

# SEXUALITY

*across the* **LIFESPAN**



**for Children and Adolescents  
with Developmental Disabilities**

An instructional guide for **PARENTS / CAREGIVERS**  
of individuals with developmental disabilities

Special Thanks to the Life Span Holistic Sexuality Education  
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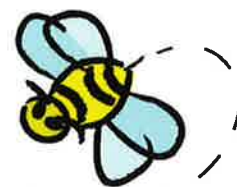
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# **SEXUALITY ACROSS THE LIFESPAN**

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**Sexuality education for Children and adolescents with Developmental disabilities.  
An Instructional manual for Parents / Caregivers of Individuals  
with Developmental Disabilities**

First Edition 2005



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**A**S A PARENT OR CAREGIVER OF ANY CHILD OR ADOLESCENT, ADDRESSING THE SUBJECT OF SEXUALITY CAN BE DAUNTING. ADD TO THE MIX A PHYSICAL OR COGNITIVE DISABILITY AND YOU MAY FIND YOURSELF FEELING TOTALLY UNPREPARED.

We are all sexual beings from the day we are born. Sexuality is the exploration of ourselves - our physical bodies, our emotions, self-worth and image, and our interrelations with others. It is one of the most **basic** human instincts, and no matter what level our learning abilities, it is a natural part of being human to have the desire to discover what our bodies are all about. It is the ability to learn the responsibilities and consequences of the various aspects of sexuality that will define for each of us to what degree of involvement and discovery we will explore.

This Instructional Manual and its accompanying Resource Guide are designed to help parents and caregivers assist individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities in their exploration of self and sexuality. It is the author's hope that by using these resources, both parents/caregivers and family members will gain a deeper appreciation of this sensitive subject, and that when the person with a disability reaches adulthood he or she will be better prepared to live and participate as independently and safely as possible in the community.

While this Instructional Manual was designed to address a wide range of concepts, you know your child best. Not every child will be ready or able to learn about all the subjects. Please speak with your child's teacher(s) and use your discretion to determine what is appropriate for your son or daughter's age and maturity level.



### Helpful Hints for Educators

As a parent or caregiver you have the responsibility of teaching your family member about growing up and becoming a sexual being. There is a myth that individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities are "asexual" beings (meaning without sex). This is so false! Therefore, it is important that you take this duty seriously. It is also important that sexuality be presented to children in a positive and gradual way. Since each person is unique with different abilities and learning styles, you as the parent or caregiver will be best positioned to determine when and how much information your family member needs in order to explore his or her sexuality fully and safely.

This can be a difficult topic to talk about. The instructional guide will help you with that. Your child's educators can also be wonderful allies in this process. A companion instructional guide for educators is also available, which should be helpful in building consistency in teaching your child about sexuality across settings. Be aware, however, that educators are often limited by school administrations and policies in how much information about sexuality they can teach. It will be important to know your school's policies on this issue.

### There are some things to keep in mind while you and your family member learn about sexuality:

1. It is normal for all children to express a curiosity about sex.
2. It is helpful to look for opportunities to discuss the subject. For example, your family member may ask a question dealing with relationships or, if your family member is non-verbal, you may find him/her watching a particular movie or show involving loving relationships more than other shows. These are good clues that your family member is noticing and may be thinking about issues of sexuality.
3. You may find that you are uncomfortable talking about sexuality with your family member. Most parents/caregivers feel that way. You may also think you are ill-prepared to discuss the issue. Rest assured the very fact that you are reading this workbook today means you have a vast knowledge of sexuality - you are an adult and may have had many different types of sexual relationships. You may not know all the technical terms, but having personal experience is a great starting point in teaching. How you respond to your family member is as important as what you say. If sexuality is taught as a bad or unnatural thing, then your family member may have trouble participating in society appropriately. Keep it positive!
4. Your family member will already be aware of many aspects of sexuality through TV, the radio, music, and classmates. Your job is to make sure he or she/your child learns to like who s/he is and to use the correct language and appropriate behavior for what your family member will be feeling as s/he matures and moves into puberty and adulthood.
5. It is important to use the correct language. The correct names for body parts will better prepare your family member for living safely in the community. There is a very high incidence of sexual abuse among individuals with developmental disabilities. We all hope it never happens, but if it does, teaching your child to speak or point to the correct body parts where s/he was touched will better help the authorities.
6. You and your family member may not always agree when discussing sexuality. Sexuality includes discovering our own style in clothing and appearance, so make room for individuality. Your style may not be his or her style. Even in a disagreement, keep it positive. Do not put your family member down. Rather, teach that sexuality involves responsibility. Then discuss the consequences of acting irresponsibly. No matter whom we are, irresponsible sex has serious consequences. The consequences may be physical or emotional. Use praise when the right decisions are made. Seek professional counseling help should the need arise.

7. Talk, Talk, Talk. The best relationships involve open communication. You have learned how best to communicate with your family member. Use this method to teach about sexuality remembering that it is not just about sex. Sexuality is mostly about the importance of self-worth and personal responsibility in all types of relationships.
8. There are exercises in this manual for you to do with your family member. They are broken down into small steps. This is important to remember when teaching any aspect of sexuality, whether it be washing one's pubic area, or appropriate social interactions. We all learn best by learning small steps. You will also need to revisit many of the steps over and over again. You will be reminded throughout this manual of possible skills to revisit.
9. Use as many resources as possible to teach these tasks. The brain is a marvelous thing. Different parts are responsible for processing differing media input such as: spoken language, visual, touch, or music. Trying a variety of media formats will help you discover which one, or which combination, works best for your family member.
10. We all need positive reinforcement when working on a task. Throughout this manual you are encouraged to keep it positive and acknowledge a job well done. This will help your family member see sexuality as a positive experience and make learning about it more fun.

### Adapting for different learning styles:

When working with an individual with an intellectual or developmental disability you may have to try out several methods for explaining the processes of maturation and puberty. Taking full-length photos (fully clothed of course) of your son or daughter from different stages of their life, and pasting them on a picture board can help your child to see the changes that s/he has already gone through. Continue to do this as s/he goes through puberty. Showing pictures of siblings or even yourself as you grew up is also another way to illustrate the changes your child is and will be experiencing. Using anatomically correct dolls (e.g. the teenage Skipper adult Barbie, or others) so that your child can touch and feel the changes would be of help as well. The more formats you can use to aid in your discussions, the better prepared your son or daughter will be to deal with the many changes s/he will be experiencing. This manual is designed to give you a variety of exercises within each topic area that you can adapt to meet your family member's learning style.

