

Sexual Development Ages 9-12

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 young people understand and accept their evolving sexuality.

During puberty:

- Skin becomes more oily and may develop pimples
- Sweating increases and youth may have body odor
- Hair grows under arms and on pubis and, in males, on face and chest
- Body proportions change (hips widen in females, shoulders broaden in males)
- Joints may ache due to rapid growth
- In males, genitals mature, scrotum darkens, voice deepens, sperm is produced, and erections, ejaculation, and wet dreams are more frequent
- In females, genitals mature, breasts develop, vaginal lubrication increases, and ovulation and menstrual cycle begin
- May masturbate (both males and females) and may have fantasies about others and about sexual intimacy

Emotional Development

Most young people aged nine to twelve will:

- Want to blend in and not stand out from their peers in any way, particularly as to gender roles and sexuality
- Feel concern about outward appearance. They want to look like "everyone else."
- Become self-conscious and self-centered
- Have ambivalent, conflicting feelings about puberty and about sexual desire and want to be independent and to conform
- Care greatly about relationships with peers, friendships, dating, and crushes and give peers more importance than family

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- Relate to both same-gender and opposite-gender peers and may develop sexual feelings for others as a new dimension within relationships
- Develop the capacity to understand the components of a caring, loving relationship
- Experience feelings of insecurity and begin to doubt self-concept and previous self-confidence. Girls, especially, often experience a significant drop in self-esteem.
- Struggle with family relationships and desire privacy and separation from family. They test limits and push for independence.
- Experience mood swings, especially evident in family relationships
- Develop infatuations or "crushes" and may begin dating

Sexual Development

Most young people aged nine to twelve will:

- Have an emerging sense of self as a young adult
- Feel conscious of their sexuality and how they choose to express it
- Understand jokes with sexual content
- Feel concerns about being normal, such as, is it normal to masturbate, have wet dreams, etc.
- Feel anxious about puberty, when it will happen, how it will occur, how to be prepared, etc.
- Feel shy about asking questions of caregivers, especially regarding sexuality, and may act like they already know all the answers
- Value privacy highly

What Families Need to Do to Raise Sexually Healthy Youth

To help nine to twelve year old youth develop a healthy sexuality, families should:

- Help young people understand puberty and the changes they are going through and that these changes, including menstruation and nocturnal emissions (ejaculation), are normal.
- Respect young people's privacy while encouraging open communication.
- Convey that growth and maturation rates differ from person to person.
- Help young people understand that, while they are maturing physically, they still have lots of emotional and cognitive growth ahead and that sexual intercourse is not healthy, appropriate, or wise at this time in their lives.
- Acknowledge that abstinence is normal and healthy, that sexual development is healthy and natural, and that, as they grow older, there will be many ways to express sexuality that do not include sexual intercourse.
- Discuss the important relationship between sexual and emotional feelings.
- Be open to conversations about contraception and condoms and respond honestly and accurately when young people ask about them.

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