

# Sexual Development Ages 6-8

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 six to eight will:

- Become more modest and want privacy
- Develop relationships with and love people outside the family as their emotional needs are met by peers as well as family
- Develop less physically demonstrative relationships and express love through sharing and talking. They may be embarrassed by physical affection.
- Need love and support, but feel less willing to ask for it
- Understand more complex emotions, such as confusion and excitement
- Want more emotional freedom and space from parents
- Become better at controlling and concealing feelings
- Begin to form a broader self-concept and recognize their own strengths and weaknesses, especially with regard to social, academic, and athletic skills
- Have friends and sustained peer group interactions

## **Sexual Development**

Most children aged six to eight will:

- Prefer to socialize with their own gender almost exclusively and maintain a fairly rigid separation between males and females [They will tease someone who acts in a way that does not adhere to pre-defined gender roles.]
- Recognize the social stigmas and taboos surrounding sexuality, especially if parents are nervous about the subject, and will be less open about asking questions
- Understand more complex ideas with regard to sexuality and begin to understand intercourse apart from making a baby
- Look to peers, media, and other sources for information about sex
- Understand gender role stereotypes, if presented as such
- May engage in same-gender sexual exploration
- Have a stronger self-concept in terms of gender and body image

## **What Families Need to Do to Raise Sexually Healthy Children**

To help six to eight-year-old children develop a healthy sexuality, families should:

- Continue to provide information about sexuality, even if a child does not ask for it. At these ages, children may ask fewer questions, but still have lots of curiosity and need information about sexuality.
- Explain that there are many different types of families and all types have equal value and deserve respect.
- Provide basic information about important sexuality issues, such as HIV/AIDS, abortion, marriage, and sexual abuse.
- Inform children about the changes that will take place when they begin puberty. Though most six to eight-year-old children do not experience these changes, the age at which some begin to show signs of puberty, such as pubic hair, breast buds, and hair under the arms is gradually decreasing, so that children need this information sooner.
- Recognize that everyone does not have the same sexual orientation. Acknowledge to children that many people have romantic feelings for members of the other gender, and some have these feelings for members of the same gender.

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

## **References**

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