If you are still experiencing difficulty helping your family member understand the changes and appropriate behaviors, then please do not be afraid to reach out for help. There are many professionals who can help. An important link to either make, or maintain, is with your family member's teachers. The changes your child will be experiencing and the corresponding emotions will travel with him or her wherever s/he goes. Having everyone involved in your family member's life using the same teaching methods will greatly enhance the learning experience.

Another reason for having open communication with your family member and all those involved in his/her life is that this is a time when s/he may be open to sexual abuse or exploitation. Your child may be having sexual feelings and find him or herself in situations where it feels good to him/her, but in fact it is abusive! Reinforcing good touch/bad touch and abstinence, and having a plan of action for communication and support is of extreme importance!

### Some tips to keep in mind while teaching sexuality to your Family member:

1. Throughout this manual there are references to using pictures to help your students understand what you are trying to teach. It is true that "a picture is worth a thousand words." Using pictures of family or friends when describing various types of relationships will help make the concepts more realistic and relatable for your students.
2. There are exercises in this manual for you to do with your family member. They are broken down into small steps. This is important to remember when teaching any aspect of sexuality, whether it be washing the public area or having other appropriate social interactions. We all learn best by learning small steps. You will also need to revisit many of the steps over and over again. You will be reminded throughout this manual of possible skills to revisit.
3. Use as many resources as possible to teach the task. The brain is a marvelous thing. Different parts are responsible for processing differing media input such as spoken language, visual, touch, or music. Trying a variety of media formats will help you discover which one, or which combination, works best for your family member.
4. We all need positive reinforcement when working on a task. Throughout the manual you are encouraged to keep it positive and acknowledge a job well done. This will help your family member see sexuality as a positive experience and make learning about it more fun.
5. Reach out to others for help. If you don't know the answer find someone who does. There are professional organizations able to help. Even better, find another parent who has already gone through the process and ask them what they did.

### Links to the Resource Guide:

Below are corresponding references to the accompanying Resource Guide. The selections were chosen to help you find additional information that you can obtain to help you and your child through this learning process.

- Resources for Parents/Caregivers: pages 9 & 10
- Diversity Inclusion in Sexuality Education: page 12
- Train-the-Trainer Materials: pages 13 & 14
- General Sexuality Education Curricula: pages 15 & 16
- Materials to Support General Sexuality Education by Grade Level: pages 16 -18
- Materials to Support Teaching about Feelings/Emotions: page 18
- Materials to Support the Teaching of Gender-Specific Issues: pages 22 - 24
- Abuse Prevention Curricula: pages 25 - 29
- Materials to Support Abuse Prevention: pages 29 - 30

## Alike or DIFFERENT?

### For the parent or caregiver

These activities can be used to help children demonstrate progress toward understanding the differences between males and females.

### Knowledge and understanding:

- Identifying body parts; includes being able to recognize and use correct terms
- Identifying the ways all people are alike and different

### Attitudes and values:

- Demonstrating an appreciation of people with different attributes

### Self-management skills:

- Observing differences and similarities between themselves and others

### Interpersonal skills important in school, family, and social situations:

- Practicing taking turns when speaking and listening
- Sharing
- Listening carefully and clearly expressing oneself
- Following rules

### Monitoring and assessment:

This activity will provide parents/caregivers with an opportunity to assess whether their family member can:

- Use correct terminology or identification for body parts, including some sexual organs
- Discuss physical similarities and differences between boys and girls
- Recognize how they are alike and different from other people their age
- Work together to demonstrate developmentally appropriate communication and listening skills.

**Note:** Multiple learning activities may need to be used to meet the learning needs and interests of children. Talk to your family member's teacher to find out what learning method works best in school and then use that method at home to discuss sexuality. Share with teachers what you are teaching at home to help build consistency across settings.



## PREPARATION

The following resources can be used alone or in combination to meet the specific needs and interests of the family member

- Anatomically correct dolls
- Skeleton
- Mirrors
- Dress-up area
- Scissors
- Posters of anatomically correct bodies
- Books and stories about the human body (see Resource Guide)
- Create an activity/collage table. Include butcher's paper, art paper, card, pencils, felt, opens, crayons, paints, brushes, textiles, wool materials, clay and glue
- Prepare a learning corner
- Dolls (anatomically correct, multicultural, a boy and a girl)
- Puzzles with correct body part labels
- Dress-up clothes for male and female
- Prepare three different sized and shaped boxes, with different wrapping. Have exactly the same contents in each box
- Cut out two paper dolls with exactly the same paper clothes on
- Create an example board that has pictorial examples of all terms being addressed in the lesson

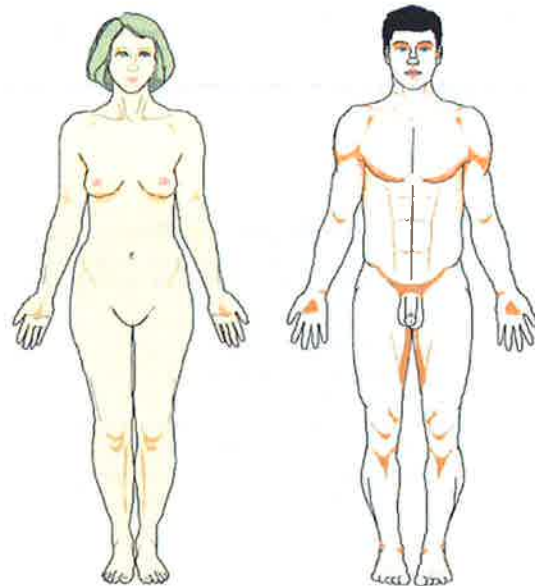
### Procedure

**ACTIVITY** - It is important in these activities that you emphasize observation and understanding, not the completion of the activities.

1. Assess your family member's understanding of the concepts of alike and different, demonstrating where needed by using like and different objects. When the concept seems to be understood, the following game can be used for reinforcement: Sit across from them. Ask them to describe (verbally or through pointing to an example board of different types of clothes and body parts - include the correct terms for each item underneath) one thing about you that is different. For example - "you are a boy and I am a girl" or "I am wearing pants, you are wearing a skirt." Then have your family member describe one thing that is alike, such as, "we are both girls", or "we both have pants on."
2. Using the worksheet on the next page, or anatomically correct dolls, ask your child to identify what is alike and different on each. Cover the pictures on the next page, except for the heads, and then uncover them so s/he can see the difference. Keep the example board handy if s/he is unable to respond verbally. If your child does not know the correct terms for the body parts, then discuss the correct terms using verbal and pictorial reinforcement. Use correct names such as penis and nipples, not nicknames. If your family member uses a nickname that is heard elsewhere then acknowledge that "Yes, there are a lot of names for these body parts, and here are the correct names." (Some people like to teach both nicknames and correct terminology, so that children will know if someone says something inappropriate to them. Use your best judgment. If your child is mature enough to learn both, that is ok. Flash cards with both slang and correct terminology are often used in these situations. Do be aware, however, that much of today's slang for body parts is abusive and vulgar,

so you will want to use discretion.) Many schools have anatomically correct dolls. You could partner with the school and even perhaps borrow the dolls. You could also ask the school nurse or social worker to do this exercise with your child.

