

Normal Developmental Behaviors Related to Sexuality

Birth to AGE 4

- Explore body parts, including genitals. (Begin exploring genitals between 6-10 months.)
- Begin to develop attitudes toward their own bodies.
- Experience genital pleasure (from birth boys have erections and girls lubricate vaginally).
- Learn expected behaviors for boys and girls.

AGES 3-4

- Become aware of and very curious about gender/body differences.
- Masturbate unless taught not to do so.
- Play house, doctor or explore other forms of sex play with friends and siblings.
- Have fun with bathroom humor.
- Mimic adult sexual behavior.
- Begin to repeat curse words.
- Are curious about their own origins: "Where did I come from?"

AGES 5-8

- Continue sex play and masturbation.
- Become very curious about pregnancy and birth.
- Have strong same sex friends. Girls and boys learn different styles of communicating. Girls tend to form close and intimate friendships with one or two other girls. Boys usually play in larger groups; their play is rougher and more oriented around mutual interests in activities.
- Show strong interest in male/female roles that are often stereotyped, regardless of parent's approach to childbearing.
- Have a new awareness of authority figures.
Teachers may be seen as knowing more than parents.
- Compare their own situations with those of peers; complain about lack of fairness.
- Begin to conform to peer's style of dress and speech.
- Engage in name calling and teasing.

(over)

AGES 9-12

- Enter puberty, especially girls. Early pubertal development is perceived positively by most boys but negatively by many girls.
- Become more modest and desire privacy.
- Experience emotional ups and downs.
- Develop romantic crushes on friends, older teens, music and TV idols or sometimes teachers and counselors.
- Continue to attach importance of same sex friends.
- Feel awkward and wonder “Am I normal?”
- Be strongly influenced by peer group, but parents remain the major source of values.
- Continue to learn society’s expectations and appropriate behavior for boys and girls.
- Masturbate to orgasms.
- Begin to enter the mysteries of the adult world by using sexual language and enjoying romantic and sexual fantasies.
- Face decisions about sex and drugs.

Ages 13-17

- Complete puberty and the physical transition from childhood to adulthood.
Reaching their adult height.
- Seek increased power over own lives and increasing independence.
Build skills to become self-sufficient.
- Understand their own feelings and have the ability to analyze why they feel a certain way.
- Attain cognitive maturity – the ability to make decision based on knowledge of options and their consequences.
- Continue to be influenced by peers (but remembering that parental influence is still #1).
- Understand they are sexual and understand the options and consequences of sexual expression.
- Recognize the components of healthy versus unhealthy relationships.
- Recognize the role of media in influencing their views about sexuality and body image for both males and females.
- Choose to express their sexuality in ways that may or may not include sexual intercourse.
- Have the capacity to learn about intimate, loving and long term relationships.