

Let us identify gender responsibilities

All animals produce offspring which ensures the survival of the species. The male and the female reproductive systems are made up to produce offspring. The reproductive system becomes active during adolescence and produces secondary sexual characteristics. You and your friends who are about 14 years old will begin to display these characteristics. It is important to learn facts about reproductive health and not to believe in inaccurate information.

In Grades 7 and 8 you learnt about the functioning of the male and the female reproductive systems. We also learnt how the menstrual cycle prepares the female reproductive system for a pregnancy and the role of the male reproductive systems in conceiving a child.

In this lesson we will learn about sexuality, healthy sexual behaviours and social norms.

Gender

The child is assigned a gender based on the appearance of the external genitalia. The biological gender is determined genetically and through the action of hormones.

Society assigns different gender roles for males and females. For example society assigns different dress codes for males and females and expect girls and boys to play with different toys. Social norms regarding responsibility, behaviours and roles contribute to the social concept of gender. The social concept of gender is also influenced by economic status, culture, religion and political influences. Our gender role as a male or a female is acquired by imitating our parents, the clothes we dress during childhood, toys we play with etc.



Activity

Discuss the social differences between males and females based on the social concept of gender in Sri Lanka.

Occasions influenced by the social concept of gender

1. Jobs
2. Patterns of behaviour
3. Things which women can do and men can do
4. Position in the family and the society
5. Family responsibilities assigned to males and females
6. Clothing and fashion
7. Toys



Figure 20.1 - Classifying toys according to gender

Senali came back from school to find her father cooking. “Your mother went to see your grandmother who is not well. I will do the household work today” Senali’s father said.

Senali helped her father with the cooking and washing up. They both washed the clothes. After some time her brother returned home from school. He swept the floor and, folded the clothes.

Their mother came home in the evening. She looked tired. Senali’s father made her a cup of tea. “Although I wasn’t at home the work has been done well” she said smiling.

From ancient times, in Sri Lankan households, cooking, housework and looking after children have been the responsibility of the female. The husband goes to work and is responsible for earning for the family.

However, many social changes have happened in the recent past and often both husband and wife go out to work. Therefore, the difference in the assigned gender roles have become less. Depending on the time available, both husband and wife equally share the responsibilities and work.

As shown in the incident above, sharing of work equally ensures a successful family life. If work is not labeled as “work of women” and “work of men” and it is shared, it will improve everyone’s wellbeing. You should also do the same while at home and in school.



Figure 20.2 - Equally sharing responsibilities

Activity

Explain how the family members in the above incident helped each other without adhering to male, female or age related stereotypes.

The socially attributed male and female roles can lead to conflict and stress.

Socially assigned differences in gender can lead to issues such as abuse of women and children, women being restricted to the home, depriving children of education, male female inequality in certain occupations and abuse of human rights.

Therefore, the international concept of human rights does not recognize the social concept of gender. It states that both males and females are entitled to the same rights as humans. There should not be any gender discrimination at home, work place or society.

Responsibilities and behaviours related to sexuality and reproduction

Male and female gender roles are determined by two major factors. The biological sex which is genetically determined and the socially assigned gender which is determined by social and cultural factors. Based on these, from childhood, we identify ourselves as male or female and behave accordingly. Gender identity is one's personal experience of one's own gender.

People express their sexuality in different ways. Reproduction is the main function linked with sexuality. It is important to adopt healthy, responsible sexual behaviours.

The conception, implantation and development of the foetus takes place in the female reproductive system. The male reproductive system contributes to the conception of the child. After the birth of the child the female assumes the mother's role and the male assumes the father's role.

Until 20 years of age, the female reproductive system is not adequately developed to provide the nutrition necessary for the foetus. The adolescent female reproductive system is still undergoing growth. Both adolescent boys and girls are not psychologically mature enough to assume the role of a mother or father. They are still developing skills needed to function in the role of a mother or father.

The minimum age at marriage in Sri Lanka is 18 years. The law has been enacted to prevent teenage pregnancies which can harm the mother and the baby.

The sexual relationship between two married adults, based on love and trust, contributes to physical, psychological and social wellbeing. A child born to a married couple, who plan the pregnancy, will enjoy more love and security than if it is born to an unmarried mother.

Most married couples are economically stable. Therefore, they are more able to provide the child's educational and other needs. The child will develop psychological and social skills by associating the parents, family and friends.