3. The song "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes" can be modified to introduce the new body parts.
4. Using dressed paper dolls or girl/boy dolls, have your family member identify which doll is a boy and which one is a girl and why. Have him/her remove the clothing to discover the correct gender.





**List of words to be learned**

Head, Arms, Legs, Stomach, Feet, Hands, Fingers, Lips, Eyes, Nose, Hips, Breasts, Penis, Testicles, Pubic Area, other terms as you feel necessary (see worksheet on next page).

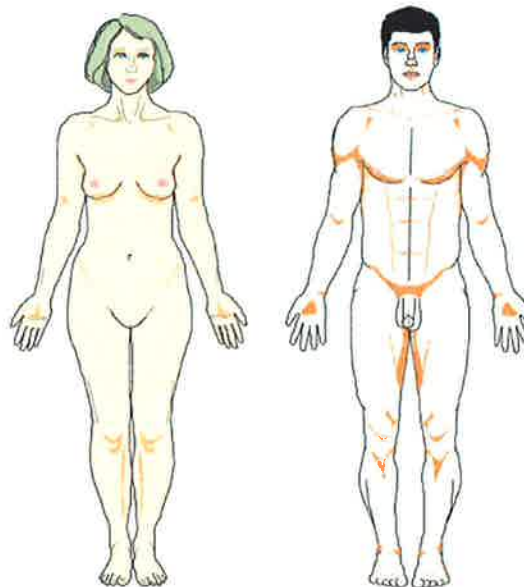
Keep in mind that children are very observant and notice the differences in bulges or bumps in clothing between adults and children. Introducing them to the differences in bodies and the correct names will help them to better understand themselves when they reach puberty.

**Other activities (with adult supervision)**

1. Have your child paint, draw, or create representations of a boy or girl.
2. Have your child create a life-size figure of him or her self on paper. Have him/her fill in the face, clothes, etc. Hang it in the room and have him/her discuss the similarities or differences between him or herself and other family members.
3. Give the opportunity for independent learning time via storybooks, magazines, or videos.
4. Help your child find pictures in magazines or newspapers of people with different attributes (eyes, hair, nose, mouth). Help him/her make a picture book of these for use for reinforcement. Talk with your child's teachers or other professionals and encourage them to discuss correct terms with your son or daughter. These terms, along with pictures, should be included in the picture book.

**Point to the picture that matches each word:**

- |        |       |           |            |      |      |
|--------|-------|-----------|------------|------|------|
| Head   | Arm   | Leg       | Stomach    | Feet | Lips |
| Breast | Penis | Testicles | Pubic Area | Hand |      |



**Links to the Resource Guide**

Below are corresponding references to the accompanying Resource Guide. The selections were chosen to help you find additional information that can help you and your child through this learning process.

**Grades K-2**

- Teach-A-Bodies Anatomically Correct Dolls, page 16
- Bare Naked Book, page 17
- Belly Buttons and Navels, page 17

**Grades 3-5**

- A Kid's First Book About Sex, page 17
- Where Did I Come From?, page 17



## CHANGES IN YOUR BODY

TOPIC TWO  
For use with Grades 4-6

### Activities and Discussion Points

These activities can be used to help girls and boys demonstrate progress towards understanding the changes in their bodies as they mature into puberty. The first several pages are for you the parent/caregiver to use as an instructional resource. Following are several pages for you to do together with your family member.

### Knowledge and understanding:

- Identifying body parts – includes being able to recognize and use correct terms
- Identifying that all people are alike and different
- Understanding the difference between male and female
- Understanding the changes in their emotions



### Attitudes and values:

- Valuing their own bodies and understanding that the changes in their bodies and emotions are important and natural

### Self-management skills:

- Observing differences and similarities between themselves and others

### Interpersonal skills:

- Learning how females differ from males
- Understanding and exhibiting appropriate behavior
- Learning how to express feelings regarding emotions

### Growing up:

Growing up is a natural part of life. Our bodies go through many changes. It is important to understand that everyone grows and matures at different rates. Topics for discussion could include the following:

- Differences in height and weight from person to person. *Note:* Being overweight can have detrimental effects on health and self-image, so this is a good time to start emphasizing healthy eating and exercise
- Use correct terminology or identification for body parts, including some sexual organs, menstruation, and erections
- Discuss the physical differences between boys and girls such as: usually, but not always, boys have more muscle strength than girls and are therefore stronger; voice changes; obvious body changes - breast growth, hair on legs, under arms, on the face (for boys) and in pubic area; boys' shoulders may get broader
- Recognize how students are alike and different from other people their ages

**Note:** Multiple learning activities may need to be used to meet the needs, interests, and cognitive and maturity levels of children.



### PREPARATION

The following following resources can be used alone or in combination to meet the specific needs and interests of the family member

- Anatomically correct dolls
- Diagrams provided
- Picture board
- Scissors
- Posters of anatomically correct bodies
- Books and stories about the human body (see Resource Guide)
- Samples of sanitary napkins (pads) to show
- An example board that has pictorial examples of all terms being addressed in the lesson

#### Procedure

**ACTIVITY-** It is important in these activities that you help your family member understand to the best of his/her abilities about the changes his/her body is or will be going through. Puberty is a tough age (remember?), but to not understand what is happening to our bodies can be scary. The more your family member knows the less stressful puberty will be for him or her.

1. Assess your family member's ability and preparedness to understand the various concepts about puberty. Remember to use as many different learning formats as possible. Take each step of puberty listed under the sections "for girls" and "for boys" one at a time, teaching just that term and how it will affect your family member's body. Ask your son or daughter to describe (verbally or through pointing to a picture board to acknowledge s/he understands - make sure you include the correct terms for each body part underneath). For example - If you are talking about how a girl's breasts will start to get bigger have your child point to a picture of an adult woman to acknowledge s/he understands.
2. Use correct names, such as penis and nipples, not nicknames (unless you have made a considered decision to use both). If your family member uses a nickname that was learned elsewhere, acknowledge the different term: "Yes, there are a lot of names for these body parts, and the correct names are.....".

