

SESSION 4

Pondering Puberty

Objectives

1. Participants will be able to identify the physical changes of puberty that occur for both males and females.
2. Participants will be able to accept their own, and others', natural and normal rate of progression through puberty.
3. Participants will be able to differentiate between hygiene practices that help maintain a healthy body and those that are personal grooming decisions.

Key Questions

1. Which physical changes of puberty does everyone (both boys and girls) experience? Which changes happen only for boys? Which changes happen only for girls?
2. Is there a "right way" to go through puberty? What makes you think that?
3. What is the most important piece of advice you think all adolescents need to hear about taking care of their bodies while going through puberty?

Takeaway

Puberty is a process of physical changes that begins during adolescence when the pituitary gland begins releasing hormones (chemical messages) that signal other parts of the body to grow and change. Puberty usually begins somewhere between 9 and 15 years of age and lasts for several years. By the end of puberty, the body is capable of reproduction (making a baby) and will look more like an adult body than a child's body. Though everyone goes through the same process, there is no one right way to go through puberty. Everyone begins puberty when their brain and body are ready and moves through the process of puberty at their own pace. At the same time young people are going through puberty, they often experience emotional reactions to the physical changes and concerns about how their bodies look. They can become more responsible for their personal hygiene and personal grooming practices.

Vocabulary

Female

Breasts
Menstruation
Ovulation
Vagina
Vaginal discharge

Male

Ejaculate
Erection
Penis
Semen
Sperm
Testicle(s)

All

Acne (pimples)
Antiperspirant
Areola
Deodorant
Genital(s)
Hormone(s)

Hygiene

Masturbation
Nipple
Pituitary gland
Puberty
Pubic hair
Reproduction

Secondary sex characteristics

Urethra

Simon Says (Whole group, 5 minutes)

Purpose: Build connectedness among participants with a medium-risk activity that requires cross-lateral full body movement.

Materials: None



Do

1. Stand facing the participants and ask participants to stand up facing you.
2. Using the Simon Says Suggestions below, call out instructions one at a time by saying, for example, "Simon says hop on your left foot," after which, participants hop on their left foot. You can also call out instructions without saying "Simon says..." before giving the instruction, saying, for example, "Hop on your left foot." If you call out an instruction without saying "Simon says..." participants do not follow the instruction.

Simon Says Suggestions

1. Hop on your left foot.
2. Pat your head with your left hand and rub your stomach with your right hand.
3. Wiggle your ears without using your hands.
4. Raise your right eyebrow.
5. Curl or roll your tongue.
6. Touch your left elbow to your lips; switch and touch your right elbow to your lips.

Best Practice:

Participants will likely be accustomed to being "out" if they followed an instruction that did not begin with "Simon Says." Because the purpose of this activity is to build connectedness and encourage cross-lateral movements that are good for brain development (not competition), allow participants three "strikes" before they are out of the game.

Ask

Which of the tasks were difficult or impossible for you to do?

What would it take for you to be able to do the tasks that you could not do?

Was it frustrating for you when you couldn't do one of the tasks? What would have made it less frustrating?

Say

Today's session will focus on how some of the changes happening in your brain are responsible for the physical changes of going through puberty.

Puberty is a process of physical changes that begins during adolescence and lasts for several years.

By the end of puberty, your body will be capable of reproduction and will look more adult-like than child-like.

In the next activity, we will discover some of the physical changes of puberty that occur for males, for females, and for both.

Fishing for Physical Changes of Puberty (Small groups, 20–25 minutes)

Purpose: Increase competence in identifying and discussing physical changes of puberty that occur for males, for females, and for both sexes.

Materials for each small group: One set of Fishing for Physical Changes Cards, Fishing for Physical Changes Mat, Enough space to play the game



Do

1. Provide each small group with a set of Fishing for Physical Changes Cards, one Magnificent Male Mat, one Fantastic Female Mat, and one Extraordinarily Everyone Mat and ask groups to place the Fishing for Physical Changes Cards face down and the three mats face up.
2. One at a time, participants “fish” for a card and place it on the mat they think is the correct place for the card to go. If another participant disagrees with where the card was placed, he or she should respectfully explain why it is in the wrong place and where it should go.
3. When all groups have “fished” all cards, reveal the correct placement of each card using the Fishing for Physical Changes Instructor Cheat Sheet and ask groups to move their cards around as needed until they are all correct.

