

# Parent Guide



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## What is this resource and how do I use it?

The information in this guide is designed to help you think about the sorts of questions your child may have about puberty as well as to help you provide some honest, accurate and reassuring answers. Use the information as a starting point for a discussion with your child about how girls' bodies change as they grow.

## What skills does this practise?

Comprehension

Discussion

Self-Awareness

Self-Esteem

## Further Activity Ideas and Suggestions

If you want to discover more about puberty with your child, this [Period Education Resource Pack](#) is great for children. These [RSHE Puberty True or False Sorting Statements](#) can help clear up misconceptions around puberty, or build confidence with this [body image and self-esteem activity](#).

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# Parent and Carers' Guide to Talking about Puberty Changes in Girls

Puberty is a natural part of growing up yet for many parents and carers, it can be a daunting subject. Knowing when and how to talk to your child about puberty can be tricky, especially as children can mature physically and emotionally at different rates. The information in this guide is designed to help you think about the sorts of questions your child may have about puberty as well as to help you provide some honest, accurate and reassuring answers. Encourage your child to celebrate their body and to see puberty as a time full of opportunities to learn about all the amazing things their body will do on its journey into adulthood.



## What is puberty?

Puberty is the time when a child's body changes and develops as they start to grow from children into adults. Everyone goes through puberty; adults have already been through it and every young person will experience it at some point too. Puberty is a sign that your body is getting ready to reproduce (it is getting ready to be able to have a baby). Although this sounds like a big change, puberty doesn't happen overnight. Instead it's a gradual process that happens over several years, allowing your child plenty of time to adjust to the changes along the way.

## When is the right time to talk to my child about puberty?

Every child is different and only you know your child best. It's important to gauge your child's emotional maturity - their ability to understand and to be able to cope with the prospect of change when you explain puberty to them. It is also important to have conversations with your child about puberty changes in girls and boys, so they understand any similarities and differences.

Ideally, children should learn about puberty before it actually happens so that they aren't worried or concerned when their bodies start to change. Everyone is different, but most girls start puberty between the ages of 8 and 14. Although the changes our bodies go through during puberty are similar from person to person, not every girl experiences puberty in exactly the same way. Reassure your child that their body will start to change in the way it needs to when it is ready to do so.

## How should I talk to my child about puberty?

- Some families may be more open when talking about puberty while others may be more private. The important thing to remember is that it's nothing to be embarrassed or ashamed about. The more you normalise puberty, the more comfortable you and your child will feel about discussing it together. Underline the fact that puberty is something that every person goes through at some point in their lives.
- Finding a calm, quiet space at home may be a good way to initiate a discussion about puberty. It may be that you start with an open question, encouraging your child to tell you about any physical changes they may have noticed about their bodies or about how they are feeling emotionally. Alternatively, you may find that using this guide or having a book about puberty helps to start a conversation.
- Encourage your child to ask any questions and attempt to answer them as honestly as you can. That way, your child won't be tempted to find out about puberty from less accurate or reliable sources, such as the Internet or their peers. Reassure them that you are always there to help with any concerns, issues or anything they may want to know more about.
- You may wish to initiate a general discussion about puberty and the changes that happen to both male and female bodies during this time, or you may want to tailor your discussion to the child you are talking to. Whatever you and your family feel more comfortable with is the best fit.
- Try to use specific terminology when talking about puberty and different parts of the body, such as vagina and breasts. This makes things clearer and easier to understand as well as normalising vocabulary surrounding puberty.

## When will my child learn about puberty at school?

Although it can vary from school to school, most primary schools teach children about puberty in year 5 (ages 9 - 10) as part of the national curriculum for science, which states that pupils should be taught to '**describe the changes as humans develop to old age**'. This is often consolidated with age-appropriate learning as part of RSHE (Relationships, Sex and Health Education). These sessions may involve discussions about relationships, body confidence and emotional and physical changes.



## What are the main changes girls experience during puberty?

A girl's body undergoes many changes during puberty. During this time, the body produces lots of hormones - chemicals that help to start the changes they will experience during this time.

### Growth

During puberty, girls may start to grow faster. They may put on weight or become taller or curvier, especially around the hips and legs.

### Breast Development

Developing breasts is often one of the first signs of the start of puberty. 'Budding' breasts might feel quite tender as they start to grow. Sometimes one breast may develop quicker than the other breast, sometimes both breasts may grow fairly quickly or hardly at all. Every girl is different and how their bodies change and grow during this time will be just right for their particular body.

### Periods

Perhaps one of the biggest parts of puberty for a girl is the start of menstruation (periods). This may manifest itself as a few light spots of blood in their underwear or the blood could be heavier or darker in colour. Periods happen every month and can last between three and eight days. On the next page are some questions girls may ask about their periods.

