

PROMOTING CHILD DEVELOPMENT

AGE-APPROPRIATE, CHILD-CENTRED SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Age 6

WHAT HAPPENS WITH THE CHILD?

THE BODY AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT Develops a deeper understanding of the individuality of the human body and its development.

CLOSENESS, PLEASURE, SELF-ESTEEM Is happy over the body and accepts it. Understands the concepts of morality and privacy.

EMOTIONS Experiences love, hate and jealousy towards members of both sexes. Doesn't always know what to do with these emotions.

RELATIONSHIPS AND LIFESTYLES Is more sociable, more flexible and more talkative. Is better able to follow rules.

HEALTH, WELL-BEING The child's independence and efforts to cope without help are strengthened.

REPRODUCTION Is able to understand the lifespan.

MANNERS, NORMS Develops an even deeper understanding of how to follow social rules and what these rules actually mean.

RIGHTS Understands that not all humans are good. Still, the child doesn't need to be scared of all strangers.

WHAT THE CHILD MAY DO OR ASK

May ask detailed questions about differences between bodies, about intercourse or sexuality. Children wonder over things together and explain them to each other.

Manages to go to the toilet without help. Touching one's private parts for pleasure and good feeling takes place mostly in secret and perhaps in the form of sexual inspection games, without adults knowing.

Talks and asks a lot, practices expressing emotions and understanding other people. Friendships are important, for many children even infatuations and crushes are important.

Observes, mimics, clings, rejects. Explores and conquers new surroundings with confidence, occasionally wanting to be in a familiar lap to feel secure. Likes to be affectionate.

Wants to experience feelings of well-being and looks for ways to do so. Moves around more independently outside the home.

Drawings, games and speech often include an element of sexuality: jokes, rhymes, sayings, sometimes cursing.

May wonder about differences relating to gender, culture and age. Recognizes values and wonders about them.

May have nightmares and cling to a parent in the nighttime. May be afraid of strangers or feel afraid while being out alone. Practices feeling secure and protecting his/her rights even with friends.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO SUPPORT AND GUIDE THE CHILD?

Teach respect of diversity, equality, uniqueness and of one's own body. Give appropriate information about being a man, a woman, a human being.

Encourage approving, positive touching, and offer plenty of it. Teach that every part of the body is precious and important. Raise the child in an atmosphere of positiveness and approval of oneself and others.

Teach that sexuality and love are wonderful things. Teach to recognize emotions and to express them. Avoid using grown-up terminology to brand and describe infatuations and crushes. The child needs help coping with emotions.

Admire and talk to the child. Respond to the messages he/she gives out. Be there for the child as someone who offers closeness and a calming touch. Allow the child to meet and become familiar with many different kinds of people. Tell the child how it makes somebody else feel when you stroke them kindly or hurt them.

Explain that the child has the right to choose close friends and to decide who is allowed to touch him/her. A touch should not be unpleasant. Safety measures for the child to learn: say NO, walk away, tell a reliable adult what happened. Experiencing good touching also has beneficial effects.

Listen patiently and give age-appropriate answers about intercourse, birth etc. Create a safe and open atmosphere. Teach the proper words.

Teach the rules of appropriateness and privacy. Not everything needs to be or should be shown to everyone. Raise the child to value equality.

Teach rights and attitude: My body belongs to me! Talk to the child about dangerous adults and teach safety measures and skills. Show that you approve of questions. A child's right to be safe and secure is the responsibility of adults.

Age 4-5

WHAT HAPPENS WITH THE CHILD?

THE BODY AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT Is curious, compares his/her own body to the bodies of others and wonders about it. Need for privacy may increase.

CLOSENESS, PLEASURE, SELF-ESTEEM Develops an identity as a boy, a girl, a human being. Wants to be admired and accepted, and also to be seen and heard. Understands that he/she will grow up to be a man, a woman, a grown-up.

EMOTIONS Emotions run high and the child practices controlling them. The need for justice and fairness increases.

RELATIONSHIPS AND LIFESTYLES The child's considerateness, empathy and cooperational skills are increasing. Friendships become more and more important. Wants to please and do well as a member in a group.

HEALTH, WELL-BEING Is keenly aware of the difference between good and bad touch, as well as how these make the body feel. Wants to feel good and avoid feeling bad.

REPRODUCTION The child's curiosity and understanding increases. Is interested in life, pregnancy and babies being born.

MANNERS, NORMS Learns what sort of behaviour and intimacy is appropriate in different situations. Learns to defend his/her boundaries. Becomes interested in the different norms of other cultures; in other words, the child learns what is and isn't allowed.

RIGHTS Is more actively engaged with familiar people and strangers. Needs to know some safety measures even when dealing with other children. Has the right to age-appropriate knowledge and skills.

WHAT THE CHILD MAY DO OR ASK

Learns to wash and get dressed without help. Recognizes differences: old/young, woman/man. Wonders about different parts of the body and their use, about how the body feels and what it can do. May be touching the genitals.

