

Sexual Development Ages 4-5

Human development is a lifelong process of physical, behavioral, cognitive, and emotional growth and change. In the early stages of life from babyhood to childhood, childhood to adolescence, and adolescence to adulthood enormous changes take place. Throughout the process, each person develops attitudes and values that guide choices, relationships, and understanding.

Sexuality is also a lifelong process. Infants, children, teens, and adults are sexual beings. Just as it is important to enhance a child's physical, emotional, and cognitive growth, so it is important to lay foundations for a child's sexual growth. Adults have a responsibility to help children understand and accept their evolving sexuality.

Emotional Development

Most children aged four to five will:

- Still rely on caregivers, while no longer needing or wanting as much physical contact with caregivers as they received in infancy and as toddlers
- Continue to express emotions physically and to seek hugs and kisses
- Socialize with peers, begin to develop relationships, and learn to recognize some peers as friends and others as people they don't like
- Have more opportunities to interact with peers, either through school or recreational activities, and will play with other children

Sexual Development

Most children aged four to five will:

- Experience vaginal lubrication or erection
- Touch their genitals for pleasure
- Feel curiosity about everything, and ask about where babies come from and how they were born
- Feel curiosity about bodies and may play games like doctor
- Feel sure of their own gender and have the ability to recognize males and females
- Begin to recognize traditional male and female gender roles and to distinguish these roles by gender
- Become conscious of their own body, how it appears to others, and how it functions

What Families Need to Do to Raise Sexually Healthy Children

To help four- to five-year-old children develop a healthy sexuality, families should:

- Help children understand the concept of privacy and that talk about sexuality is private and occurs at home.
- Teach correct names of the major body parts (internal and external) and their basic functions.
- Explain how babies "get into" the mother's uterus.
- Encourage children to come to them or other trusted adults for information about sexuality.

For more information please contact The Clinic at 519-663-5446.

References

¹Reproduced with permission from Advocates for Youth Website © 2001, Advocates for Youth

Retrieved from <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/growth-and-development-home>

Last modified on: January 8, 2013