



### Understanding Typical Healthy Child Development: An Important Tool to Keep Children Safe

An understanding of typical child development helps parents and caregivers understand and nurture a child as he or she grows and learns. Children who understand the stages of development are less likely to become victims of child sexual abuse.



#### Typical Healthy Development of Children

#### Tips for Adults to Support Typical Healthy Development of Children

##### Infancy - Birth to Age 2

- Learn about love and trust through loving relationships with parents and caregivers
- Learn about body through sense of touch
- Notice differences between boys and girls – children and adults
- Enjoy nudity

- Name body parts, including genitals, using correct names
- Model “comfortable” touch (i.e. hugs that are not forced on the child)
- Talk about boundaries as the opportunity arises (i.e. during diapering and bath time tell children their genitals are “private parts” and “off-limits” to others)

##### Toddler and Preschool Years Ages 2 to 5

- Learn to name body parts – teach children the actual names for their private parts (i.e. penis and vagina)
- Begin to identify as either male or female
- Show an interest in the differences between boys and girls
- Interested in privacy for themselves, yet be very interested in bathroom activities of others
- Curious about where they came from
- Begin to learn about personal boundaries
- Likely to play house, doctor or other forms of body exploration

- Encourage children to use correct names of body parts and to identify their “private parts”
- Model the importance of privacy during bathing and toileting
- Give child permission to be private about his/her own nudity
- Acknowledge touching oneself feels good, is OK and may be done in private
- Teach children to respect other people’s bodies and privacy
- Teach children the difference between comfortable/appropriate touch and uncomfortable/inappropriate touch
- Do not force them to have physical contact with others (such as hugging adults)

##### Middle Childhood Ages 5 to 8

- Develop strong friendships with children of same sex
- Desire to be like their peers – to be included
- Understand differences between males and females
- Display basic understanding of puberty
- Display basic understanding of human reproduction
- Exhibit increasing modesty and interest in privacy in bathroom and dressing activities

- Respect child’s need for privacy
- Reinforce child’s need to respect other people’s bodies, boundaries and need for privacy
- Teach children about male and female puberty (by 7 - 8 years old)
- It is important to remember research has shown children whose parents talk with them about sexuality are less likely to become sexually active at an early age





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### Typical Healthy Development of Children

### Tips for Adults to Support Typical Healthy Development of Children

#### Late Childhood / Tweens Ages 9 to 12

- Boys experience changes in voice and the penis and testicles mature
- Girls begin having periods and develop breasts
- Begin to grow pubic hair
- Sometimes engage in some mutual, same gender exploration and sex play
- Feel uncomfortable undressing in front of others
- Continue to value same sex friendships – may share information about sexuality with friends of the same gender
- Enjoy being like their peers and dressing and speaking the same
- Often engage in swearing and conversations with sexual content
- Experience increased sexual feelings and fantasies
- Develop crushes on friends, older teens, teachers, rock stars, etc.

- Respect their need for body privacy, but set limits on other types of privacy (i.e. computer and cell phone use must be monitored/supervised to ensure safety)
- Model healthy, intimate adult relationships and responsible use of alcohol and prescription drugs
- Talk with children about bullying and other unhealthy and abusive relationships
- Supervise and monitor tweens
- Communicate clearly and directly about family values, beliefs and traditions surrounding dating, substance misuse, and other issues of importance
- Teach children about risk of sexual activity, including physical and emotional risks; teen dating relationships are a major source of emotional distress
- Role play situations tweens will likely face in middle school such as being encouraged to smoke, drink or bully another child

#### Teens Ages 13-18

- Continue and complete the changes of puberty
- Peer relationships with both genders become more and more important
- Value independence and explore ways in which they are unique and different from family members
- Desire to “try on” different styles, personalities, ways of expressing themselves
- Increase in ability to control impulses
- Vary between desire for independence and need for ongoing parental help, support and stability
- Strong emotional highs and lows
- Developing confidence in social situations
- Developing ability to reason, foresee consequences of actions, questions others values and decisions
- Experience increased sexual feelings and want physical closeness with a partner

- Continue to set limits on various privacy issues, relaxing these only as older teens demonstrate increased maturity
- Consider starting regular family meetings to promote open communication about issues and concerns
- Continue to supervise and monitor teens; make sure friends’ parents know and will respect your family’s rules and limits
- Talk about family values, beliefs and traditions
- Talk about teen sexual and other high risk activities



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