### LINKS TO THE RESOURCE GUIDE

: Below are corresponding references to the accompanying Resource Guide. The selections were chosen to help you find additional information that can help you and your child through this learning process

#### Grades 4 - 5

- A Kid's First Book about Sex, page 17
- Where Did I Come From?, page 17

#### Grades 6 - 8

- Changes in You: ...for Boys, page 17
- Changes in You: ...for Girls, page 17
- Janet's Got Her Period, page 22

\*Pages 23 - 24 list many good resources for teaching about periods.

\*\*There are two videos listed on page 23, one for girls and one for boys, that teach about puberty. The cost is \$24.95 each.

### What happens as we grow? Hints for parents or caregivers

Your child may begin to feel growing pains (pain in muscles and joints) as early as 5, but s/he is most likely to feel it around 10 or 11 years old. These pains occur mostly behind the knee, in the shins or thighs, but may also occur in the arms, back, shoulders, ankles and groin. The pains usually occur in the late afternoon and early evening. If your child is able to communicate feelings of discomfort to you it is important to encourage him/her to do so. If your child is not able to communicate his or her feelings, being aware that these changes are occurring will help you to notice signs of discomfort in his or her mannerisms. Reassure your son or daughter that this pain is natural and seek out professional advice on ways to ease the discomfort. This is a time of life with many mood swings and hormonal changes. It is important to stress the normality of this. Bear in mind that your son or daughter may need additional help, such as seeing a counselor, to help him/her through this emotional time. Remember to use small steps in teaching concepts of puberty. This would include teaching a young girl how to put on or change a sanitary napkin or pad.

#### What happens during puberty? (For Girls)

**Breast growth** - discuss the correct terms for breast parts

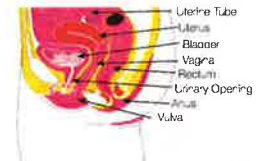
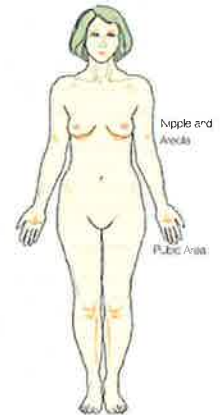
- The nipple and areola get larger and darker in color.
- The breasts enlarge.
- The breasts may feel tender or sore.
- The nipples will be sensitive and when cold, touched, or sexually aroused they may become erect.

**Pubic area**

- Much of a girl's changes are on the inside. Pubic hair will start to grow.

**Menstruation** - also known as Period

- The ovum, or female egg, is the female reproductive cell (ova is plural).
- The ovary, the part that holds the hundreds of thousands of ova.
- The sac is what holds the ova. As puberty begins, the ovum begins to mature and move toward the outside of the ovary.
- Ovulation - this is when the ovum pushes through the ovary and travels through the uterine tube.
- Uterus - the part of the body where a baby would grow. During this time blood builds up in the lining of the uterus. When there is no fertilization of the egg, the egg and the blood of the lining leave the body.



**What happens during puberty? (For boys)**

**Circumcision** - It is important to help your son understand the difference between being circumcised or not. During gym class or in the bathrooms at school he may see that there is a difference. An explanation will help to alleviate any concern.

**Voice changes**

- A boy's voice changes more noticeably than does a girl's. Often this leads to teasing by peers. You can stress that everyone goes through this, and that it is part of becoming a man. Having another male talk about his experience would be a good strategy.

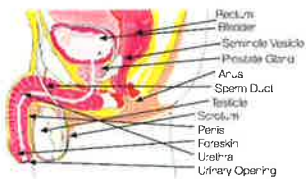
**Pubic area** - Boys exhibit more external changes than girls do.

These changes will include:

- Pubic hair grows.
- Testicles - the equivalent of girls' ovaries, they contain male sex cells (sperm) and the male hormone testosterone.
- Scrotum - the pouch of skin that contains the testicles. When cold, the scrotum shrinks to draw the testicles closer to the body for warmth.
- Sperm duct - 2 tubes through which sperm travel toward the penis.
- Seminal Vesicles - glands that produce a fluid which gives sperm energy.
- Urethra - in males this has two functions, one to carry urine out of the body and the other to carry the semen (a mixture of sperm and fluid from both the seminal vesicles and the prostatic gland).
- Penis - this becomes hard (an erection) during sexual excitement. Teenage boys will have many uncontrolled experiences of sexual excitement, which can lead to embarrassing situations. As a parent it is important to help your son learn appropriate behaviors during these times.

**For example:**

if he is in school, he may need to excuse himself to go to the bathroom or learn to engage himself in other activities until the erection goes away. If at home, he may need the privacy of his room, or if your family does not believe in masturbation, you will want to find ways to help him learn to engage in other activities until the urges go away. It is natural for most teenage boys to experiment with masturbation. Your son needs to learn though, that there is an appropriate time and place for this.



**What is puberty?**  
**AN INFORMATION SHEET FOR GIRLS**

Growing up takes a very long time. The changes your body will go through take place very slowly. These changes that you will see in yourself and others your age are what is called puberty. Some of the ways in which girls and boys change are the same. However, there are other changes that are different for boys and girls.

**How girls change:**

**Height**

Girls start growing taller faster than boys do. But they also stop growing before boys do. Look at your mother, father, and other adults. You will see that the men may be taller than the women. This is normal. It is important to remember though that no two people grow at the same rate or in the same way. You will each grow at your own rate so don't compare yourself to anyone else.



**Physical changes**

**Hips and Breasts** - You may notice that your hips will get wider. This is a normal part of being female. You will also notice that your breasts will get bigger. Only girls' breasts grow. Boys' breasts do not grow. At first your breasts will just be small mounds. After a long time they will get bigger. As they get bigger you will need to start wearing a bra. Girls wear bras to give their breasts support. This is an exciting time for you, and buying your first bra is something most girls look forward to.

**Hair** - The hair on certain parts of your body will start to grow too. This is one thing that boys and girls have in common. For girls, you will find that you will get hair under your armpits, around your pubic area, and on your legs. Hair growing on these areas of your body is a natural part of growing up. You will notice that your armpits will start smelling funny. This is also part of growing up, but it means that you will need to start wearing deodorant. Deodorant is something that keeps you from sweating under your armpits. This sweating is what causes your armpits to smell funny. Many girls shave the hair from under their armpits and on their legs. Your parents can help you with deciding whether you will shave your armpits and legs. Even if you do shave your armpits you will still need to wear deodorant.