Ask

What is happening in your brain that causes the physical changes of puberty to begin?

Which physical changes of puberty from this activity do males and females have in common? Which changes happen only for females? Which changes happen only for males?

Why do you think there are so many similarities in the physical changes of puberty that males and females experience?

Best Practice:

Provide a stuffed animal in the shape of a fish or a beanbag to each group for participants to toss into the air. They can pick up the card it lands on. Alternatively, put a small self-adhesive magnet on the back of each card and create a “fishing pole” for each group with a long stick and a long piece of string with a magnet tied to the end that participants can use to pick up cards.

Say

Puberty is something that everyone experiences, even if we do not all experience it at the same time or in exactly the same way.

It is very common for young people to experience changes in their emotions at the same they are going through the physical changes of puberty.

In the next activity, we will explore some of the feelings young people might experience as they go through puberty.

Fishing for Physical Changes

INSTRUCTOR CHEAT SHEET

Magnificent Male

1. Shoulders begin to grow wider.

As boys progress through puberty, their shoulders will get wider, and if they are active, their chest and arm muscles will get bigger and become more defined. This is something that happens naturally and cannot be helped by lifting weights. In fact, if you haven't started puberty yet, lifting weights will tone your muscles, but it won't help them get any bigger.

2. Voice begins to get much deeper.

The vocal chords are like strings on an instrument. When you run a bow across the strings or pluck them with your finger, they make different notes depending on their size. The thicker strings make lower notes than the thinner strings. Air pushing past the vocal chords is very similar. People with thicker vocal chords have lower voices. Everyone's vocal chords get thicker during puberty (so even girls will notice their voices getting a little bit deeper), but on average, boys' vocal chords grow thicker than girls' do. Some boys' voices crack during puberty because the vocal chords do not grow at an equal rate. Sometimes one side is thinner than the other, and when air pushes past the thin side of the vocal chord, the voice cracks a little bit.

3. Mustache and beard (facial hair) begin to grow.

The amount of hair people grow on their face is genetic (i.e., it is an inherited trait from their biological family). While males, on average, grow more facial hair than females, it is common for females to experience new hair on the upper lip, eyebrows, or side of the face. This is perfectly normal, but if it is bothersome, it can help to talk to a trusted adult about how you are feeling.

4. Penis and testicles begin to grow.

The new hormones released by the pituitary gland during puberty trigger the testicles to begin producing other hormones that regulate the sexual and reproductive system, including the penis and testicles. By the time you are finished with puberty, you will have the penis and testicles that your body was meant to have. Boys often notice that they begin to have more spontaneous erections as they begin to go through puberty. Sometimes these are in response to something sexual, other times they are not. Either way, they are perfectly normal (even if they are a little annoying).

Fishing for Physical Changes

INSTRUCTOR CHEAT SHEET

Fantastic Female

1. Hips begin to grow wider.

The pelvic bones spread wider apart and begin to form a "bowl" shape. This new shape will support a pregnancy if the individual ever decides to have a child.

2. Breasts begin to develop.

For many girls, breast development is one of the first visible signs of puberty. Breasts grow in stages, beginning with breast buds, which are small, raised bumps behind the nipple. The breasts will continue to grow, and the nipple and areola (the area surrounding the nipple) will get bigger and often change color. Often, breasts do not grow at the same rate, and one will be bigger than the other. Many grown women find that their breasts are not exactly the same size or shape. Many males experience soreness around their nipples and some swelling of their breasts tissue during puberty. This is perfectly normal and will usually go away after some time.