Games of exploring and examining are at the forefront. May experience the touching of the private parts for pleasure as calming and as an aid in falling asleep. Looks for more self-knowledge and pleasure, tries to obtain these in different ways. May be playing sexual games with other children or with dolls.

Becomes especially fond of either the mom or the dad, or may identify with one of the parents. May have a crush on a friend, regardless of gender. Active imagination, may have nightmares. Clearly expresses joy, infatuation and anger.

Lots of roleplaying games, storytelling, nursery rhymes. May have imaginary friends. May have emotional outbursts very easily and needs support when this happens; kiss and hug the child openly. May show off and boast. Needs praise for his/her abilities.

Looks for feelings of well-being by exploring and touching the body, by playing and goofing around, and wants to be in the adult's lap. Wonders about good and bad and about different feelings in the body.

May be interested in how a baby gets inside the mommy's tummy and how it comes out. May be "playing doctor", playing house and "making babies". Mimics words that adults use.

Recognizes and understands different customs and lifestyles. Asks questions and wonders about these subjects. Tests existing rules and boundaries. Pays close attention to rules some of the time. May not always have the energy to behave well, especially when tired.

May test good and bad touching. Learns to express wishes, boundaries, needs. Gradually starts to focus on the world outside the home and takes more interest in the media.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO SUPPORT AND GUIDE THE CHILD?

Answer questions in ways that the child can understand. Support the child's attempts to wash and get cleaned up without help. Explain how to care for the genitals and that they are the child's own precious area. Enhance individuality. It's great to be just the way one is.

Accept the child and tell the child that he/she is wonderful, whether boy or girl, tomboy or boy that likes "girly" things. Teach that the body is precious and valuable, and that it's okay to enjoy it. Teach that other kinds of people are wonderful too, and all right just the way they are.

Teach to name and identify emotions. Consistent boundaries give security to the child. If the child is acting up, calm down your own emotions as well. Explain that emotions are good but that you mustn't harm anyone. Give attention, admire, praise.

Teach respect, fairness and different customs and manners: both those of the child's own family and of other families. Encourage and admire the child's attempts at independence. Give support when the child is dealing with defeat. Be a comfort and a secure lap for the child to return to.

Touching one's own areas is a good thing to do, and it needs peace and quiet. It's right to protect oneself. Teach basic safety measures to the child: say NO, walk away, tell a familiar adult about what's happened. Explain to the child in a positive way that these are the right things for him/her to do.

Answer questions in ways that the child can understand. The baby comes from a baby seed that has been growing in the mommy's tummy. The baby seed can go into the tummy in different ways. Making love is how adults show that they love each other and how they make babies. People can also adopt babies or have them with the help of treatments.

Teach in a gentle and patient way about social norms. Talk about how there may be different values and habits in different cultures and families. Teach about the autonomy of oneself and others: where one is allowed to touch.

A touch is not supposed to feel bad. It is right for the child to refuse touching that feels bad, and he/she needs to talk about this to a reliable adult. Has the right to be safe. Give the child permission to ask and to express needs and wishes.

Age 2-3

WHAT HAPPENS WITH THE CHILD?

THE BODY AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT Learns to regulate peeing and pooping. Observes different bodies and notices differences between girls and boys.

CLOSENESS, PLEASURE, SELF-ESTEEM Is happy and proud over the body, over what it can do and produce (like making pee or poop in the potty). The child's self-image develops.

EMOTIONS Starts to practice how to regulate emotions. Begins to have a will of his/her own, starts to distance him-/herself a little bit from the parents and to develop a basic sense of independence.

RELATIONSHIPS AND LIFESTYLES Is more sociable. Learns to take notice of other people's needs. Dares to explore surroundings when there's a safe lap to return to and seek comfort from.

HEALTH, WELL-BEING Observes and notices what makes oneself and others feel good.

REPRODUCTION There may be a baby on the way in the child's own family, or in the family's circle of friends.

MANNERS, NORMS Social rules are becoming clearer. Learns to distinguish between what is forbidden and what is allowed, and what is public and what is private.

RIGHTS The child's understanding of the right to one's own body develops. Wants to be boss of his/her own body.

WHAT THE CHILD MAY DO OR ASK

Has a natural curiosity towards the private parts. During potty time at daycare and in the sauna, the child observes other people's private parts and comments out loud about what he/she sees.

Openly touches and explores the body, and may even be touching the genitals for pleasure. Wants to touch others' bodies. Wants to be held a lot.

Disappointments and other big emotional sensations are expressed often through physical acts such as hitting, hugging and kissing. Visibly shows love towards the parents. Asks all kinds of questions, also about sexuality.

Practices playing together with others, but when a conflict develops there can easily be some hitting. May have a hard time separating from a parent.

Seeks comfort and security from a favourite toy or from familiar people, or from touching the body and often even from touching the private parts. Says what it is that he/she wants.

Strokes the baby bump, wonders about breastfeeding. Thinks out loud, may ask about all kinds of things.

Asks a lot. Separates public from private, starts to accept certain norms, for example won't run around naked at daycare. May test the boundaries of forbidden and allowed behaviour.

