

Issue 16 | September 2024

Two Thirds of Girls Fear Making a Creative Mistake: Are we pressuring girls to be perfect?

How often do we praise our children? Or encourage their creative efforts? The benefits of creative play are immense, and how we engage with children can have a significant impact on them – not least young girls aspiring to be creative. Three quarters of girls have goals to work in creative industries. A global study released by LEGO this year has shown that girls as young as five feel intense pressure to be perfect. But when girls feel free to play, their creativity soars. So, what can we do to support girls' creativity? Researchers talk about 'creative confidence', the 'power of play' and 'everyday language'. LEGO breaks this down to show how we can support girls' creative confidence and challenge the pressure of perfection that is impacting girls. And it's as simple as changing the words we use.

The statistics are concerning. Girls as young as five are not reaching their full creative potential. As they get older, they become more afraid of sharing their ideas with others. Many parents have affirmed their own concerns about this issue, saying that they feel girls are less likely to share their ideas because of perfectionism and anxiety about making mistakes. The problem is that this can carry on into adulthood. And with more than three in five girls saying they feel pressured by 'society's messages of perfection', we need to act now to support young girls as they explore their creative potential (LEGO Group, 2024b).

We can change things simply by changing our language. The power of the words we use around girls is vitally important. In fact, LEGO's study found that girls aged between five and 12 repeatedly said the 'language they hear makes them worry about making mistakes, feel like they shouldn't experiment, or reinforces this need to be perfect' (LEGO Group, 2024c). This is about more than just the language we use when talking to our own children. It's also about the language society uses, and the gendered way the creative outputs of boys and girls are described.

Words such as sweet, pretty, cute and beautiful are often attributed to girls' work. In fact, society is seven times more likely to use these words when discussing girls' creative outputs. In contrast, boys are twice as likely to have their work described as brave, cool, genius or innovative. More than half of the girls in the LEGO study felt that adults will listen to boys' creative ideas more than girls. When combined with the fact that 68 per cent of parents surveyed in the study also said that society takes male creative figures more seriously than females, this is highly concerning.

The language that we use around young girls is critical. Even without realising, we could be unintentionally reinforcing traditional gender roles. Challenging this bias is crucial to support girls and allow them to become who they want to be. Parents in the study said that they have seen girls become reluctant to share their ideas, with many seeing the impact of societal pressures for perfectionism on their daughters. And the opportunity to play is just as important as the language we use. Parents from 36 countries included in this study reported that their daughters had more confidence to experiment, better self-expression, and better creative confidence when playing.

So, what do girls want? They want mistakes to be recognised as learning. They want to know that progress is more important than perfection. They want adults to recognise more than just the final output of their creative work. And they want to hear that they can be just as imaginative, brave and inspiring as boys. Girls themselves said that they feel like they can be their true selves when they play, and don't feel like they are going to be judged. They also report feeling more confident about sharing creative ideas when playing.

As LEGO says, let's support girls' creativity. We can challenge the societal stereotypes and biases that can impact girls. We can change our language to recognise their creativity and potential, and encourage a healthy, positive, growth mindset. We can do this by celebrating the effort girls put into a task, regardless of the outcome, and using positive language when talking about both mistakes and successes. Emphasising playfulness and encouraging girls to reflect on what happens when they step outside of their comfort zone and take risks can also help, as can celebrating all wins — including the small ones. Ultimately, by refocussing how we think about girls' creativity, we can remove the pressure of perfectionism and the fear it creates, and instead allow girls to explore their own creativity and become the best version of themselves possible.

Reference:

LEGO Group. (2024a). 10 steps to fostering creative confidence. Retrieved September 16, 2024, from

https://www.lego.com/cdn/cs/set/assets/bit0e6cff41e3af61d9/LEGO_Play_Unstoppable_Fostering_Creative_Confidence_Guide.pdf.

LEGO Group. (2024c). The impact of perfectionism and language bias on girls' creative confidence. Retrieved September 16, 2024, from

<https://www.lego.com/en-us/play-unstoppable/creative-confidence>.

LEGO Group. (2024c, March 5). Girls as young as five are having their creativity impacted by pressure of perfection and language bias. Retrieved

September 16, 2024, from <https://www.lego.com/en-au/aboutus/news/2024/february/lego-play-unstoppable>.