Fishing for Physical Changes

INSTRUCTOR CHEAT SHEET

Extraordinary Everybody

1. Begin to grow taller quickly (growth spurt).

Adolescents tend to grow very quickly in a short amount of time. This can cause pain in the joints, especially in the hips, knees, ankles, elbows, and wrists. Sometimes these are called “growing pains,” and they’re completely normal. The body does a lot of its growing overnight, so it’s important to get enough sleep. All adolescents will grow taller during puberty, but a person’s height in adulthood is determined by genetics (an inherited trait from his or her biological family). Girls usually begin puberty a little earlier than boys, so it’s not uncommon for the girls to be taller than the boys for a few years. But, eventually, the boys will catch up.

2. Skin and hair become oilier.

Due to an increase in hormones released primarily by the ovaries in females and the testicles in males, the skin and hair often become oilier than they were during childhood. The oiliest parts of the skin are often the forehead, the chin, and the sides of the nose. This increase in oil production can cause an increase in acne and a need to shampoo hair more often.

3. Begin to have acne (pimples).

Acne is a very common skin condition experienced by many adolescents (and some adults) that is the result of pores (the tiny holes in the skin that hair grows out of) getting clogged with oil, dead skin cells, germs, and bacteria. When the pores get clogged, whiteheads, blackheads, and small red infections called pimples can form. Adolescents are particularly prone to acne, because their skin and hair are naturally producing more oil than they did when they were younger. Washing your face with a mild soap and water, keeping your hands away from your face, and using a face cream specifically designed to reduce acne can help. Acne most often appears on the face, but it can appear on the neck, chest, shoulders, and back as well.

4. Pubic hair begins to grow.

Pubic hair grows around the base of the genitals and often on the upper thighs, perineum, and anus. When pubic hair first begins to grow it is often long, thin, and straight, but it will become coarser and curlier as more grows in. Sometimes pubic hair is the same color as the hair on a person’s head; sometimes it is different.

5. Underarm and other body hair begin to grow.

Underarm hair grows in the armpit. When underarm hair begins to grow, it is often long, thin, and straight, but it will often become coarser and sometimes curlier as more grows in. Other body hair may grow on the chest or around the areola, on the belly, on the back, on the buttocks, and on the arms, legs, hands, or feet.

6. Begin to sweat more.

Everyone sweats when it is hot, but during puberty another group of sweat glands begin to produce sweat in reaction to feeling stressed out, nervous, upset, or sexually aroused. This kind of sweat can have a strong odor when it mixes with bacteria on the skin or clothing.

7. Body odor changes.

During puberty, the sweat glands under the arms and around the genitals begin to produce a sweat that smells different than your sweat smelled when you were younger. This sweat may have an odor you find unpleasant, especially when it mixes with bacteria on your skin and clothing. Wearing clean clothes, washing your underarms and genitals with a mild soap and water, and putting antiperspirant/deodorant on clean, dry skin can help keep you smelling nice.

8. Pituitary gland releases new hormones.

The pituitary gland releases hormones throughout the life cycle that help regulate different bodily functions like body temperature and metabolism (how your body converts food into energy). But, the moment that puberty begins is when the pituitary gland begins to release new hormones that trigger the sexual and reproductive systems to “turn on” and stimulate the development of the secondary sex characteristics.



Shoulders begin to grow wider



Voice begins to get much deeper



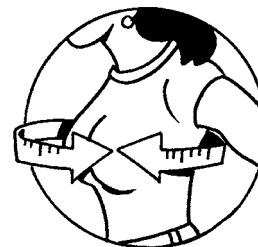
Mustache and beard (facial hair) begin to grow



Penis and testicles begin to grow



Hips begin to grow wider



Breasts begin to develop



Begin to grow taller quickly (growth spurt)



Skin becomes oilier



Hair becomes oilier



Begin to have acne (pimples)