**Menstruation or Periods**

When girls mature, they change on the inside as well as on the outside. Somewhere between the age of 9 and 14, girls will start their menstrual cycles, or what is often called a period.

Here is what you can expect. Every month an egg is released from your ovary (see diagrams on page 31). When the egg is not fertilized it dissolves. Then the blood that was building up as a lining in your womb leaves your body. This blood is no longer needed, and your body knows to remove it. This is what we call your period.

The blood comes down through the vagina, which is between your legs. You will need to wear a sanitary napkin or tampon to keep the blood off your clothes. Deciding whether you will wear a sanitary napkin or tampon should be done with your parents or your doctor. Your period will last between 4 and 7 days. You may also want to keep extra sanitary napkins or tampons at school in case your period comes while you are there, or you can ask to see the school nurse, who may have a sanitary napkin to give you.

You may notice some changes just before you start your period. Girls have certain hormones that increase so that an egg will leave the ovary. This hormone increase may make you get angry more easily. Or, you may find that you cry for no reason. Your breasts may hurt. You may also experience some pain in the lower pelvic area or lower back. Some girls experience only a little pain. Others experience a lot of pain. There are medications that you can take for this pain. It is important to tell your parents or teacher that you have pain so they can help you.

Having your period is a very private thing. Girls should only talk to their parents, close friends, doctor, or other trusted people about it. This is not something that you should talk about to strangers or others you do not know very well.

When you start your period your parents, family members, someone else who takes care of you, or perhaps the school nurse will help you learn how to use a sanitary napkin, pad, or tampon. These are used to catch the blood that comes out from between your legs. This blood is no longer needed by your body so it is ok that it is getting rid of it.

Pads and tampons come in many shapes and sizes. What one you use will depend on how much you bleed and what feels most comfortable for you.



Above are some examples of sanitary napkins and tampons. There are many styles available so each person has to find what works best.

## What is puberty?

### AN INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUNG BOYS

#### How boys change:

##### Height

Boys start growing taller a little later than girls but also grow until they are a little older. All boys grow at different rates. Some boys will be very tall and others will be shorter. How tall you grow depends on how tall your parents, grandparents or other relatives are.

You will also notice that you will grow a little heavier. You will see the muscles on your arms, chest and legs get bigger and stronger too.

##### Physical Changes

**Muscles** - You will also notice that you will grow a little heavier. You will see the muscles on your arms, chests, and legs get bigger and stronger, too.

**Voice** - You will notice that your voice will start cracking when you talk. It may sound a little like a frog. This is normal. Your voice is becoming deeper. Girls' voices don't change very much, only boys.



##### Hair

You will see tiny little hairs starting to grow on your faces, chests, armpits, and pubic areas. At first it will look like the fuzz on a peach. As you get older, however, it will change and become thicker. It is common for men to shave the hair on their faces and necks. Some men may choose not to shave and will grow a beard and mustache. You will need to learn how to trim a beard or mustache, though, to keep it neat.

**Penis** - Your penis is another part of your body that will grow. It will grow longer and thicker. Your testicles (often called balls) will get bigger too. The penis is usually soft and floppy. Now that you are getting older you will have more erections. An erection is when your penis gets stiff and hard. Erections are very private things and not something to talk about with anyone but your parents or your doctor.

Sometimes you will get erections in a public place like school. This can be embarrassing. You do not want to touch yourself when this happens. This is not the right thing to do. Touching your penis should only be done when you are alone in very private areas. Try to think of something else, like your favorite TV show, and it should go away.

**Wet dreams** - Boys have dreams at night that cause erections. This is normal. Semen (a milky colored substance) squirts out through the opening of your penis. Semen contains sperm, which is how an adult man helps to make a baby. You will not know that you are having a wet dream. Keep tissues by your beds so you can clean it up when you wake up. Be sure that you also launder your bed sheets and nightclothes, or else there will be a very strong odor later in the day.



## More on puberty for both girls and boys

### Personal hygiene:

**Bathing** - Your body is going through so many changes. Some of these changes will make you sweat more. Your hair will get greasy and you may get acne (or pimples) on your face. It is important that you keep your body clean. You should bathe or shower every day. When you do, make sure you wash your hair with shampoo. Girls may also want to use conditioner on their hair to keep it healthy. You need to also wash your skin very well with soap. You need to especially wash under your arms and in your pubic areas. Washing your face every morning and every night will help clear up pimples. There are also creams that you can use to help dry them up. Talk to your parents about using these creams.

**Mood swings** - Mood swings are when you are happy one day, angry the next day, or very sad on another day. Sometimes you may feel all three feelings in one day. Girls are more likely to get strong mood swings, but boys can get them too. You get mood swings because of hormones. Everyone has something called glands in the body. Some glands make these chemicals called hormones. The hormones that cause mood swings also cause your bodies to change as you grow up. Mood swings are caused by the increase or decrease in these hormones in your bodies.

When you are feeling these hormone changes, you may find it difficult to say how you are feeling. You may yell at your parents or others. When you feel this way it is important to take some time by yourselves. Listen to music or look at a magazine. Then when you feel ready it is important to talk to your parents about how you are feeling.



**Self-image** - Your body is, or will be, going through so many changes. Sometimes it is hard to understand what is happening. You may look in the mirror and see something you don't like. You may look at your friends and wish you looked like them. It is normal to be uncomfortable at this time in your life. Everyone has these feelings, including your brothers and sisters, friends, and your classmates.

There are some things you can do to feel better. Keep clean. Wear clothes that fit you well and are in fashion. Try a new hairstyle. All these things will help.

**Independence** - Part of getting older is being able to do more things. You will see classmates or friends doing more things without their parents. You may feel you want to do this too. It is important for you to learn to do more things on your own. Talk to your parents about how you may do this.

**Sexual feelings** - Puberty and growing up is nature's way of preparing people who love each other to make babies when they are ready. Having a baby is not something that everyone does though. It is a VERY important decision and should take a lot of planning.

As you grow up you may start feeling sensations that feel nice. Boys will get erections. Both boys and girls will find it feels nice to touch parts of their bodies. It is a normal part of growing up. **But remember it is a very private thing. You should not touch yourself in front of anyone else.**

Part of growing up includes keeping yourself safe from harm. It is normal for you to touch yourself in private in your bedroom. You should not let someone else touch you. If someone tries to touch you in a private way you need to immediately tell your parents or an adult who knows your parents. It is also not right for you to touch someone else.

