

# Even as two-year-olds, girls are more independent and sociable

August 21 2015, by Elisabeth Rongved

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Girls are more independent than boys already at the age of two.

Girls of two and a half years of age are more capable of feeding and dressing themselves, they are better at participating in circle time in kindergarten, and they are out of nappies earlier than boys of the same

age. This is according to a study of over 1000 Norwegian children aged 30–33 months. Researchers looked at the extent to which girls and boys master different everyday activities. The results show that girls were more advanced in all areas studied by the researchers. The study is part of the Stavanger Project at the Norwegian Centre for Reading Education and Research, the University of Stavanger.

Both Norwegian and international research shows that girls have better language and social skills than boys in school and [kindergarten](#). There are few studies, however, which document how small children master everyday activities in kindergarten. In Norway, over 90 percent of children aged 1 to 5 attend a public or private kindergarten, which is an integrated part of the education system.

"We expected to find differences, but were surprised that they were so great," says Aud Toril Meland, who together with Elsa Kaltvedt and Elin Reikerås recently published the findings in the Early Childhood Educational Journal. The Stavanger Project is a multidisciplinary, longitudinal study that is being carried out by the Reading Centre at the University of Stavanger in cooperation with the city of Stavanger.

## **More independent and better at participating**

In the study, kindergarten staff observed the children during the normal day. They looked at the extent to which the children take part in games and circle time, how they adapt to kindergarten meal-times and other routines, whether they like to dress and undress themselves and whether they master eating and drinking without help from adults. It became apparent that the girls were more independent with regard to dressing and undressing and that, to a greater extent, they mastered kindergarten routines such as changing from one activity to another and helping younger children.

The biggest difference between boys and girls was the age at which they were out of nappies and started using the toilet. Of the two and a half-year-old girls, 21.3% were completely finished with nappies and could say when they needed to use the toilet, compared to just 7.5% of the boys. Up to 67.8% of the girls had developed an interest in using a potty or toilet compared to 42.1% of the boys.

"The girls also scored higher on participation in circle time, where singing, games that develop motor skills and activities involving discussion or narration are important. Such activities require concentration for short periods, as well as the desire and the ability to interact, something which the girls seem to be better at mastering," says Elsa Kaltvedt.

"To a large extent, social skills and everyday activities are connected with children's language comprehension, motor skills and self-regulation. Well-developed [language skills](#) may contribute to girls being better able to express their needs and desires than boys. Children's language skills may also influence other activities, such as participating in conversation during mealtimes, dressing and undressing, and going from one activity to another," Meland explains.

## **Problematic**

The researchers believe that this is an important study as it highlights developmental differences between boys and girls, of which kindergarten staff ought to be aware.

"The differences may be due to both biological expectations and the fact that different demands and expectations are required of girls than boys. In the framework plan for Norwegian kindergartens, it is stated that boys and girls should have equal opportunities. Many people think that the fact that boys run, jump and climb is good for their development, but

they are not necessarily better at mastering everyday activities despite being active. It is important to provide adequate support for boys. Boys should also get enjoyment from mastering [everyday activities](#) that involve both social and language skills," says Kaltvedt.

"Previous studies have shown that the behaviour and habits of girls often correspond with school and kindergarten teachers' preferred ideals. Girls are more frequently characterised as being responsible, cooperative, well-behaved, conscientious and diligent. Adults' behaviour and interaction with children can reflect their own attitudes to gender, thus giving different signals and expectations to [boys](#) and [girls](#). Adults' attitudes, expectations and participation thus affect [children](#) differently, even in the early kindergarten years," says Reikerås.

**More information:** "Toddlers Master Everyday Activities in Kindergarten: A Gender Perspective." *Early Childhood Education Journal* [DOI: 10.1007/s10643-015-0718-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-015-0718-1)

Provided by University of Stavanger

Citation: Even as two-year-olds, girls are more independent and sociable (2015, August 21) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-08-two-year-olds-girls-independent-sociable.html>

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