Pubic hair begins to grow



Underarm and other body hair begins to grow



Begin to sweat more



Body odor may become unpleasant



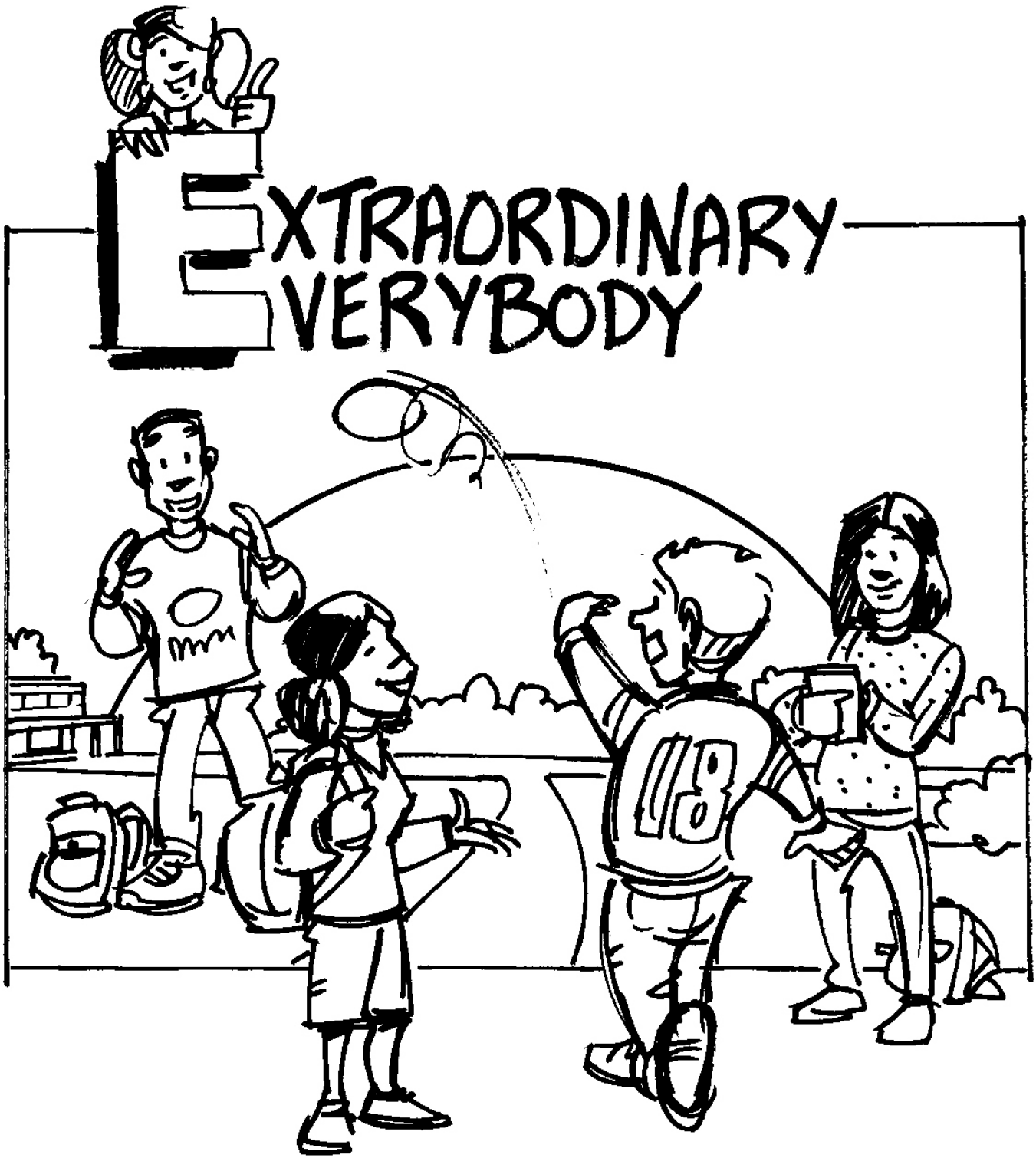
Pituitary gland releases new hormones

MAGNIFICENT ♂ MALE



FANTASTIC ♀ FEMALE





Puberty Walk (Whole group, 10–15 minutes)

Purpose: Build connectedness among participants with a medium-risk activity that validates and normalizes the feelings young people experience when they go through puberty.

Materials: None



Do

1. Ask all participants to stand in a group on one side of the room.
2. Using the Puberty Walk Order below, tap participants lightly on their shoulders and ask them to walk slowly and silently to the other side of the room, turn around, and face the group.

