

Helping your Children to GROW UP OK!

A guide for
parenting children
through the
changes of puberty

A companion to the booklet:
Growing Up OK!

Parenting children to grow up healthy and happy includes guiding them through puberty – the physical and emotional changes that happen to them as they become teenagers. This booklet is for parents and caregivers and is a companion to the booklet: Growing Up OK!, which gives youth general facts about puberty.

Giving young people information about puberty prepares them for what's ahead and makes it feel less scary. It helps kids understand their own body – how it works, what is normal development and how to keep themselves safe and healthy. Healthy development includes physical, mental and sexual health. Puberty affects all of these areas.

For most children, puberty will begin somewhere between the ages of 8 and 16. The age that these changes happen will be different for everyone.



Healthy Talk

From the time your children came into your life, you have been playing a big part in their learning about health, sexuality, gender and relationships. You are their role model and they look to you to understand what behaviours are healthy and what is ok to talk about.

Most parents and caregivers feel ok talking about physical health, but talking about sex and sexuality can be uncomfortable. This may be because these topics were rarely talked about when you were growing up. Think about how you learned about puberty and sexuality – what information was missing? What other information from your parents and other adults might have helped? Some parents and caregivers worry that if they talk about sexuality, their children are more likely to become sexually active, but studies show that young people whose parents talk openly with them about healthy sexuality, are actually more likely to delay becoming sexually active.

Today, children are also learning about sexuality from the internet, TV/movies and music. These messages can be confusing for young people, but for parents and caregivers, they can be a good conversation starter. Instead

of having 'the big talk', have smaller conversations about something you both saw or heard, or a book/magazine you both read. By having open and honest conversations and making them seem natural, you are teaching your child that it is ok to talk to you about these topics.

What should parents and caregivers talk about?

Use the correct language for body parts

If you show that you are comfortable with these words, your children will feel that way too and will feel more confident in their body. Having language, knowledge and a positive body image gives young people tools to make decisions that will help them be healthy and safe.

Family values

Think about your own values and what you want to communicate to your preteen about these values. What is important to you? When should dating start? Are there cultural traditions or spiritual ceremonies that celebrate puberty in a positive way that you want to share with your child?



Talk about feelings

In puberty, young people often experience a lot of emotional changes, have ups and downs, and begin to feel romantic feelings towards other people. These changes are normal, but can sometimes be difficult for parents and caregivers to adjust to. Invite your child to talk about their changing feelings as they come up.

You don't need to have all the answers

Sometimes you might need to think about what you want to say, before you answer a question. And sometimes you really don't know what to say. Try to stay

calm and listen to your child even when they are saying something that may be hard to hear. Look for answers together with your child. For help, use reliable outside resources, or talk to a professional who can offer guidance. See the back of this guide for a list of helpful resources.

Say things more than once

Everyone learns better with repetition. Important messages will need to be repeated to your preteen many times, so be patient. Repeating messages tells them that this is something you really want them to remember.

Mental health and wellness

Many adults who develop mental health problems and illnesses, say that these issues began in their teenage years. Looking after our mental health is extremely important and there are things you can encourage your child to do to keep up positive mental health.

- **Move your body.**

There is a strong link between physical activity and positive mental health. Help your preteen find a way to move that they enjoy. For some this might be organized sports, like soccer or hockey. For others, walking, cycling, dancing, running, or skating might be more enjoyable.

- **Find positive ways to cope with stress.**

Young people feel stress, even if parents and caregivers think they have life pretty good at home. Everyone has some stress and finding ways to deal with stress is an important part of growing up. Deep breathing calming exercises, doing something enjoyable like reading or baking, physical exercise or talking about what is stressful – these are all things young people can do to cope with stress.

- **Give to others.**

Being generous to others can help a young person feel good about themselves. Encourage your child to volunteer, help a friend or relative and just to be kind. Recognize their actions with praise.

