Helping Your Child Understand Body Changes

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Goals for this session:

- Discuss ways to share information with your child about his/her body and physical development
- Understand children's thinking abilities at different developmental age
- Discuss how to talk about several difficult topics
- Review resources to aid discussions
We all come in as experts
Background

• Why have this talk?

• Parent factors
  • Consider your own experience
    • For many - not much was directly taught
  • Consider your own values and how they apply to your child

• Child factors
  • Developmental level (separate slide)
  • Temperament
  • Showing signs he/she wants more information
Thinking/reasoning abilities evolve over time

- **Sensorimotor**
  Exploring objects through touch, only think about things in the present
  - Birth - Toddler

- **Preoperational**
  Think and talk about things beyond immediate experience
  - Toddler - 7 years old

- **Concrete operational**
  Can now reason, but only about concrete, real life situations
  - 7-12 years old

- **Formal operational**
  Abstract thinking, critical analyses of different points of view
  - ≥12 years old
Pubertal Onset (average ages in years)

- Onset 10-11 in girls
- 1st sign thelarche (breast development) 10.5
- Menarche (period) 12-13; usually 1-2 years after breast buds
- 11-12 in boys
- 1st sign penile and testicular enlargement
- Ejaculation 13

- May begin early
  - Cerebral palsy
  - Spina bifida
General Principles

- Start early, before the onset
- Teach body parts (penis, erection, ejaculation)
- Teach the way your child learns best
- Teachers, providers, therapists can help
Public and Private Behavior

- Start early - talk about it when dressing, in bathroom
- Use visuals
  - Sort activity
- Redirect when in public
  - Use a picture cue, discrete verbal prompt
- When private can’t be private
  - If assistance needed with toileting, hygiene
  - Teach appropriate/inappropriate in that setting
Teach your child where she can touch others and where it is okay for others to touch her by using these figures. Point to a body part and say "Can we touch?" If yes, put a green circle on that body part for "go." If no, put a red circle for "stop."

For example, your daughter should put a green circle on the hand but a red circle on the bottom. You can use the same activity and ask "Where can people touch me?"
Intimacy and Relationships

- Discuss social boundaries
- Who in your life can kiss you, hug you?
Talking about Sexuality

- Why do it?
  - Children deserve to know correct information
  - Can help them to identify their own feelings
  - Can help protect from abuse

- How to do it?
  - Teach age-appropriate information at developmentally appropriate level
  - Be as concrete as possible
  - Use visuals, body charts
  - It is okay to say “I don’t know but I’ll find out the answer and get back to you”.
Touching Private Parts

- Normal behavior
- Almost impossible to stop this behavior completely
- Where and when it is allowed may be best option
- Punishing, shaming, giving a lot of attention may increase the behavior
  - Less likely to ask questions
- Touching might not be associated with sexual thoughts
  - Sensory soothing, itch, pain (sign of infection)
Nocturnal Emissions

- Ejaculation during sleep
  - Normal process and not in your son’s control
- Important to prepare - avoid feeling he is doing something wrong
- Some conclude they wet the bed
- Make connections with other body changes
- Encourage independence
- Use visuals/keep it private
Erections

• Most teenage boys have several throughout the day
• Normal part of puberty - often out of son’s control
• Discuss what to do when it happens in public
Period

- Often happens 1-2 years after breast buds and/or similar age as for mother
- Many kids think blood = bad/pain
- Can use red dye to show what blood looks like on underwear
- Practice using pads/tampons before period comes
Good Hygiene

• Improves self-esteem and independence

• Make a picture book with your child

• Make hygiene kits
  • Shower, dental, shaving, morning routine

• Create routines
  • Shower CD (different songs for activities)
  • Use visuals - visual schedules
  • Try different brands, let your child choose
Moods and Feelings

- Label feelings
- Or use visuals, cartoons, photos, sign language
- Working with a counselor often helpful
- May indicate a medical issue
Physical Activity

- Boosts self-esteem and mood
- Schedule physical activities
- Make exercise rewarding (preferably not food)
  - If you..., then you can play more Minecraft
- Risk for obesity
Question

- “At what age should puberty be discuss versus the sexual act in children that are emotionally young?”
- If cognitively at least at the preoperational stage, then we recommend starting the discussion prior to the onset of puberty.
- Once a child is physically able to reproduce, he/she needs to understand as well as they are able.
Question

- “Regarding the sexual question how do you explain to a child that there is a genetic link that the disorder would be passed forward, such as for Duchene muscular dystrophy?”
- Genetic counseling, X-linked recessive, make sure you have a clear understanding before explaining.
- www.kidshealth.org has medical wording for kids (including about genes).
Questions?
Resources to take home...