Puberty Walk Order

1. One participant.
2. A few participants, one at a time in slow succession.
3. A group of two or three in quick succession.
4. A large group all at the same time.
5. A group of two or three in quick succession.
6. One at a time until the last participant is left.
7. Last participant after everyone else is on the other side.

Best Practice:

Be mindful of which participants you choose to walk across the room by themselves, as this requires a higher level of social risk taking.

Ask

How did it feel to be the first one to go to the other side? How did it feel when other people joined you on the other side?

How did it feel to be a part of the group still waiting, while the first person walked to the other side?

How did it feel to wait until the end to walk to the other side of the room? How did it feel to finally get to walk to the other side after waiting?

Are there any positives to being one of the first in your age group to begin to go through puberty? What are they? Are there any negatives? What are they? What about for being one of the last in your age group to begin going through puberty?

How do you think most of your peers are feeling about going through puberty?

Say

There is no right or wrong way to go through puberty.

When your brain and body are ready, your pituitary gland will begin releasing a chemical message that tells other parts of your body to start changing.

Your brain knows what is best for you, even if it seems like it is happening way too early or way too late.

Going through puberty also means becoming more responsible for taking care of your changing body.

In the next activity, we will explore issues of health and hygiene related to going through puberty.

Forced Choice: Fact or Fishy? (Whole group, 10–15 minutes)

Purpose: Increase competence regarding managing new hygiene practices that often become more common during puberty.

Materials: FACT sign, FISHY sign



Do

1. As you read each statement from the Forced Choice: Fact or Fishy Instructor Cheat Sheet, ask participants to move to the sign that best matches how they feel about the statement: “Fact” if they believe that the statement is true for everyone; “Fishy” if they believe the statement is not true for everyone.
2. After reading each statement, reveal the answer and provide a brief explanation.

Best Practice:

Forced choice activities are helpful to move concrete thought to more abstract thought, so it is best not to allow participants to stand in the middle of the room. The idea is to “force” them to choose one or the other, so that they have to consider their personal opinions and attitudes on each topic.

Ask

Do you think it is important to keep your body clean and healthy during puberty? Why do you think that?

What are the benefits of taking care of your body during puberty?

Does everyone have to follow the same hygiene practices? Why do you think that? How might some people’s hygiene practices be different than others?

Are there some hygiene practices that are more about personal grooming but do not necessarily contribute to a healthy body? What are they?

What is the most important piece of advice you think all adolescents need to hear about taking care of their bodies during puberty?

Say

Many of the hygiene practices we explored in this activity are about personal grooming habits (i.e., personal choices people make about how to maintain their bodies), which do not necessarily contribute to a healthy body.

Going through puberty can feel exciting, scary, overwhelming, or something in between. If you are unsure of something or are feeling overwhelmed by the experience, it can help to talk to a trusted adult.

Extension Activity:

Facilitate a large group discussion about talking to peers respectfully about personal hygiene habits, or create a list of respectful ways to tell a friend you are concerned about his or her poor personal hygiene.

Forced Choice: Fact or Fishy

INSTRUCTOR CHEAT SHEET

1. Eating junk food gives you pimples.

FISHY

Acne (pimples) is caused by oil, dirt, dead skin cells, and bacteria getting trapped in the pores of the skin and not by the food you eat. The hair and skin produce more oil during puberty, which is why adolescents are prone to acne. But, if you are eating greasy food, be sure to keep your hands away from your face so that you don't add to the oil your skin is already producing.

2. For fresh breath and healthy gums, floss your teeth every day.

FACT

Brushing your teeth using toothpaste and a soft toothbrush twice a day is an important part of keeping your teeth and gums healthy, but flossing is also really important. Little pieces of food get stuck in between your teeth, and sometimes brushing alone doesn't get them out. Those little pieces of food can turn into plaque, and when too much plaque builds up, it can harm your gums and cause bad breath.

3. All girls should start shaving their legs in their teens.

FISHY

People have different ideas about women shaving or removing leg hair. Removing the hair on your legs, or any other part of the body, does not have any health benefit (other than possibly helping you feel good about your body) and is a matter of personal grooming.