- **Healing from trauma.**

Some children will experience disturbing events in life. These events can have a big effect on their ability to feel happy and secure, concentrate in school, and have good relationships with others. Get help from a professional counsellor who can help your child and you heal from trauma.

- **Don't forget to laugh.**

Finding humour in things can be a good way of dealing with tough situations. Don't laugh at your preteen as this can feel like teasing. Laugh together with them.

- **Connect to culture or community.**

Feeling like you belong somewhere is a basic human need. Getting involved in cultural activities or events based in your community can help your child develop bonds of belonging and connection.

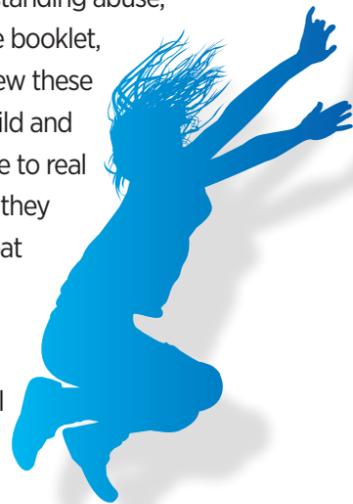
Safety

As children grow, their need for independence (freedom) grows too. How much a young person is allowed to make decisions, and mistakes, should change gradually over time. Parents and caregivers can support this by giving information to their child about what is safe and what might not be safe. Create opportunities for your preteen to develop their independence, while you give them guidance.

Understanding that every person has the right to control their own body, the concept of consent and understanding abuse, are all presented in the booklet, **Growing Up OK!** Review these concepts with your child and discuss how they relate to real life. It's important that they understand how to treat others and how they should be treated.

Technology and social media have become a big part of our lives and the lives of our children.

Changes happen quickly, and as a parent or caregiver it is hard to keep up. Talk with your preteen about online safety and develop guidelines for technology use that you can both agree to.



Our relationship is changing

As your child grows and develops, their relationship with you will change too. Young people naturally begin to shift their attention to their peers. They feel their friends are very important, and may worry about fitting in. Even with these changes, parents and caregivers are still very important. You will continue to be a source of security to your preteens and teenagers, even when it seems that you are no longer the centre of their lives.

Attachment and connection

Some days you may feel that your child doesn't need you as much anymore. They are exploring their own world, developing their own opinions and don't want you to hold their hand. Other days they seem to need you to manage the simplest things for them. They call or text you in a panic and need you to drop everything you are doing to help them with this or that. The connection between parents and adolescents can be unpredictable and will continue to evolve and change as your child grows.



Young people may also look to others for guidance and leadership – a coach, a mentor, a teacher, extended family, an Elder or a spiritual leader. Meet these people, and talk to your preteen about these relationships to make sure they are positive. These other supports can be an important part of a community who will shape your child's growth and development.

You will continue to be an important source of guidance and security for your preteen and teenager. Keep the lines of communication open in a variety of ways. Talking, texting, finding shared interests, and giving opportunities for increased responsibility are great ways to connect with your child now, and in the years ahead.

Your child is Growing Up OK!

Resources

Below are resources that you might find helpful as you guide your child through the emotional and physical changes of puberty. Check out the **Growing Up OK!** booklet for more resources.

General

www.manitobaparentzone.ca

Healthy sexuality

www.serc.mb.ca
www.sexandu.ca
www.kidshealth.org

Teen clinics in Manitoba

www.teenclinic.ca

Mental Health

www.mbwpg.cmha.ca
www.keltymentalhealth.ca

Safety

www.protectchildren.ca

Help with a crisis

24 hour crisis line 204-786-8686
or 1-888-322-3019
Farm and rural stress line:
1-866-367-3276

A list of crisis services in Manitoba can be found online at:
www.gov.mb.ca/health/mh/crisis.html

Growing Up OK! is online at
www.manitoba.ca/healthychild/mcad/growingupok.pdf

For more copies of this pamphlet, or for more information, contact:

Healthy Schools

Email: healthyschools@gov.mb.ca
Website: manitoba.ca/healthyschools/index.html