

# Introduction to puberty

<b>Objective:</b>	Participants will describe some of the common external changes associated with puberty.
<b>Structure:</b>	Presentation by educator with large group discussion.
<b>Time:</b>	50 minutes.
<b>Materials:</b>	Blackboard or flipchart, "Introduction to puberty" handout.

## Procedure

1. **Introduce** the topic by stating that often these classes are called sex education classes. Ask: what have you heard about these classes? What topics do you think we will learn about in sex education classes? **OR** What topics are we going to discuss today?

Use their answers to get a feeling for how many participants know about the topic and observe their comfort level. Answers might be – growing, changes, bodies, puberty, sex...

2. Continue by **stating**:
  - We are going to talk about the bodies of boys and girls and the changes that happen to them as they grow from a child into an adult. There are 3 rapid periods of change in our bodies: conception to birth, birth to first year, and puberty.
  - The beginning of the period of growing and changing from a child to an adult is called puberty.
  - The time period that starts with puberty and ends with adulthood is called adolescence (being a teenager).
3. **Discuss** why it is important for a young person to talk to a person they trust whenever they encounter information that is confusing to them, or which they don't understand. Misinformation can lead to health problems, anxiety, and uncertainty. They need to know what is true and what is not.

**4. Talk** about their feelings using the following script:

I think that many of you know the differences but it is difficult to talk about them. Why is it difficult to talk about these changes?

- Feel embarrassed; never talked about it in class before.
- Not supposed to talk about it – especially with people of opposite sex.
- It is private.
- Difficult to discuss with adults around.
- Afraid someone will laugh if answer is wrong.

How do we act sometimes when we are embarrassed?

- Giggle, blush, act silly, cannot look anyone in the eyes, get very quiet, unable to ask questions. (Many participants will have acted in some of these ways already.)
- Many of us do find it difficult, even embarrassing, to talk about our bodies, and we behave in these ways.

**5. State** that today, young people have access to information about puberty and sexuality from a wide range of sources. Some sources provide accurate information in a sensitive and age appropriate way. Many sources provide inaccurate, confusing, or disturbing information. Many young people have unsupervised access to television, adult magazines, and sexually explicit videos and Internet sites.

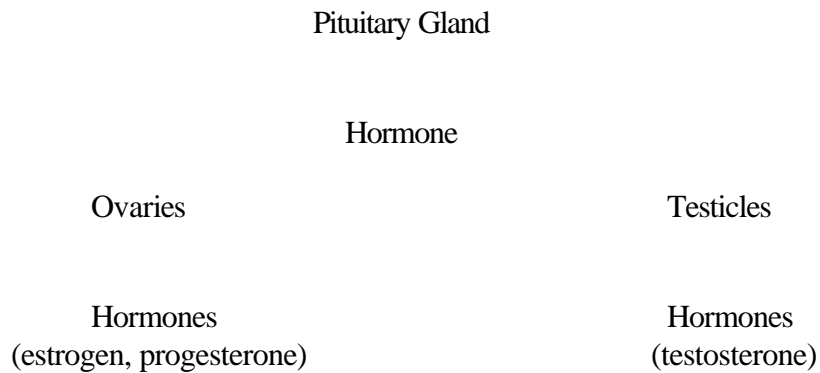
- **Write** the word “PUBERTY” in the centre of the board and draw a circle around it
- **Ask** participants to think of some of the places where young people learn about puberty, e.g. parents, brothers and sisters, other family members, TV, books, Internet, religious institutions.
- **Ask** which ones might be good sources of correct information? Why?
- **Ask** for 2-3 students to visit the school library to see what books there are on this topic. Have them report back.

6. **Distribute** the “Introduction to Puberty” handout. Instruct participants to answer the questions as you go over them.
7. **Define** puberty as the “stage of life in which the reproductive system matures, and secondary sex characteristics appear.”
8. **Ask** how does puberty happen? Draw the chart and make the following points:

Pituitary gland:

- Master gland in the centre of the brain
- Sends out chemical messages to all parts of the body through the blood stream
- “Messages” are in the form of substances called hormones
- Puberty begins because the pituitary gland sends out hormone messages to certain parts of the body to tell them to change.
- These hormone messages go to two special glands:
  - In girls – ovaries
  - In boys – testicles

The ovaries and testicles then begin to produce their own hormones, which go out into the blood stream and tell other parts of the body to change (drawing this chart on the black board during the discussion may be helpful). **ARROWS MISSING**



9. **Ask** how old are boys and girls when they go through puberty?

Girls change anytime between the ages of 9 and 16.

Boys change anytime between the ages of 10 and 16.

**Emphasize** that:

- Everyone changes at his/her very own rate.
- Some will begin to change much earlier or later than others, and that is normal for them.
- In general, girls begin to change a couple of years earlier than boys. (e.g. it is very normal for girls to be taller than boys for a while, especially during Grades 7 and 8.)

