

CHILD SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

Babies and Toddlers (Birth to 2 Years)

Learn more about normal and healthy sexual development for your child from birth to 2 years old.

What Is Child Sexual Development?

Child sexual development refers to the:

- Physical changes (puberty, starting menstruation, having wet dreams)
- Behavioral changes (showing affection, masturbation, partner intimacy)
- Sexual knowledge development (what gender is, what sex is, what sexual orientation is) that a child goes through in their youth.

The foundation for sexual development starts when a child is a baby. At each age, your child should show some behaviors that seem sexual.

Remember, your child is learning and growing. At times, these age-appropriate behaviors may call for a teaching moment, rather than discipline. Consider how your personal beliefs and family values may impact your child's sexual development.

How Do Babies Learn and Grow?

Babies naturally learn about their bodies as they grow. Babies learn by touching their own bodies. Your baby will also learn by interacting with you. They learn about relationship by seeing how you interact with others.

What Do Healthy Behaviors Look Like in Babies?

Your baby may:

- Show affection to caregivers with hugs and kisses.
- Touch, hold, pull, or poke their own genitals (sexual organs).
- Get an erection if they have a penis. This often happens before they pee.
- Look at or touch genitals of familiar adults and children.
- Like to be naked.
- Play games that include taking clothes off or being naked.
- Be curious when other people are naked.

- Be interested in how others use the bathroom.
- Look at or touch genitals of familiar adults and children.
- Repeat words they hear about the body.

How Can You Help Your Baby and Toddler Have Healthy Sexual Development?

There are age-appropriate ways to teach your baby and toddler about healthy sexual development. You will build on these basics as they grow and mature.

From birth, you can:

- Show love with safe and healthy physical touch, like cuddling.
- Use medically correct terms for all body parts, including genitalia.
- Teach boundaries and respect by:
 - Listening to your baby's signals about touch and comfort
 - Respecting when your child says or signals "no" to physical touch or affection.
 - Using words to tell your baby about physical touch. For example, verbalizing that a diaper change or bath is about to take place.

When Should You Talk to Your Child's Provider?

There is a wide range of development for babies and toddlers. If something concerns you, tell your provider.

Also, tell the provider if your baby or toddler:

- Continues to touch or rub own or others' genitals after being redirected multiple times.
- Touches or rubs own genitals in a way that may cause pain or injury.
- Tries to act out adult sexual behavior with other children when playing.