

# CHILD SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT CHARTS

## HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT<sup>1 2</sup>

### Infancy

**BIRTH TO  
AGE 2**

- Develop love and trust through relationships with caregivers
- Start to notice differences between the bodies of boys and girls—children and adults
- Display no inhibitions about nudity
- Interest in bathroom functions
- May have spontaneous reactions that appear sexual, such as an erection or vaginal lubrication

### COMMON SEXUAL PLAY ACTIVITIES AT THIS STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT

- Learn about bodies, including the genitals, through touch
- Experience genital sensations and pleasure

### TIPS FOR FACILITATING HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

- Name body parts, including genitals, using correct terminology
- Model “comfortable” touch (e.g., hugs that are not forced upon the child)
- Talk about boundaries as the opportunity arises (e.g., during diapering and bath time tell children that genitals are “private parts” that are “off-limits” to others)

## HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

### Toddler & Preschool Years

**AGES 2  
TO 5**

- Develop language to describe their genitalia; enjoy learning about and talking about body parts and functions
- Clearly know the difference between males and females; know their own gender ; learn female and male roles by observing others
- Become very curious about own bodies, and the differences between girls and boys
- Learn words related to sex and attempt to use them in conversations
- Find adult bathroom activities very interesting
- May show curiosity about adult genitalia (e.g., may try to see Mommy or Daddy nude; may ask questions about parent genitals while co-bathing)
- Display no inhibitions about nudity
- May know basics of human reproduction (e.g., babies grow inside mommy’s middle); may ask questions about pregnancy and birth

### COMMON SEXUAL PLAY ACTIVITIES AT THIS STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT

- Explore self and others' genitals with same-age peers
- Play house, doctor, and other body exploration activities (imitative)
- Touch or rub own genitals (masturbate-random)

### POTENTIALLY UNHEALTHY BEHAVIOR

- Speaking in detail about adult-like sexual acts
- Use of explicit sexual language
- Adult-like sexual contact with adults or other children
- May insert objects into genitals

### TIPS FOR FACILITATING HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

- Encourage children to use correct terminology to describe their bodies, and to identify their “private parts”
- Model the importance of privacy during bathing and toileting
- Give child permission to be private about his or her own nudity
- Acknowledge that touching oneself feels good, is OK, and may be done in private
- Teach children to respect other people’s bodies, boundaries, and privacy
- Teach children the difference between comfortable/appropriate touch and uncomfortable/inappropriate touch
- Model “comfortable” touch, and respect for children’s feelings by not forcing them to have physical contact (e.g., no forced hugs or kisses, no wrestling or rough play if they protest)
- Use “teachable moments” to educate children in the *fundamentals* (give simple, direct answers to questions)

<sup>1</sup> Please note that all children develop at their own pace--growth, development and maturation may vary from these indicators and still fall within the range of normal human development. Reassure teens that it’s normal for teen bodies to grow and change at different rates, and that they are not “weird” if their bodies change in different ways from their friends. If you have questions about your child’s development, please consult your physician or other trusted professional.

<sup>2</sup> Sources:

*Puberty 101 for parents: At a glance* (2011). Retrieved from: <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/parents/puberty-101-parents-22999.htm>.

*Children’s sexual behavior and body safety: A guide for parents*. Grand Rapids, MI: The Children’s Assessment Center, (n.d.)

*Healthy sexual development* (2010). Charleston, SC: Darkness to Light. Retrieved from: [http://www.d2l.org/site/c.4d1CIJOKGcI5E/b.6292241/k.8331/Healthy\\_Sexual\\_Development.htm](http://www.d2l.org/site/c.4d1CIJOKGcI5E/b.6292241/k.8331/Healthy_Sexual_Development.htm).

*What is normal childhood sexual development?* Retrieved from [http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref\\_What\\_Normal/](http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_What_Normal/)

# CHILD SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT CHARTS

## HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

- Develop strong friendships with children of same sex
- Desire to be like their peers—to be included
- Engage in name calling and teasing
- React to stories they hear in the media (AIDS, abuse, violence)
- Gender identity solidifies and stabilizes (understand physical, behavioral, and emotional distinctions between males and females)

- May understand differences in sexual orientation of others
- Display basic understanding of puberty (some children, especially girls, may show early signs of puberty by age 8)
- Display basic understanding of human reproduction
- Exhibit increasing modesty and interest in privacy in bathroom and dressing activities as mastery of fine motor skills and responsibility for personal hygiene develop

## COMMON SEXUAL PLAY ACTIVITIES AT THIS STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT

- Continue body exploration activities
- Begin or continue to touch own genitals (masturbate-specific) in private
- Tell "dirty jokes"; write or draw pictures about sex terminology or genitals

- Exhibit kissing, putting arm around shoulders, hand holding with peers
- Mimic dating or romantic relationships with dolls or other children
- May engage in consensual genital exploration with same age (and often, same sex) peers

