well enough for them to understand how to make a decision.

I desire to guide my children in such a way that they feel comfortable as their gender, but they don't feel cornered by it. I want my daughter to understand what is generally anticipated from girls, and how to break customs that don't effectively serve her desires. I want my boys to understand what is anticipated from boys and how to function in society when you desire to break from those norms.

I believe raising a child without direction and guidance just makes them feel confused and alienated from everyone. We are incredibly social, and people form themselves from their

genes, environment and social environment. We can't ignore the social context and think that we are freeing them ... we are only making them feel confused and alienated.

The response to gender rigidity of the past isn't non-gender. The response to heavy-handed parental expectation isn't letting them figure things out on their own. The response to rigid gender roles and parental pressure and expectation is a parent who guides gently, teaches social customs, and teaches how to break social customs in such a way that leads to the highest degree of happiness.