

CHILD SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

Early Elementary School (6 to 8 Years)

Learn more about normal and healthy sexual development for your child ages 6 to 8 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 Elementary Schoolers?

It is normal and healthy for elementary aged children to have some behavior that may seem sexual.

Your elementary school child may:

- Be curious about their gender and the gender of others.
- Look for books or websites that will teach them about sex.
- Gain more awareness of human sexuality.
- Try saying jokes or words about sex or genitals (sexual organs).
- Ask for more privacy.
- Touch their genitals. Masturbation is a normal way for elementary schoolers to explore their bodies and sexuality.
- Occasionally try to see someone else naked.
- Play games that mimic relationships or involve touching and looking at other's bodies such as "playing doctor."
- Start puberty.

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.
- Tell your child about sex and reproduction by age 8. They will hear about it from friends or the media. Show them they can come to you to learn.
- Have short, frequent talks about relationships, bodies, and sex. Use everyday chances to teach kids about sexuality.
- Share your family values. Explain that other families might have different values.
- Explain that touching their own genitals may feel good. It is something that they should do in private.
- Teach them about privacy and consent. Support them in setting their own boundaries and respecting the boundaries of others.
- Talk about appropriate touch. Remind them that no one has the right to touch their genitals.
- Show them safe and healthy ways to use physical affection.
- Show what healthy relationships look like. Use respectful communication in all your relationships.

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:

- Uses adult sexual language even after being corrected.
- Has sexual knowledge, language, or gestures of a much older child or adult.
- Forces or tricks other children to take their clothes off, play games of a sexual nature, or insert items in their private parts.
- Is fixated on masturbation.
- Tries intercourse with dolls, animals, or peers.
- Keeps trying to see others naked even after correction or redirection.
- Uses hateful or harmful words towards others.