## POTENTIALLY UNHEALTHY BEHAVIOR

- Adult-like sexual interactions
- Overtly sexual and/or specific language or discussion about mature sexual acts

- Public masturbation
- Use of Internet chat rooms; accessing or viewing pornography

## TIPS FOR FACILITATING HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

- Respect child's need for privacy
- Reinforce child's need to respect other people's bodies, boundaries, and need for privacy
- Talk with children about what is and is not appropriate during peer interactions
- Talk with children about bodily responses, especially those that are precursors to sexual response (e.g., "it feels good to touch one's body")
- Model healthy, intimate adult relationships characterized by effective communication and respect for others' bodies, boundaries, and privacy
- Parents may find the use of anatomically correct dolls or pictures helpful to aid in teaching children more specific information about body parts that boys' and girls' have that are the same and body parts that are different.

- Teach children about male and female puberty (by 7-8 years old)
- Use everyday "teachable moments" to inform children about sexuality and the mechanics of reproduction (i.e., children should know how adults' body parts come together during intercourse and how babies are conceived, grow, and are born, by no later than age 9)<sup>3</sup>
- Introduce children to additional words such as womb, eggs, and sperm
- ***\*It's important to remember that research has shown that children whose parents talk with them about sexuality are less likely to become sexually active at an early age.\****
- After answering children's questions, gauge their comprehension by asking follow-up questions, such as: "What do you think? Did that answer your question? Do you have any other questions?" This enables parents to gain additional insight into what children really want to know and what they may be ready to learn.

Middle  
Childhood

AGES 5  
TO 8

<sup>3</sup> There are many good children's books available that parents can use to aid in teaching the basics of sexual interaction and human reproduction. Ask a librarian, pastor, or respected youth leader if you need help locating a book that provides accurate information in the context of your family values, beliefs, and traditions.

# CHILD SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT CHARTS

## HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

**All Children** - With the onset of puberty<sup>4</sup>, children typically experience the following changes in body, thought and mood, but not necessarily at the same pace:

- Grow more modest and protective of privacy
- Become more aware of sexuality; develop romantic feelings toward the opposite sex and/or the same sex
- Interest in own organs and functions
- Increased height and weight
- Changes in body shape and distribution of fat and muscle (e.g., wider hips for girls; broader shoulders for boys)
- Appearance of pubic and underarm hair
- Changes to sweat and oil glands-- possibly leading to body odor, pimples
- Voices deepen
- Value same sex friendships
- Try to be like friends and classmates; do not want to be different, left out, or "abnormal"
- Curious about the bodies of peers; look at others' sex organs to compare to their own
- Experience increased sexual feelings and fantasies
- Talk about sex with same-sex peer

**Gender Specific:** Boys and girls develop differently during puberty in the following ways:

**Boys:**

- Testicles grow larger
- Breasts may become larger or more feminine for awhile (gynecomastia)
- Facial and/or chest hair may begin to appear

**Girls:**

- Breasts begin to develop
- Vaginal discharge in the weeks before menstruation begins
- May begin menstruating (typically between ages 10 and 16)

## COMMON SEXUAL PLAY ACTIVITIES AT THIS STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT

- Touch others' genitals (infrequent)
- Exhibitionistic behavior
- Look at pictures in books/magazines (not pornography); write letters and poems about sexual activity
- Interest in kissing or dating
- Dry humping
- May masturbate to orgasm
- May face decisions about sexual activities

## POTENTIALLY UNHEALTHY BEHAVIOR

- Adult-like sexual interactions
- Overtly sexual and/or specific language or discussion about mature sexual acts
- Use of Internet chat rooms; accessing, viewing, or downloading pornography
- Use of pornography during masturbation
- Desire to wear sexualized styles of clothing or makeup
- Use of phone or computer to send pictures of self or peers not fully dressed (illegal activity)
- Use of phone or computer to exchange sexually explicit messages with others ("sexting") or to bully others
- Romantic attention from older teens; pre-teen dating
- Substance misuse (tobacco, alcohol or other drug use)

## TIPS FOR FACILITATING HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

- Respect tween's need for body privacy, but set limits on various other privacy issues; e.g., computer and cell phone use must be monitored/supervised to ensure appropriate use
- Model healthy, intimate adult relationships and responsible use of alcohol and prescription drugs; lock alcohol and all medications in a safe location inaccessible to all children, tweens and teens
- Talk with children about appropriate behavior during peer interactions; including discussions about bullying and other unhealthy and abusive relationships; "Power & Control in Dating Relationships" and "Equality for Teens" power and control wheel resources are available online and may help parents in facilitating these discussions.
- Supervise and monitor tweens; make sure friends' parents know and will respect your family's rules and limits, and will monitor and supervise tweens' activities
- Communicate clearly and directly about family values, beliefs and traditions surrounding dating, mating, substance misuse, curfews, and other issues of importance to your family: research suggests that teens who wait until age 16 for one-on-one (as opposed to group) dating, are less likely to have sex, marry, and drop out of school than those who begin one-on-one dating earlier.<sup>5</sup>
- Teach children about risks of sexual activity, including physical and emotional risks: teen dating relationships are a major source of emotional distress, and a leading cause of major depressive episodes in teens.<sup>6</sup>
- Brainstorm together with tweens the characteristics of a "true friend."
- Role play situations tweens will likely face in middle school, such as being encouraged to smoke, drink, or bully another child; help tweens problem-solve for tough situations

