

Snapshots

RESEARCH REPORT

Mind the (Gender) Gap

The ability to read and write is a popular topic of study, especially when it comes to comparing girls' skills to boys' skills. Boys and girls have similar general intelligence levels and capabilities, but research shows that when it comes to reading and writing, girls perform better.

The gender gap is evident as early as fourth grade, and it gradually widens with age, according to a recent report from the American Psychological Association looking at National Assessment of Educational Progress studies that span almost 30 years. What's the cause? The report suggests five theories:

1. **Different rates of maturation.** Girls tend to mature more quickly than boys, so it would be easier for girls who are mentally more mature to enjoy reading and become more proficient in it. However, the report points out that this claim would suggest that boys' reading proficiency would eventually catch up, but this is inconsistent with study results.
2. **Gender differences in lateralization of brain function.** Research suggests that girls use both sides



- of their brains to learn language tasks, while boys are more likely to be left-brained. This “bilateral language function” could be why girls have an advantage in learning language skills.
3. **Gender differences in variability.** Boys are overrepresented in populations with reading impairment, dyslexia, attention disorders, and mental retardation. The “greater male variability effect” on cognitive performance in reading and writing might indicate a gender-

based neurological reason behind the gender gap.

4. **Gender differences in externalizing behavior and language competence.** The report cites a study in which children at age 7 who experience problems with externalizing behavior such as physical aggression, destruction of property, or disobedience tend to have more severe reading and spelling difficulties at ages 13 and 14. While externalizing behaviors are also present in girls, studies show that the association

MYTWOCENTS

What is the No. 1 message you'd like Congress to hear about what you need to do your job?



J. KAPUCHUCK (@PRINCIPALKAP): **In order to retain amazing educators, we need to pay them as professionals.**



JULIE BLOSS (@BlossJulie): **When making decisions, seek wise counsel. Determine what is best for students by seeking input from educators.**

Supporting Grieving Children

between such behaviors and reading impairment is significantly stronger in boys, likely because they can interfere with learning, lower student motivation, and hurt relationships with teachers and administrators.

5. **Gender stereotyping.** Because of shared cultural beliefs about gender roles, children often classify (or “sex-type”) intellectual tasks and social behaviors as masculine or feminine. Children who are highly sex-typed are more likely to adhere to gender norms that categorize reading and writing as feminine. Rigid adherence to gender roles could translate into lower interest in reading among boys who perceive the task to be in conflict with their ideas of masculinity.

While most psychological gender differences are trivial, the study notes, reading and writing abilities are exceptions to that rule. To read *Gender differences in reading and writing achievement: Evidence from the National Assessment of Educational Progress* (NAEP), visit psycnet.apa.org/buy/2018-46302-001. 📖

Children who are grieving the loss of a loved one want to understand their feelings and cope with them, and that desire doesn't stop once they step into school. What can you do, as a principal, to help students who are grieving the loss of a loved one? Start with the basics.

According to the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement, children should understand four basic concepts about death:

1. It's irreversible.
2. All life functions end at death.
3. Everything living eventually dies.
4. There are physical reasons someone dies.

But just understanding these concepts isn't going to take away their pain. If your students are grieving the loss of a loved one, here's how you can help them:

- Let them know it's OK to show their feelings and cry over something that's as sad, confusing, and scary as death. Crying might help them feel better, too.
- Allow them to express their anger. Make sure children know this is a natural reaction. Avoid being



critical of feelings of anger, but set limits if those feelings lead to inappropriate behaviors.

- Help them identify appropriate ways to express their anger. Encourage them to talk to someone they trust. Suggest they do something active, such as dancing, or creative, such as drawing.
- Reassure them they're not responsible for the death—even if they don't ask. It's common for children to feel guilt related to a loved one's death.
- Remember family members and communicate with them. Let them know how their children are handling their grief at school. Listen, too, because family members are also grieving and might need someone to talk to.

More information on supporting grieving students is available in the “After a Loved One Dies” guide at the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement website, www.schoolcrisiscenter.org. 📖



JON HARPER (@Johnharper70bd): **Simply put, we need them to believe in us. We are more than just numbers and data points.**



LESLIE HAZLE BUSSEY (@hazlebussey): **Visit schools often, [and] not as a drive-by photo op. Follow a student or teacher for a day. Let that experience inform decisions.**



EDWARD COSENTINO (@PrincipalECos): **Trust education professionals. Testing doesn't tell the full picture. Help support the whole child.**

Want to connect with your peers? Contribute to the conversation by following @NAESP on Twitter.