

# CHILD SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

## Healthy Development at Every Age

Learn more about normal and healthy sexual development at every age.

### 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?

#### Babies and Toddlers (Birth to 2 Years Old)

Your baby and toddler 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.

#### Preschool Years (3 to 5 Years Old)

Your preschooler may:

- Explore their body through touch, including touching their genitals.
- Ask basic questions about bodies or how babies are made.
- Play games to act out family relationships and gender roles.
- Talk or joke about body parts or functions.
- Be curious when other people are naked.
- Be interested in how others use the bathroom.

## Early Elementary Years (6 to 8 Years Old)

### 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.
- 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.

## Early Adolescence (9 to 12 Years Old)

### 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.

## Teenagers (13 to 17 Years Old)

### Your teenager may:

- Continue puberty. This will include both physical and emotional changes.

- Touch their genitals, or masturbate, in private for pleasure. Masturbation is a normal way for teens to explore their bodies and sexuality.
- Look for books or websites that will teach them about sex. This may include watching pornography.
- Have sexual interest in peers and begin dating. They may show emotional growth in how they treat a partner with longer, more mature relationships.
- Start to recognize the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships.
- Want to be close to someone physically and emotionally. They may show affection with friends by hugging or kissing to show love and support.
- Explore their identity by learning about gender and self-expression.
- Share their sexual orientation. They may tell others they are straight, gay, lesbian, or bisexual even if they have not had a romantic or sexual relationship yet.
- Sex text with a same aged peer. Teenagers may think sexting is an innocent activity if it is done with mutual consent, but teens should understand that problems can still happen.
- Know about or be curious about important sexual health information including reproduction, contraception, and sexually transmitted infections.
- Say "no" to things they do not want to do. This helps build respect for their own personal boundaries and the boundaries of others.
- Want to do more things on their own or ask for more privacy.

## When Should You Talk to Your Child's Provider?

There is a wide range of age-appropriate development at each age. Learn more about child sexual development at each stage of childhood.

If something concerns you, tell your provider.

## Resource

### Tips for Talking with Children

