What are some positive ways parents can address a child’s gender identity issues?

Dorothy Horton, PsyD, answers your questions in her latest Ask Doctor Dee column.

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Q: What are some positive ways parents can address a child’s gender identity issues?

A: Among parents whose children lean toward nontraditional gender roles, books such as Cinderella Ate My Daughter and My Princess Boy sparked candid discussions about kids’ gender identity issues. For many of these mothers and fathers, a child’s nonconformity to socially acceptable expressions of his or her gender at birth can generate a multitude of challenges.

For example, suppose your son enjoys playing with so-called girls’ toys rather than more masculine playthings. Maybe your daughter prefers dressing as a boy instead of a girl, or your son or daughter believes he or she is the opposite sex. Despite the difficulties parents may face, there are positive ways to address a child’s gender issues.

Start by gathering as much information as you can. Read books and learn more about your child from his or her teachers, doctors, other parents and friends. The more knowledge you have, the better equipped you’ll be to understand your child’s behavior.

In addition, don’t obsess about why your child has rejected gender norms. It’s normal during children’s early developmental years to experiment. Also, aim to create a nurturing home environment, as this can help a child feel comfortable exploring his or her identity.

Talk with your child about his or her gender issues. And finally, seek professional help if needed because therapy can help kids develop self-love and self-acceptance.

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