4. Deodorant works best if it is put on clean, dry skin.

FACT

Putting deodorant on skin that is already sweaty and where the sweat has already mixed with bacteria won't do much to shield body odor. If you are already sweaty, try to wash your underarms with mild soap and water, dry them completely, and then put deodorant on.

5. When girls start going through puberty, they should start washing inside the vagina.

FISHY

During puberty the sweat glands around the genitals begin to produce sweat that has a different odor than it did when you were younger, and you might notice a different odor. This odor is natural and normal and

nothing to worry about. There is no need to clean inside the vagina. In fact, cleaning the inside of the vagina can lead to infection. You just need to wash the genitals with a mild soap and water when you bathe.

6. Some adolescents like to bathe more often than they did when they were younger.

FACT

Body odor changes during puberty, and many people find the new odor unpleasant. Bathing every day or every other day helps keep you smelling nice and will wash away the excess oil your skin and hair are producing. Depending on your hairstyle, you may find you need to shampoo your hair every day to keep it from getting too oily, just a few days a week, or whenever you go to the salon to have your hair done.

7. Underarm sweat smells different after you begin puberty than it did when you were younger.

FACT

During puberty, the sweat glands in the underarms and around the genitals begin to produce sweat that smells differently than it did when you were younger, and these sweat glands will begin to produce more sweat than they used to. This is why you may notice new odors coming from those parts of your body that you did not notice before. It's nothing that a little soap and water can't fix.

8. Boys who have more facial hair are manlier.

FISHY

Getting facial hair is an exciting experience for most boys. The amount of facial hair each individual grows is determined by genetics (an inherited trait from your biological family) and has nothing to do with how masculine or manly a boy is (or if he is sexually active or not). Different religions and cultures have different ideas about what should be done with facial hair on men. Whether to keep the facial hair you have or shave it off is a matter of personal choice.

Fascinating Facts:

PHYSICAL CHANGES OF PUBERTY

Puberty is a process of physical changes that all human beings go through. The process begins during adolescence and lasts for several years. At the end of puberty, you are able to reproduce (make a baby), and your body will look more like an adult body than a kid body.

Puberty begins when the pituitary gland, a pea-sized part of the brain, begins releasing hormones that trigger growth and changes in other parts of the body.

Everyone experiences the changes of puberty differently. Some start puberty early, some later. Some experience all the changes of puberty in just a few years, and some will take a bit longer. It can take up to age 20 before all of the changes of puberty take place.

No matter when puberty begins or ends, everyone goes through the same changes. There is no one “right way” to go through puberty. Each individual goes through puberty at his or her own pace.

Girls usually start puberty a little earlier than boys, but eventually boys catch up.

It is normal to feel awkward, confused, or unsure about going through puberty, and it’s normal to be excited and eager for puberty to start. No matter how you are feeling about puberty, you can be sure that someone else is feeling the same way.

If you have questions about puberty, it can be helpful to talk to an adult you trust.

Common physical changes of puberty for MALES include:

- Shoulders get wider, and muscles begin to get longer and leaner.
- Mustache and beard (facial hair) begin to grow.
- Voice begins to get much deeper.

Common physical changes of puberty for FEMALES include:

- Hips begin to grow wider.
- Breasts begin to develop.

Common physical changes of puberty for BOTH FEMALES and MALES include:

- Begin to grow taller quickly (growth spurts).
- Skin becomes oilier.
- Hair becomes oilier.
- Begin to have acne (pimples).
- Pubic hair begins to grow.
- Underarm hair begins to grow.
- May begin to sweat more often.
- Body odor may become unpleasant.
- Pituitary gland releases new hormones.
- Many males experience soreness around their nipples and some swelling of their breast tissue during puberty. This is perfectly normal and will usually go away after some time.
- Some females experience some facial hair as well. This is perfectly normal. If it bothers you, talk to a trusted adult about how you are feeling.

No matter when puberty begins or ends, everyone goes through the same changes. There is no one “right way” to go through puberty. Each individual goes through puberty at his or her own pace.

Physical Changes of Puberty Resources

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