You may find that you start to like another person. Your friends or classmates may say they have boyfriends or girlfriends. You may find that you cannot stop thinking about this person that you like. This is all normal. You need to remember though that the person that you like may not feel the same way about you. This too is a normal part of growing up. If you find you like someone who does not feel the same way about you, talk to your parents, teachers, or other people that you really trust about ways to deal with the situation. Even though it is normal, it still hurts.

### Public and Private

As you become more aware of your body as a sexual being it is only natural that you will find that touching yourself on your private parts (penis, breasts or pubic area) feels good. Touching yourself this way in ANY public area is NOT OK. It is important to understand that people have different concepts of what is public and private. Below are things you and your parents or another trusted adult can do together to help you learn what is meant by public and private.



**House Rules:**

**DISCUSS THE HOUSE RULES REGARDING DRESS:**

1. Where is it Ok to be without clothes on? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Where is it Ok to be with just underwear on? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Where can I get dressed and undressed? \_\_\_\_\_

**DISCUSS THE HOUSE RULES REGARDING TOUCH:**

1. What are the rules about me touching my body? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What are the rules about me touching my private parts? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Where in the house can I touch my private parts? \_\_\_\_\_

**DISCUSS THE HOUSE RULES REGARDING PRIVATE AREAS:**

1. What are the private areas in our house? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What are the areas in our neighborhood? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What are the private places in our community? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Are there private places in my school? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What are the private places in my school? \_\_\_\_\_

**DISCUSS WHERE PUBLIC PLACES ARE IN OUR HOUSE, NEIGHBORHOOD, COMMUNITY, AND SCHOOL:**

1. What are the public places in our house? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What are the public places in our neighborhood? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What are the public places in our community? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What are the public places in school? \_\_\_\_\_

**DISCUSS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE REGARDING EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES:**

1. What are the house rules about other people's privacy, e.g. knocking on the door, using other peoples' things without asking. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Where is it OK to urinate, take a bath, look at a newspaper/magazine, get dressed, or hug a friend? (Discuss answers for each of the following locations).
  - a. At home? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. In the neighborhood? \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. In the community? \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. In school? \_\_\_\_\_

**DISCUSS WHO ARE TRUSTED INDIVIDUALS TO TALK TO ABOUT PERSONAL FEELINGS, ISSUES, AND NEEDS.**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Sample picture board for private and public places**

This is just a sample picture board. You may find that taking pictures of actual public and private areas in your child's life will be better suited to his or her learning needs. The same is true for all sample picture boards.

Public or Private?



Public or Private?



Public or Private?



Public or Private?



Public or Private?



Public or Private?



## BECOMING AN ADULT

### Activities and Discussion Points

These activities can be used to help girls and boys demonstrate progress towards understanding the changes in their body as they mature into young adults. The pages are designed for you and your family member to do together.

#### Knowledge and understanding:

- Identifying body parts; includes being able to recognize and use correct terms
- Understanding the importance of personal hygiene (self-care)
- Understanding the difference between male and female
- Understanding the changes in their emotions
- Talking about masturbation
- Having a positive self-esteem
- Understanding the development of a baby



#### Attitudes and values:

- Valuing their own bodies understanding that the changes in their bodies and emotions are important and natural

#### Self-management skills:

- Observing appropriate sexual behaviors

#### Interpersonal skills:

- Learning how to respect other individuals
- Understanding appropriate behavior

#### Self-care:

The older we are, the more important it is for us to do as much independently as possible and being responsible for our behaviors. As parents, it also means helping our children learn how and when to ask for help. Following are several important lessons to teach your family member:

- To feel good about oneself, one needs to take care of oneself. This means washing the hands after using the toilet, taking a bath, combing one's hair, eating good food, exercising in whatever ways possible, and, for girls, menstrual self-care. As you teach your child these lessons, talk with his or her teachers to find out what they are doing at school to teach your child. Then you can work together in teaching your child self-care.
- It is important for you to use the correct terminology or identification for body parts, including sexual organs, menstruation, and erections.
- Taking care of one's health is also important. This is the time to teach your child how to take a good look at his or her own body. If your child see changes that do not seem right, then s/he needs to learn how to tell someone about it in a way that will be understood. Likewise, if you see any worrisome changes in your son or daughter's body, be sure to talk to a doctor.





### PREPARATION

The following materials and resources can be used alone or in combination to meet the specific needs, interests and maturity level of the family member.

#### Procedure

**ACTIVITY:** Your family member is now in high school and is observing the rituals of "dating", "going steady", "breaking up", etc. He or she may also be involved in a health education class where s/he is learning about intercourse, pregnancy, and babies. This is the time to really stress the importance of appropriate sexual behavior. S/he will undoubtedly be curious about relationships and what his or her body is feeling when s/he is near someone s/he "likes". This is also a great time to reinforce your family's faith beliefs and values about sexuality with your son or daughter in a way s/he can grasp.

1. Assess your family member's ability to understand the various concepts about relationships. Remember to use as many different learning formats as possible. For this age group the exercises in the Social Skills section (pages 42-47) are a good place to start. Ask him/her to describe (verbally or through pointing to a picture board) what s/he is feeling (see the sample picture board in the back of manual). Give your son or daughter time to express him or herself. S/he may have a hard time at first expressing feelings, but the more practice s/he has, the better s/he will get at it.
2. Reinforce the correct names for body parts if your child uses slang in describing their feelings.

**Note:** Multiple learning activities may need to be used to meet the needs, interests, cognitive capacities and maturity levels of your child. It may help to also find out what your child's school is doing to teach these concepts, and partner with them in teaching about becoming an adult.

#### Links to the Resource Guide

Below are corresponding references to the accompanying Resource Guide. The selections were chosen to help you find additional information to help you and your child through this learning process. Unfortunately, for this age group the resources are somewhat costly and geared toward educational systems in the form of curricula.

However, there are many resources right in your own home. TV offers many opportunities for discussing appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. For example, record several hours of different soap operas and you will have a lot of video to teach from.

#### Grades 7 - 12

Learn about Life: Sexuality & Social Skills Set, page 15  
SEALS + Plus: Self-Esteem and Life Skills, page 19

#### Grades 9 - 12

The Gyn. Exam, page 24 (a good resource but very expensive)

\*Pages 24 and 25 list several videos useful in relationship building

### Self-esteem

This is the age when adolescents and young adults struggle with their self-esteem. They are under a great deal of pressure at school to "fit in". Strong friendships are formed that may last beyond high school. This is also the time when hobbies and outside interests are explored. Peers are going to dances, athletic events, and joining clubs. Give your family member opportunities to join activities with peer groups. It is important to give your child many opportunities to share about what is going on outside the home. It is also important to use your child's strengths, interests, and desires as guides when providing them with opportunities to explore activities and hobbies. If your family member mentions that peers are going to various activities, but s/he chooses not to go, this may be a clue that s/he is struggling with self-esteem issues. Again, positive reinforcement is important. Take your family member shopping for clothes that are current with his or her peers. Reinforce good grooming skills and hygiene. Encourage your child to try some activities with a few close friends that s/he feels comfortable with.

