

# PARENT AND GUARDIAN'S HANDBOOK FOR SAFER SPORT

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD'S SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT



As with social-emotional and physical development, kids mature sexually at their own pace. This information will help you better understand common phases of sexual development. Your child may exhibit these behaviors earlier than, at the same time as, or later than their peers. It is important to understand sexual development generally, as well as your child's pace relative to peers.

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**The foundation of sexual development begins in a child's infancy and preschool years. Common behaviors by kids often include:**

- ▶ Being curious about their bodies, including their genitals
- ▶ Being curious about adult bodies (such as wanting to enter the bathroom with you, or asking questions about your body)
- ▶ Touching their genitals in private or public, including masturbation as a self-soothing technique
- ▶ Being curious about where babies come from
- ▶ Feeling comfortable being nude in front of others

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**As kids continue to mature in early grade school, behaviors may include:**

- ▶ Increased use of slang for body parts; use of potty humor
- ▶ Increased understanding of traditional gender roles and "gendered" actions (such as girls wanting to wear dresses)
- ▶ Understanding basics of human reproduction
- ▶ Understanding basics of different sexual orientations and gender expressions
- ▶ Touching their genitals for pleasure, including masturbation

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**In later grade school or early middle school, behaviors may include:**

- ▶ Increased interest in adult bodies (trying to see people undressing, showing interest in naked bodies in movies, magazines, or online)
- ▶ Increased interest in having a romantic relationship
- ▶ Increased need for privacy, especially as puberty begins
- ▶ Increased privacy around masturbation or touching their genitals

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This resource was supported in part by grant number 15PSMA-24-GG-03789-KYAS, awarded by the SMART Office, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this product are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

**In adolescence, signs of sexual development become more obvious and pronounced as kids' bodies mature during puberty. Adolescents experience a combination of biological changes, psychological growth, and increased awareness of social norms. All of this influences sexual development. Associated behaviors may include:**

- Experimenting with different ways of being or identities
- Noticing their rate of sexual maturity (faster or slower) compared with peers
- Increased hormone levels and desire to understand sexuality
- Increased concern with their body image
- Increased risk-taking behavior, pushing parent or guardian boundaries

## **References**

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