Practices wanting things and defending his/her rights. May resist being examined at the child welfare clinic. Needs the security and protection of an adult.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO SUPPORT AND GUIDE THE CHILD?

Explain that everyone has their own body. Use appropriate words to explain that girls and boys have different private parts, and that both are just as good. Teach to wash hands after going to the toilet. Teach respect for the privacy of others.

Teach about boundaries in a gentle way: when and where it's okay to expose and touch which parts of the body. Touching is allowed. Teach respect for others. Hold the child a lot and be affectionate.

Choose a compassionate and empathetic attitude. Give names to emotions: "Now you're feeling bad". Teach that it's all right to feel bad but that it's not all right to harm. If the child is acting up, try to stay calm yourself. Calmness and consistency in setting boundaries creates a sense of security for the child. Show different ways of expressing liking something or someone.

Teach the child the rules of fair play together: no tearing or harming others because that makes them sad. Be encouraging, not judgmental. Familiarize the child calmly with new situations. Teach that people are different and families are different.

Act silly and cuddle the child. Show your approval in many different ways. Tell the child that his/her own body is great and that it's okay for the child to touch it.

Using basic and easily understandable language, explain that the baby comes from a baby seed, grows in the mommy's womb inside the tummy, and finally comes out through the baby hole. Choose the expressions that suit you best: baby seed, the baby's home, etc.

Talk about variety in a respecting way. Explain gently about privacy and social rules. It's okay to touch one's own body, but it's best to do that in peace and quiet when there's nobody else around. Everyone gets to go to the toilet in peace without being disturbed.

Respect the will of the child. While at the clinic with the child or during bathing, explain that it's now time to take a look at or clean the child's bottom or genitals. That's the child's very own area that the child gets to decide on. The parts under the swimsuit are private.

Age 0-1

WHAT HAPPENS WITH THE CHILD?

THE BODY AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT The body is something to learn about and to be proud of. Touch produces sensation. The child starts to develop bodily self-esteem.

CLOSENESS, PLEASURE, SELF-ESTEEM Notices that some places on the body are pleasurable to touch. Needs closeness and wants to feel good.

EMOTIONS Feelings of joy and affection intensify. Feelings change quickly, going from pure joy to anger.

RELATIONSHIPS AND LIFESTYLES In the beginning the child is interested in people who are familiar, then gradually in the rest of the world and especially in other children. May also shy away at times.

HEALTH, WELL-BEING Wants to be accepted and to avoid feeling bad. The child's well-being is bound up with every passing moment.

REPRODUCTION There may be a baby on the way in the child's own family or in the family of a friend.

MANNERS, NORMS A positive self-image needs protecting. The baby learns to understand speech and the baby's ability to produce speech evolves.

RIGHTS Has the right to explore and to play, to show emotions and to be safe.

WHAT THE CHILD MAY DO OR ASK

Every part of the body is interesting. Notices areas under the diaper. Using hands and mouth, the child becomes familiar with different parts of the body.

Likes to be naked and to touch him-/herself. May even be touching the genitals and noticing feelings of pleasure.

Smiles, cries, screams with joy. Notices other people's reactions to his/her behavior: sees how different ways of behaving make people feel and learns in this way what is acceptable and what isn't. Longs for admiration. When emotional, needs help calming down.

Observes, mimics, clings, rejects. Explores and conquers new surroundings with confidence, occasionally wanting to be in a familiar lap to feel secure. Likes to be affectionate.

Touches and explores with hands and mouth. Remembers bodily experiences such as pain.

Touches openly and asks about everything, and may be interested in the baby bump.

Learns by touching. May want to touch his/her own genitals. Figures out what's allowed and what isn't.

Eagerly explores surroundings and him-/herself.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO SUPPORT AND GUIDE THE CHILD?

Hold the child and make calming sounds while stroking him/her. Let the child know that all of the body is good: ears, genitals, everything. Give names to the different body parts. You can use picture books to look at pictures of the human body together.

Use approving, positive words when you talk to the child: "That's your genitals. It's all right. Let's clean you now, okay." Hold the child. Show that it's all right for him/her to be curious.

Be there for the child: comfort and love him/her. Give plenty of affection. Be open to the child even when he/she is angry, hold and calm the child. Teach in a gentle way that emotions are allowed and okay, but that harming others is not.

Admire and talk to the child. Respond to the messages he/she gives out. Be there for the child as someone who offers closeness and a calming touch. Allow the child to meet and become familiar with many different kinds of people. Tell the child how it makes somebody else feel when you stroke them kindly or hurt them.

Show the child that he/she makes you glad and happy. The body is good, and touching it is all right. It's okay to feel love and enjoyment.

You can look at picture books together to show the child how the baby grows inside the baby bump. You can talk about the seed of a baby and about how its home is inside the mother's tummy.

Start to teach the child to understand and respect the word "no". The child also has a right to self-protection. Teach the appropriate and allowed words by using them yourself.

When you're giving the child a bath or changing a diaper, talk to the child in a calm and friendly manner. Guide the child sensibly but gently. Always be there for the child, when he/she looks to you for help.