### Moods

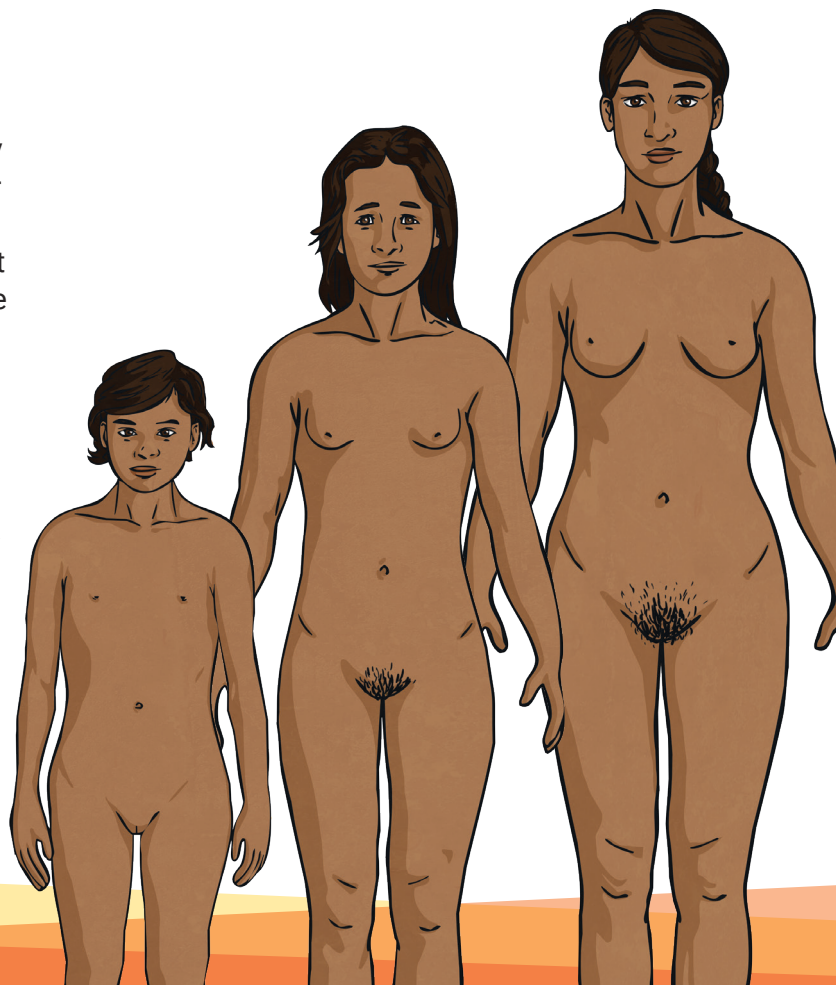
The hormones a girl's body produces at this time may intensify moods and emotions during puberty. Feelings of sadness, frustration, tiredness and anger are all normal during this time.

### Sweat and Oil

A girl's body produces new fluids during puberty. Sweat glands become bigger and more active so they may find that they sweat more. They may want to start using deodorant or antiperspirant when this happens. In addition, they may find their skin feels a bit oilier, which can cause spots and acne.

### Hair

Girls will start to grow pubic hair on their vulva and pubic mound (the space below their belly) during puberty. They may also start to grow hair under their armpits and notice that hair on their legs and arms grows thicker and darker during this time too.



## When do periods start?

Not everyone is the same and girls will experience their periods in different ways and at different ages. This is usually between the ages of 10 and 16, often around two years after a girl's breasts start to develop and around one year after getting a white vaginal discharge in their underwear.

However, girls can experience periods as young as eight so it's important to talk openly about periods as part of an ongoing dialogue, emphasising that they are a natural part of growing up. Perhaps you could use adverts for sanitary products as a way to open a conversation or buy some sanitary towels or tampons at the supermarket together.

## Why do periods happen?

Females are born with millions of tiny eggs inside their bodies - the cells needed to make a baby. During puberty, the ovaries start to release one egg a month. The egg arrives in the uterus, which prepares itself for the egg by building up the lining of the uterus walls. If the egg is not needed to make a baby, the uterus lining breaks down and the egg leaves the body along with a quantity of blood through the vagina. This is what is known as a period.

## What should be ready for the first period?

It's a good idea to have sanitary products - pads or tampons - ready at home in preparation for when the first period starts. It's also a good idea to encourage your child to carry some with them in their school bag or when they go and stay with a friend or relative. Explain how to use them and encourage them not to be embarrassed to ask a teacher or other trusted adult if they find themselves at school without a pad or tampon when their period starts.

## How long does a period last?

Every girl is different. It may take several months after starting before a girl's periods form a regular pattern but generally, periods happen every 28 to 30 days and last between three and seven days. Girls may experience period pain - a dull ache or cramp-like pain. Children should be reassured that although this may be uncomfortable, it is perfectly normal.

We hope you find the information on our website and resources useful. This resource is provided for informational and educational purposes only. It is intended to offer general information and should never be taken as medical advice. As medical information is situation specific and can change, we do not warrant that the information provided is correct. You and your child should not rely on the material included within this resource and we do not accept any responsibility if you or your child does.

Please note: this resource uses the term 'boy/boys' to refer to children who will go through male puberty and the term 'girl/girls' to refer to children who will go through female puberty.

This resource is designed to support learning about biological attributes. You should consider whether this content is appropriate for all children, especially children who have DSD/are intersex, or who are transgender.