



Puberty

All children, including those with disabilities, go through puberty. Puberty is when your child starts making the physical change from being a child to being an adult. A person's cognitive skills, social skills, or mobility do not impact how their body progresses through sexual development. Some children with disabilities actually go through puberty early. It's important to discuss what is happening to their body so that they won't be scared when changes happen. Your child may notice their body changes before you do. Don't wait for them to hear it from their peers or see it online and get misinformation.

WHAT MY CHILD NEEDS TO KNOW

1. Puberty is a normal part of growing up. You can't choose when it happens. It could be as early as age 9 or 10 or during your teenage years. Puberty lasts for several years. Everyone is different and how and when their body goes through puberty can be different.
2. You will notice body changes, including things like breast development in females; muscle tone, voice changes, and facial fuzz in males; underarm and pubic hair, acne, and height changes in males and females. You will also begin to sweat more and have body odor.



TIPS FOR TEACHING YOUR CHILD ABOUT PUBERTY

1. It can be embarrassing for young people to communicate about puberty, body changes, sex, masturbation, wet dreams, and relationships. Make your child as comfortable as possible.
2. Use the correct name for body parts. Explain things like menstrual periods, ejaculation, hormones, and sexual feelings using simple words. Let them know that these changes are part of becoming an adult.
3. Be open to questions. Don't act shocked or embarrassed by anything they ask. If you don't know the answer, look it up together.

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What my child needs to know continued...

3. To take care of your body during puberty you should eat a balanced diet, drink plenty of fluids, get enough sleep, keep yourself clean, exercise in some way each day, and talk about things that bother you.
4. Other bodily functions will also change. Females will experience menstruation although it may not be a regular monthly period in the beginning. For males, their testicles and penis will grow in size, and they may experience nocturnal emissions (wet dreams).
5. You may start thinking about sex or have romantic feelings or sexual attractions to others. Females can get pregnant as soon as they begin to menstruate and have sexual intercourse. Birth control is necessary to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

Tips for teaching your child about puberty continued...

4. Depending on your child's age or point of development, try playing games with them to identify what happens during puberty (get taller, develop acne, voice changes, underarm and pubic hair, emotional changes, etc.)
5. You can use books, illustrations, and videos that talk about puberty in an easy-to-understand way. There are lots of good materials out there that can make the conversation easier. You can also use anatomically correct dolls to talk about body parts and changes.
6. Teach your child hygiene skills—showering more often, using deodorant, cleaning their private parts, and staying clean during menstruation.

