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## How Parents Can Talk To Daughters to Help Avoid Labels & Embrace Their ANDs

As a parent, you want the best for your daughter. You want to cultivate a strong, fearless, successful, loving young woman who is ready and able to live-up to her full potential. But as we have learned from the Global Labels Survey Venus conducted with Wakefield Research, young girls encounter labels from a young age, which can negatively impact her life and her ability to reach her full potential. The majority of women (70%) surveyed around the world first felt constrained by stereotypes or labels starting as early as 10 years old, reporting their classmates as the top group of people (67%) who have given them a label.

To help your daughters avoid the negative impact of one-dimensional labels and realize her true potential, here are 5 pieces of advice to help them instead embrace their “ANDs”:

- 1. Have the Conversation:** Your daughter cannot protect herself from what she isn't aware of. As she grows up, friends, teachers, siblings and even you as her parent, may label her without realizing its limiting effects. Find the time to explain to her how common this is so she can catch it when it happens and approach the labels with curiosity, not acceptance. Ask her what her labels might be and how they make her feel. Ask why certain words make her feel good, while others make her feel self-conscious, confused or other emotions. Is she associating with certain words based on who she knows at school or on television? Emphasize that everyone has multiple characteristics and she should acknowledge the ones that make her feel positive about herself and curious about her life. If questionable words come up, find out where that's coming from to undo the label or shift it to a confidence building one. For example, you can explain the differences between “assertive” vs. “aggressive.” Explain that these nouns and adjectives will evolve as she grows older, and that it is a self-learning process to keep her open to possibilities. Schedule the time now to have this important conversation; it can transform her future.
- 2. Be ‘askable’ and a great listener:** The best step to cultivating authentic communication with your daughter is to be open to what she has to say. This means letting go of judgment around the issues and statements your daughter may bring up to you. Emotions often overrule empathy because parents care so much. Try to remember to RECEIVE what she is saying first so you can digest it and then thoughtfully react. By doing so, you create space and trust for her to come to you to share her concerns.
- 3. Encourage Journaling:** It's extremely beneficial to write things down, or else ideas and thoughts can be lost. Encourage your daughter to start journaling her passions, interests, curiosities, dreams -- as well as her fears and insecurities -- from a young age. Explain to her what “values” are and that she is defining her own through journaling. This practice will give her courage to believe she can be and do anything in her life.



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4. **Be a role model and express your ANDs:** As a parent, your daughter looks to you for inspiration, example and mentorship. Reflect on any labels you may allow yourself to be boxed into, how you label yourself and statements you make about yourself around her. Your daughter can adopt these habits and not even realize she is doing so. You can even share a story of how you defied a label to embrace a new AND. Maybe you were labeled as the quiet one, but ended up building a successful career based on your vocal skills. Or you can share a history of your ANDs and how they changed throughout your journey from high school, college, before you had her to now. One of my favorite quotes is “we cannot be what we cannot see.” By learning more about her mother’s multiple qualities and journey to embrace her full potential, she can feel more ready to embrace her own.
5. **Act on teachable moments:** All around us, there are case studies offering parents the opportunity to teach their children the effects of lost potential due to stereotypical labeling. Just look at the news, pop culture or, even closer, in your daughter’s school yard or lunchroom, for examples of girls being called names. These could put them to being boxed-in to the stereotypical assumptions assigned to those names. Encourage your daughter to share with you any instances she notices, whether in pop culture or in her own life and ask her questions about it. It may be hard for her to see a situation that she is personally in, so using outside examples may better help her to understand the negative impact of labels on girls and women, so she can become more conscious of the issue.