

CHILD SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

Early Adolescence (9 to 12 Years)

Learn more about normal and healthy sexual development for your child ages 9 to 12 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.

What Do Healthy Behaviors Look Like in Early Adolescence?

Your early adolescent may:

- Begin or continue puberty. This will include both physical and emotional changes.
- Have sexual interest in their peers and begin dating.
- Show physical and emotional affection to friends.
- Know about sexuality, including body image, relationships, puberty, and sexual behavior.
- Imagine what an ideal partner would be like, often thinking of a celebrity.
- Explore their own and others' sexual orientation.
- Look for books or websites that will teach them about sex.
- Feel uncomfortable or embarrassed talking about sex with adults.
- Want more privacy.
- Touch their genitals, or masturbate, for pleasure. Masturbation in private is a normal way for adolescents to explore their bodies and sexuality.

How Can You Help Your Child Have Healthy Sexual Development?

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

At this age, you can:

- Tell your child how bodies change during **puberty**. Use medically correct terms for male and female genitalia (sexual organs).
- **Assure your child** that changes in puberty are normal.
- Talk to your child about **sexual health**. Cover reproduction, puberty, and sexually transmitted diseases or infections.
- Offer books about sexuality that are right for their age.
- Give honest answers to their questions. They may ask questions you do not know how to answer. You can find an accurate answer together.
- Share your **family values** about love, relationships, and dating. Listen to what your child thinks and believes.
- Teach your child what is okay and not okay when dating for a healthy relationship.
- Set clear boundaries for safety online and in person.
- Talk about safe and unsafe ways to use phones and the internet.
- **Respect** your child's need for privacy.

When Should You Talk to Your Child's Provider?

There is a wide range of development for elementary age children. If something concerns you, tell your provider.

Also, tell the provider if your child:

- Has a hard time adjusting to their sexual orientation.
- Is often on websites with sexual content.
- Bullies people in a sexual way online or in person.
- Talks about or views people only as sexual objects for sexual pleasure.
- Masturbates in public or at a frequency that gets in the way of daily life.
- Tried to do sexual acts with younger children.
- Touches adults in a way that seems like adult-to-adult sexual contact.
- Tries to mimic intercourse with dolls, peers, or animals.
- Thinks things that are not sexual are sexual.