The following two pages give you some sample activities to help you glean information about your family member's self-esteem, who s/he looks up to as role models, and how s/he thinks others view him or her. Use the method of communication that works best with your family member to modify the activities.

If you feel your family member is experiencing extremely low self-esteem you should take him or her to see a qualified professional. Depression often starts in the teen years, so it is important to monitor your child's self-esteem to be sure that s/he is developing into a healthy adult who values him or herself for whom s/he is.

#### If I Could Choose To Be.....

Choose 5-10 of the following statements to discuss with your students, including the last two statements. You may need to make a picture board showing examples of the questions you pick. For instance, for the first question, have a book of animals available for your students to leaf through and then point to the ones they would choose.

#### IF I COULD CHOOSE TO BE...

- An animal, I would be \_\_\_\_\_
- A cartoon, I would be \_\_\_\_\_
- A flower, I would be \_\_\_\_\_
- A bird, I would be \_\_\_\_\_
- A tree, I would be \_\_\_\_\_
- A shoe, I would be \_\_\_\_\_
- A food, I would be \_\_\_\_\_



- A song, I would be \_\_\_\_\_
- A TV show, I would be \_\_\_\_\_
- A sound, I would be \_\_\_\_\_
- A color, I would be \_\_\_\_\_
- A movie, I would be \_\_\_\_\_
- An insect, I would be \_\_\_\_\_
- A car, I would be \_\_\_\_\_
- A friend, I would be \_\_\_\_\_
- A parent, I would be \_\_\_\_\_

**NOW HAVE THEM ANSWER THESE TWO QUESTIONS:**

- What are things I like about myself? \_\_\_\_\_
- What do others like about me? \_\_\_\_\_

**Reflections of Myself**

- What kind of person am I? Examples: kind, quiet, honest...  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- Who do I think I can become?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- What adult do I want to be most like?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

- Why do I want to be like that adult?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- What person my age would I want to be most like?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- Why would I want to be like that person?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- What are the things I like most about myself?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- What are the things I don't like about myself?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Masturbation**

It's that dreaded "M" word. Masturbation is probably one of the most uncomfortable words for any person to use. Yet masturbation is incredibly common, especially among young people learning about their own bodies. What you teach your family member about masturbation will depend on family values and faith beliefs. Keep in mind though, that your family member may try masturbation whether or not you choose to address the issue.

Regrettably, there have been many cases where individuals with I/DD have been denied the right to express their sexual urges in appropriate ways. This led to them use whatever means they could find to relieve these natural urges, often causing physical harm to them. Help your family member find appropriate ways to deal with his or her sexual feelings.

The scenario below represents a very common occurrence. There are many ways to deal with such a situation. Two possible reactions are described. Which you choose will likely depend on your faith beliefs and values. Keep in mind that these are only suggestions, and you should use your best judgment in how you will approach these types of situations. Take time to learn if your child is masturbating at school, the school's policies, and teachers' responses to these types of situations. Having this conversation will help to prevent potential tensions between home and school and confusion for your child, should s/he be receiving contradictory messages from home and school.

### How to talk to your family member about masturbation

**SCENARIO:** You walk into your living room and see your family member masturbating. Clearly s/he is not alone in the house so this is inappropriate.

**Reaction 1:** In a calm voice tell him/her to stop what s/he is doing. (Don't say things like "stop doing that, it's bad.") Then take your child into the privacy of his/her bedroom and have a discussion about what s/he was feeling when s/he started to masturbate. Use the term "masturbate" so s/he connects it with what s/he was doing. Acknowledge these feelings as being natural. Introduce what an orgasm is. (If your family member is a male, explain that he may see a white sticky substance come out of his penis. Likewise, if your family member is female, explain that she may feel very wet around her vaginal area.) Next discuss what was inappropriate with the location where s/he was masturbating. It might be helpful to make a separate picture board (using real photos) showing places where masturbation would be appropriate and places that are not. Draw a stop light showing red above the pictures of inappropriate places and green above the places that are appropriate (bedroom, bathroom). You will want to include pictures of the school bathrooms under the inappropriate column so s/he can learn to tell the difference between "home" and "school" bathrooms. If it is easier, just teach one appropriate place, such as the bedroom to start. You may have to redirect him or her to the bedroom and go over the picture board many, many times.

**Reaction 2:** In a calm voice, tell him/her to stop what s/he is doing. (Avoid saying things like "stop doing that, it's bad.") Then take your child into the privacy of his/her bedroom and have a discussion about what s/he was feeling when s/he started to masturbate. Use the term "masturbate" so s/he connects it with what s/he was doing. Acknowledge these feelings as natural. Then talk about what was inappropriate about masturbating. Talk about ways s/he can take his or her mind off these feelings and avoid the urge to masturbate. For example, your son can go for a bike ride or get on the computer. If you have a daughter, she may enjoy the computer and could do this to take her attention off how she is feeling.

If you notice that your family member's penis or vaginal area is red and sore-looking it could be because s/he is masturbating. You could try teaching your family member to use a lubricating gel or cream. There are several good ones on the market.

If you feel that your family member is overactive sexually, talk with your doctor. There may be a hormone imbalance or other medical condition which is causing an overactive sex drive.

**Note:** You may want to use pages 24 and 25 as reference for this discussion.

#### Intercourse

Intercourse, making love, and having sex are all terms your family member will have heard by now. S/he may even have asked you about it more than once. So how do you talk to your son or daughter about what happens during intercourse? It is important that you use correct terms. Even if your family member is unlikely to ever be in an intimate relationship, it is important that s/he knows exactly what intercourse is. Explaining it using correct terms will help your child describe to you if someone touches him or her in an inappropriate way. Here is a suggestion on how to describe it:

Sexual intercourse starts when a man's penis enters the woman's vagina. The man and woman move in a way so that the man's penis slides in and out of the vagina. This movement should feel good to both the man and woman. After a period of time, which could be a couple of minutes or longer, the semen ejaculates (squirts) out of the man's penis. The man and woman will have what is called an orgasm.