A child born to unmarried parents will often have the protection of only one parent. Sometimes the child may not get the love and protection of either parent. There may not be adequate economic resources to provide for the needs of the child. The child will not get adequate psychological and social support. If there is inadequate love and security such children may engage in antisocial behaviours. If married parents too do not carry out their responsibilities and provide adequate, love, and security, their children's education may get disrupted and they may consume alcohol and other drugs or be subjected to sexual abuse.

Negative consequences of irresponsible sexual behaviour

1. Unplanned pregnancies
2. Sexually transmitted diseases
3. Psychological problems
4. Disruption of education
5. Disruption of future plans
6. Social discrimination
7. Break-up of family relationships
8. Lack of security for the children



Figure 20.3 - Unplanned pregnancies

Responsibilities of parents for a healthy child

The ideal family will help each other, share joys and sorrows and work together. This will build up a good relationship between parents and their children who will become citizens who contribute positively to the society.

The birth of a child is a special occasion for the parents. The parents have a special responsibility to ensure the birth of a healthy child. They must be prepared for the birth of the child. Planning for the pregnancy will contribute to the health of both mother and child.

What a mother should do to ensure the birth of a healthy child

1. Eat a healthy, balanced diet.
2. Inform the public health midwife about the pregnancy. She will then educate the mother and direct her to obtain the necessary services.
3. Attend clinics conducted by the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) in the area, take the supplementary nutrition, vitamin and minerals as prescribed. Undergo necessary check-ups.
4. Carry out daily activities and exercises.
5. Engage in aesthetic activities and religious activities to improve psychological wellbeing.

6. At the appropriate time, identify the hospital where you want to deliver the baby and register in the maternity clinic of the hospital.
7. Continue to fulfill your responsibilities towards your other children and family members.
8. Avoid consumption of alcohol and smoking.



Figure 20.4 - Attending health clinics

Responsibilities of the father regarding his pregnant wife

1. Provide adequate love, care and security for the wife
2. Provide food, clothing and other needs
3. Provide a home and environment suitable for the pregnant mother
4. Attend the maternity clinics with the wife
5. Engage in activities with the wife which improve psychological well being
6. Avoid alcohol consumption and smoking
7. Support the wife in caring for the other children and family members



Figure 20.5 - Providing love, care and security to the wife

Activity

A mother is expecting her third child. She already has two children. Explain how the family members can contribute for household work cooperatively.

With the birth of a new child the parents are faced with many responsibilities. They have to look after the child from birth until adulthood and ensure that the child becomes a useful member of the society. The parents have to provide security and education so that as an adult he or she has adequate skills to engage in employment and have a successful life.

Responsibilities of the parents towards their children

1. Provide adequate nutrition
2. Provide a suitable education and encourage children to learn
3. Provide love and protection
4. Ensure that the children have adequate skills to protect themselves
5. Provide opportunities to develop physically, psychologically and spiritually
6. Provide opportunities to express their ideas and develop their creativity
7. Provide opportunities to excel
8. Provide a conflict free home environment



Figure 20.6 - Providing love and protection



Activity

Although you are still a child, you have responsibilities towards your parents. List the responsibilities of a child towards his / her parents.

Understanding about your sexuality and the accompanying social responsibilities ensures your wellbeing and that of your children.

Summary

The biological gender of a person is determined genetically.

The social concept of gender assigns different roles and responsibilities for males and females based on cultural, religious and political factors.

The gender based stereotypes assigned by the social concept of gender can sometimes be harmful.

A happy family disregards strict adherence to gender roles.

Gender identity is one's personal experience of one's own gender, which is based on the biological sex and the social concept of gender.

Responsible sexual behaviour is essential for physical and mental health. Good relationship between parents and responsibility towards each other ensures a healthy environment for the children.



Exercise

1. What are the factors that determine the social concept of gender?
2. Give three adverse consequences of the social concept of gender.
3. Are the following statements true or false?
 - i. Household responsibilities must always be carried out by females (.....)
 - ii. If a person wishes to, he or she can get married even if he / she is are under the age of 18 years. (.....)
 - iii. Irresponsible sexual behaviour can lead to disruption of education. (.....)
 - iv. Good relationship between parents ensures a healthy environment for the children. (.....)
 - v. During pregnancy both mother and father have to bear many responsibilities to ensure the birth of a healthy child. (.....)
4. What should a pregnant mother do to ensure the birth of a healthy child?
5. What are the responsibilities of the parents towards their children?