



Family Life Education

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Sexual Development and Behaviours: The Early Years What to do? Information for Parents and Care Givers

Sexual Development

Sexual development like all other areas of human development begins at the beginning. As cell proliferation begins at the beginning of life the child is developing. The SRY gene present on the Y chromosome begins the development of testicles. The absence of this gene on the X chromosome develops ovaries. The development of sex glands begins hormone production in the child that sexualize the development of the child. This is physiological and obviously there is room for variation. This process of sexual development continues after birth as the child interacts with their environment. This development is not just physical but also driven by knowledge, beliefs and behaviours these are predominately mediated by:

- The child's observations (and experiences) within their environment
- Cultural and religious beliefs
- Right and wrong instruction
- The child's age



“Nobody wakes up at the age of 18 and discovers they are now a sexual being.”

The Need to Know

Children grow through a series of developmental stages. Each stage has certain developmental tasks. The consequence being: if these tasks are neglected there can be developmental delays. Therefore, sound mature guidance is necessary for raising (forming) our children. Parents cannot leave it to chance. But this does not mean that we have to become hypervigilant either.

Parents know that one of the hardest things to do with a two year old is to keep their clothes on!

There are many influences in the world that can have negative effects on children, it is true. The easy access to pornography is a classic example. However, not all exhibited sexual behaviour is the result of negative influences. There is a raft of 'normal' behaviour that is observed in children that parents can understand and respond to.

Resources that can help

1. Learning to chart your fertility - Research has shown it makes you more comfortable with the right topics and knowledgeable on anatomy www.naturalfertilityservices.com.au
2. Get your school to run our range of Family Life Education Programs:
 - **The Wonder of Living Program**
 - **Puberty Talks**
 - **Parent and Child Puberty sessions**

www.inspiredformation.com.au

Family Life Education



Age	What we Know and Observe	What to Do
Birth to 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physiological capacity for sexual response is present from birth Discover genitals approx. 12months Infants and young children have many sensual experiences, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> sucking on their fingers and toes, and being rocked and cuddled. <p><i>(These experiences may establish preferences for certain kinds of stimulation that persist throughout life.)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The child's capacity for sexual and emotional relationships later in life are influenced by the quality of relationship with parents at this stage through the forming of a healthy parental attachment. This is improved by consistent and positive physical contact. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hugs Skin to skin time Body play (this little piggy went to market etc) <p>Use accurate names for body parts from the beginning and they will never be weird !</p>
2 to 7 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children will start playing with their genitals (on purpose) from about 2 -3 years Will develop a sense of gendered identity by approx. 3 years. Understand genital difference Interested in other people's genitals (as part of natural curiosity) Play adult roles in games between 3 to 7 years becoming increasingly covert depending on parental reactions etc. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> mummies and daddies Doctors and nurses Show and tell 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not shut down conversation or 'punish' the child for such games this teaches the child that the body is bad and something to be ashamed of. However, this is in conflict with their interest and experience and only serves to cause them to seek their information from their peers and make their behaviour more covert. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Answer all questions openly and honestly Teach what is appropriate behaviour Use correct terminology Attach moral values to the discussion Encourage Show enthusiasm and appreciation for child's curiosity. Teaching a child that their body deserves to be respected is the foundation for healthy choices later in life. It also empowers the child to have a positive construct of body and its sexual capacity. <p>"We are not hiding the body because it is rude.... we are clothing the body to show it respect"</p>
7 to Puberty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sexual attraction between 10 to 12 years with fantasy up to a year later Social groupings are more often homosocial First experimentation is often with someone of the same sex Exposure to pornography common by 10 years and becoming more common younger (especially in boys) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don't fear this stage! Attraction is a wonderful thing. However, curiosity and lack of formation can lead to problems. Therefore, as your child starts this stage make sure they know they can talk to you. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share stories from your childhood and what you learnt. Listen to them! Pornography is very dangerous for the developing sexuality! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talk about accountability and keep focusing on respecting the body and human dignity. <p><i>(This continues to shape their moral reasoning as to why certain things should be avoided.)</i></p>

The Most Important Question

When asked a question that seems to come from left field make sure you know what is being actually asked before launching into any explanation! Ask:

"What do you mean?"