10. **Ask** what happens to your body during puberty? Instruct participants to:

Think of someone who has already gone through puberty.

How is he/she different from you? What changes have happened?

- List on blackboard changes that relate to puberty.
- Observe reactions of participants to your questions. May get a few superficial, non-threatening answers – e.g. taller, bigger, deeper voice, rounded hips, etc. They may be feeling too embarrassed to answer.

MALE

acne  
perspiration  
hair  
grow taller  
shoulders and chest broaden  
muscles  
voice deepens  
genitals grow larger

FEMALE

acne  
perspiration  
hair  
grow taller  
breasts develop  
hips widen  
voice deepens  
genitals grow larger and darker

- Note how many of these changes are common to both males and females.

11. When they have given you the main general changes, **point out** how it seemed easier for them to talk about acne, perspiration, and voices changing than testicles, hair, and breasts.

- Why? How is everyone feeling about discussing these topics?

or

- If participants are just too embarrassed to give you any answers, just stop making the list. Comment and discuss feelings.

12. Note the common external changes of puberty. Changes in the skin are often the first signs of puberty in boys and girls.

Ask for some examples (e.g. acne and perspiration).

## 1. Skin

### a) Acne

- At puberty and all during adolescence, glands secrete an increased amount of oil.
- Increased hormones are responsible for this change.
- Pores get clogged with oil and dirt.
- The blocked area can form a pimple.
- Everyone will get a few pimples.

Some people may require treatment by a doctor. BUT: Most people can reduce the severity by following these basic rules of hygiene:

- Wash face with unscented soap and water daily.
- Do not squeeze or pick pimples, as this can cause infection.
- Avoid creams and cosmetics that contain oil, and make sure all cosmetics are removed before going to bed.
- Eat a well balanced diet, and drink lots of water.
- Get lots of exercise and rest.
- Wash hair regularly and keep back from face.

## **b) Perspiration**

- At puberty, perspiration (sweating) increases.
- In combination with bacteria on the skin, an odour can result—sometimes called “body odour.”
- People perspire all the time – not just during physical activity.
- Underarms, groin area, palms of hands, and soles of feet tend to perspire more.

To combat perspiration, people can

- bathe or shower regularly (or wash underarms, genitals, hands and feet)
- use deodorants or antiperspirants
- wear clean clothes.

## **2. Body Hair**

During puberty, the following changes may occur:

### **a) Hair on head**

- Boys and girls may experience oilier hair. This is due to an increased hormone production, which causes increased oil secretion on scalp.

### **b) Underarm hair**

- Boys and girls will experience an increased hair growth in the underarm area. This is normal. Because of increased activity, perspiration, and the presence of hair, boys and girls may want to cleanse this area daily.
- Antiperspirants and deodorants are available. Antiperspirants slow the sweating process. Deodorants cover/mask unpleasant odours.
- In our culture, some women shave underarms and legs. As this may not be done in other cultures, be considerate of the practices/habits of others.

**13. Ask** participants what other factors influence good health:

- 3 meals a day; healthy snacking; drinking water
- Breakfast every day
- Moderate exercise 2-3 times a week
- Adequate sleep
- Not smoking
- Healthy weight (NOTE: Body Mass Index is not valid during adolescence – many adolescents gain weight before their growth spurt.)

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(Adapted with permission from: Regional Niagara Public Health Department (1999) *Growth and Development Lesson Plans for Grades 5 & 6* and Toronto Public Health (1998) *Changes in You and Me!*)

**Handout**

## **Introduction to puberty**

**Directions:** Write in information about the following topics during the presentation:

1. What is puberty?
2. How does puberty happen?
3. How old are boys and girls when they go through puberty?
4. What happens to your body during puberty?

**MALE**

**FEMALE**

5. Common external changes of puberty

SKIN

BODY HAIR

OTHER FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE GOOD HEALTH



## Answer Key

# Introduction to puberty

### 1. What is puberty?

The period of growing and changing from a child to an adult.

### 2. How does puberty happen?

The pituitary gland send out hormone messages to certain parts of the body to tell them to change.

### 3. How old are boys and girls when they go through puberty?

Girls: anytime between the ages of 9 and 16

Boys: anytime between the ages of 10 and 16

Everyone changes at his/her own rate.

### 4. What happens to your body during puberty?

#### MALE

Acne

Perspiration

Hair

Grow taller

Shoulders and chest broaden

Muscles

Voice deepens

Genitals grow larger

#### FEMALE

Acne

Perspiration

Hair

Grow taller

Breast develop

Hips widen

Voice deepens

Genitals grow larger

### 5. Common external changes of puberty

#### **SKIN**

Acne

Perspiration

#### **BODY HAIR**

Oilier hair

Increased growth in underarm hair

Pubic hair grows

### **OTHER FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE GOOD HEALTH**

3 meals a day

moderate exercise 2-3 times a week

adequate sleep

not smoking

healthy weight