Late  
Childhood/  
Tweens  
AGES 9  
TO 12

<sup>4</sup> Puberty may begin sooner or later in individual children. Generally girls begin puberty earlier than boys: some as young as age 8; others don't begin these changes until age 14. Boys' bodies typically start changing between the ages of 10 and 12. Most of the changes of puberty are complete before a person is age 16, but may continue throughout the teen years.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Parker, Wayne. (n.d.). *Talking to your teenagers about dating*. Retrieved from: [http://fatherhood.about.com/od/dadsandteens/a/teen\\_dating.htm](http://fatherhood.about.com/od/dadsandteens/a/teen_dating.htm)

<sup>6</sup> Davies & Windel, 2000; Collins, 2003.

## HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

### All Teens:

- Continue and complete the changes of puberty
- Peer relationships with both genders become more and more important
- Value independence and explore ways in which they are unique and different from family members
- Desire to "try on" different styles, personalities, ways of expressing themselves
- Progressively developing impulse control (develops along with brain development through the 20's)

### Gender Specific:

#### Boys:

- Facial and/or chest hair may begin or increase in growth
- Penis grows larger and erections occur more frequently
- Spontaneous erections occur, even when a boy is not thinking about sex (typically lasting only a few minutes)
- Begin producing semen and may experience ejaculations during masturbation and/or during sleep (nocturnal emissions/wet dreams)

- Vacillate between desire for independence and need for ongoing parental help, support, and stability
- Strong emotional highs and lows
- Progressively developing confidence in social situations
- Progressively developing ability to reason, foresee consequences of actions, question others values and decisions
- Experience increased sexual feelings and want physical closeness with a partner

#### Girls:

- Vagina starts to lubricate when aroused
- Begin having erotic dreams

## COMMON SEXUAL PLAY ACTIVITIES AT THIS STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT

- Choose romantic relationships over close friendships; want to date
- Masturbation becomes more sexual; fantasize about romantic and/or sexual scenarios
- Fall in love
- Face strong peer pressure and decisions about sexual and other high-risk activities
- Touching others' genitals may occur more frequently and purposefully
- Experiment with kissing and touching that may include oral sex and intercourse

## POTENTIALLY UNHEALTHY BEHAVIOR

- Wearing overly sexualized styles of clothing or makeup
- Teen sexual interactions with others
- Use of Internet chat rooms; accessing, viewing, or downloading pornography
- Use of pornography during masturbation
- Romantic attention from older teens or adults
- Use of phone or computer to send pictures of self or peers not fully dressed (illegal activity), or to exchange sexually explicit messages with others ("sexting") or to bully others
- Substance misuse (tobacco, alcohol or other drug use); gambling
- Abusive or violent interactions in relationships with others

## TIPS FOR FACILITATING HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

- Continue to set limits on various privacy issues, relaxing these only as older teens demonstrate increased maturity.
- Consider starting regular family meetings, which might include agenda items such as: *affirmations* (time for all family members in turn to tell other members positive qualities or behaviors observed in them since the last meeting); *concerns* (time for members one at a time to communicate matters and issues that are causing problems between them—no interrupting others!); *calendar* (time for members to communicate activities, events and plans with which other family members may need to coordinate); *needs and expectations* (time to communicate other needs for support, cooperation, time and/or attention); family members may consider taking turns facilitating/leading family meetings—even young children can do this well after participating in several meetings. Research indicates that involving youth in family and community decision making and activities imparts protective factors such as internal locus of control and increased sense of self-efficacy.<sup>7</sup>
- Continue to supervise and monitor teens; make sure friends' parents know and will respect your family's rules and limits, and will monitor and supervise teen activities
- Talk about family values, beliefs and traditions, how these evolved in your family, and why they are important to you; ask teens what they value and believe, and what family traditions they think they will carry with them as adults.
- Talk about teen sexual and other high-risk activities (e.g., underage drinking and other substance misuse, gambling, online chat), and clearly communicate your family values and expectations for teens' behavior
- Ask teens their hopes and dreams for high school and beyond; as they set goals for themselves, help them identify resources and brainstorm possible actions they might take to make their dreams come true; talk about obstacles they might face and possible ways around them.

Teens  
AGES 13  
TO 18

<sup>7</sup> Werner, 1993; Werner, 2001; Benard, 2004.