



Talking About Puberty

Talking about puberty with your daughter may be one of the most difficult conversations you'll ever have with her. Our hope is for parents to initiate a dialogue that will not only educate and prepare your child for this time of transition, but also create open lines of communication. Your involvement and support will help nurture her growth into a confident young woman with positive self-esteem, values, and body image.

Below are some suggestions for how to approach conversations about puberty with your daughter. Remember, just because you are ready to talk may not mean she is. Continue your invitations for conversation even if your first attempts are not successful. Eventually she will come around. She's probably just as nervous as you are. Do you remember how you felt when you had to talk to your mom about puberty for the first time?

Things to remember before the conversation:

- ◆ Don't wait for your daughter to come to you – she may be too embarrassed or nervous to begin the discussion.
- ◆ Puberty includes not only physical changes, but considerable emotional and social changes as well.
- ◆ Exposure to information in the media about puberty and sex will likely influence your child's attitudes and ideas. Be prepared to dispel myths about sexuality or unrealistic ideas about body image.
- ◆ Consider The Big P puberty books by Toyona Chin about puberty as a resource for you and your daughter in exploring the different topics of puberty.
- ◆ Answer your daughter's questions openly and honestly.
- ◆ Begin the conversations with your daughter before she starts experiencing the physical changes of puberty. For girls, puberty can begin as early seven and as late as fourteen. Most girls start their periods between the ages of 9 and 16, with average age of menarche at age 12.

- ◆ Your daughter may ask about your experiences with puberty – be prepared to talk honestly about how it felt, how you felt, and how you got through it.
- ◆ Your daughter's teacher may be an excellent resource for you. Inquire about the school's sex education curriculum. You may find it helps guide your conversations at home.

Conversation Starters:

- ◆ I know you are going through some changes. How are you feeling about what is going on?
- ◆ If you ever feel like your body is growing and maturing too fast for you, come and talk to me. I'd love to talk to you about it whenever you want to.
- ◆ I've noticed that you've been getting very careful about cleaning your face. That's great! You are really taking responsibility for your skin. When I was your age, my skin was...Would you like to go shopping with me? I can tell you about some products that I like?
- ◆ I notice you've been down lately. Do you want to talk? We haven't had a good conversation in a long time. How about lunch together?
- ◆ I noticed Suzie has really started to develop. I know she's your best friend. I hope you aren't worried that you are behind. You know every girl matures at her own pace. When I was your age ...
I'm going in next week to see my doctor for my yearly check up. Do you think you
◆ want to start seeing a grown up women's doctor? It doesn't have to be mine, but I thought maybe you might be ready to see a gynecologist. (The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommends that girls visit a gynecologist for the first time between the ages of 13 and 15).

One final reminder, the right time to begin these critical conversations is now. This is the beginning of a new relationship, one with a young woman. Respect her and she will respect you, too. She knows her best advice will come from you. Just be there when she is ready for it.

Best of luck,
Toyna ohIn

Developed by: Valerie Sabbag, Health Educator
and curriculum developer.

This lesson was developed in consultation
with Dr. Michelle Bourke.

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