

Puberty in Boys with Disabilities

“We feel we are walking a fine line between a need for supervision and what we feel is our son’s right to privacy. The rules for parenting change at adolescence...” -A Parent

“When I’m helping Carey with his bath, it’s a good opportunity to teach him the names for all his body parts. He has no speech, so I ask him to point to his arm, nose, etc.. And we include his penis and testicles in the game. I tell him, ‘You are a boy. All boys and men have a penis. It’s part of being a boy or a man. Dad is a man and I have a penis, too.’ I figure it helps him learn he is like other boys and men, if I tell him I have a penis, too.” -Jim

Sometime between the ages of 9 to 15, the pituitary gland, at the base of the brain, signals the testicles in boys to release a surge of hormones into the blood stream. Hormones cause rapid changes in the body. They also have a part in the mood swings that young teens go through.

Sexual sensations are very intense during the teen years. An issue you may come up against with a son is masturbation. This is perfectly normal, but knowing the appropriate time and place may mean some very structured teaching.

“I have been able to teach my thirteen year old son that masturbation is okay in his room, but I’m afraid he’ll forget and take his pants down outside sometime. You hear such stories about people with handicaps getting arrested for something like that. The possibility scares me.” -Joan

Teach your son the meaning of private places and public places; private parts of the body and public parts of the body.

A private place is the bedroom or the bathroom, where he is alone.

A public place is where other people are or could be. Private parts of the body are those we keep covered in public places.

Touching private parts of the body is done in a private place with the door closed.

As your son begins to understand the concept of private / public, you can go on to teach about who else may touch private parts of his body, such as the doctor or a parent. You may also need to teach him about touch that is OK and touch that is not OK, even from a doctor or a parent.

If your child spends much of his time masturbating and does little else, it may be a symptom of stress, insecurity, loneliness or simply not having enough to do. Look at the behavior in the same way you would if the child were constantly rocking or sucking his thumb. The masturbation itself isn’t the problem; it’s the signal that something else needs to be seen to.

“Could I have wet dreams at school, during class? I wondered because my teacher says I daydream a lot.” -Tim, age 14

Most girls going through puberty get at least some information about menstruation. But boys usually get very little about what is happening to them. This is a description of how you might tell your son about wet dreams:

Now that you are growing up, you will notice your penis and testicles getting bigger. Sometimes a boy's penis gets hard and sticks out in front of him. This is called having an erection. This is normal and happens to all boys. Sometimes a boy's penis gets hard when he is thinking about girls or looking at girls. Sometimes it happens for no reason at all. Sometimes when you wake up in the morning, you will see some sticky white stuff on your pajamas or on your sheets. This is called semen. It means that when you were sleeping, your penis got hard and the semen came out. This is called having a 'wet dream'. Some boys have wet dreams; some boys do not. Everyone is different. Having a wet dream means you are growing up. What is the thing to do when you find the sticky stuff on your pajamas, or on your body? You wipe it off with a tissue. Having an erection is a private thing. Who can you talk to about it? Mom or Dad and no one else.

Giving Information about Sexual Topics

Start with what is absolutely necessary and add information bit by bit, as much as your son can understand.

Start with the simple basics: what your son absolutely needs to know so he is not afraid of what is happening, can look after himself properly, and can behave properly in public.

Tell your son what is happening inside his body, if he can understand it. For instance:

When a boy holds his hand around his penis and rubs it up and down, it gets hard. When the feelings get very strong, the penis jerks back and forth very fast. This is called having an orgasm or 'coming'. It feels very good. Also, some sticky white stuff, called semen, comes out. Then the penis gets soft again and the boy feels relaxed.

Talk to him about the emotions that happen in connection with what is going on in his body. Discuss as much as you think he'll understand.

Let him know about the relationship between semen and babies, again as much as he can understand.

If you would like more material on teaching your son about his body, Special Medical Services has some literature and teaching tools for families to use. Please call your Care Coordinator:

at 1-800-852-3345 ext. 4488 or 1-603-271-4525 ext. 4488

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