When the man and woman have an orgasm they may feel the muscles of their bodies getting tense (lighten your arm muscle so they can feel what you mean). It is a very good feeling though and not a bad feeling. If you have discussed masturbation with your family member and you know s/he masturbates, it will be easier to explain orgasm during intercourse.

If you are unsure how to best describe intercourse to your son or daughter, you might consider talking to the school nurse or health/sex education instructor, for guidance.

#### Safe Sex

If your family member is likely to be sexually active in adulthood, now is the time to start talking about safe sex. This may be a hard subject for you to think about, but persons with 1/DD are marrying, buying their own homes, and even raising families. You know your family member best. Introduce the concept of safe sex the same way you did for masturbation or intercourse. You will need to decide how much emphasis you are going to place on abstinence and safe sex/birth control methods. For abstinence, the "saying NO" pages later in the guide will be helpful to you. When teaching about safe sex, if possible have pictures or actual items of various birth control methods. For your son, teach him how to use a condom the same way this is taught in school - with a banana. For your daughter, it is best to discuss the various forms of birth control with your OB/GYN. There may be specific medical conditions which would keep your female family member from using certain birth control methods. The OB/GYN would be able to steer you both to the one that is the safest and easiest to use.

#### Condom Use

For sexually active individuals, condoms are one of the most common methods for safe sex. Before teaching your students about condom use, be sure that you, a school nurse, or other health professional from the school talks with their parents. Some parents may not want you to teach condom usage, due to their faith beliefs. Come up with alternative ways to emphasize safe sex, such as abstinence. Once you and your students' parents are agreed on teaching about condom use, here are some important points to teach your students.

**Note:** Even when used correctly, condoms are not 100% effective.

- Only use latex condoms (unless your student is allergic to latex).
- Inspect the condom package for a safety seal. The safety seal is an air bubble in the package. If this is not there do not use the condom.
- Condoms have expiration dates. Check the date on the package.
- Open the package using only your fingers. Anything sharp can damage the condom.
- Do not unroll the condom before putting it on the penis.
- Place the condom on the tip of the penis pinching the end to keep air out.
- Unroll the condom all the way to the bottom of the penis.
- If the condom breaks throw it away and do not use it.
- Do not use oil-based lubricants like Vaseline or baby oil—these damage the condom.

- Condoms are used only once.
- There are also condoms for females, although these are a little more difficult to use. Below are pictures of condoms for both males and females.

It is important to emphasize several key issues:

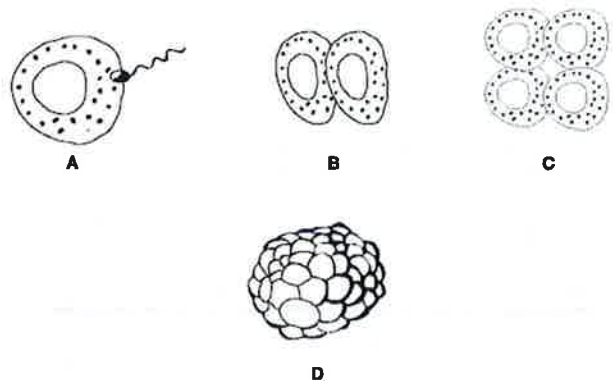
First, sexual intercourse should be between two consenting adults (both people want to have sex). In the state of Florida, the minimum age for legal sexual consent is 16 if the partner is under age 24, and 18 if the partner is over age 24. Having sexual intercourse with someone who is not of consenting age is illegal and can result in arrest, and possibly even jail time.

Second, abstinence is still the safest way for your family member to prevent pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STD's), and other potential health and legal problems. Remember to talk with your family member about ways to say NO to sexual activity. More will be discussed on this topic in the section on saying no in our Abuse Prevention section.

This is a good time to move into discussion on how a baby is made and develops. If you need to go back to the section on puberty (page 18) that describes the egg and sperm. The semen that comes out of the man's penis into the woman's vagina holds the sperm. Some of this sperm stays inside the woman. If the woman has an egg in her uterus then the sperm may join with the egg and a baby grows. The next few pages show the progression of the growth of a baby.



### HOW A BABY GROWS



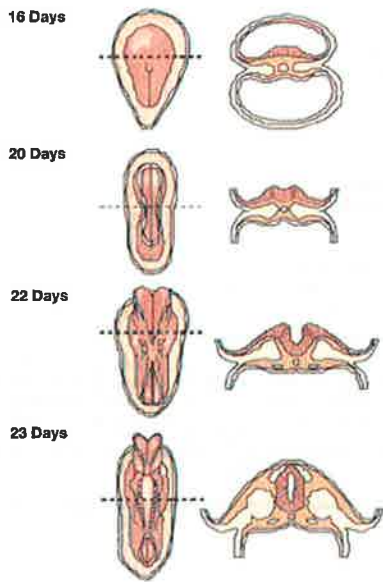
Embryo

The female egg cell and male sperm cell unite (A). Cell division begins (B). Cells continue to divide (C). The division continues until a cluster (D) is formed.



Fetus

Seven to eight days after fertilization, the cluster of cells attaches itself to the lining of the uterus. In about ten to fourteen days, the cluster begins to "specialize" and later become organized into various tissues of the body, such as skin, muscle, bone, nerve blood and glands. By the time the baby is ready to be born, it will have billions and billions of cells. Up to about the twelve week, the developing baby is sometimes referred to as an embryo. After that, it is sometimes referred to as a fetus.



**Neural Tube Formation**



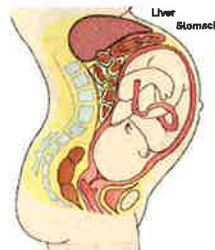
**1st Trimester:**

**2nd Trimester:**

**3rd Trimester:**

The fetus is about 10" long and weighs about 3/4 lb. Heartbeat may be heard through the stethoscope. Movement can be felt.

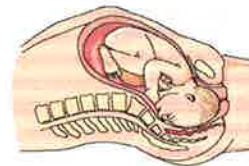
The fetus is about 14" long and weighs about 2 lbs. Central nervous system develops so that if born now the baby could survive.



**4th Trimester:**

The fetus is about 20" long and weighs about 7-8 lbs. Cartilage in nose and ears develop. Rapid weight gain.

Approximate Fetal Growth		
Week of Pregnancy	Weight	Length (Head to Heel)
4	1/32 ounce	1/8 inch
12	6/8 ounce	1-3 inches
18	4-3/4 ounces	8 inches
20	12 ounces	10 inches
24	1-1/4 pounds	13 inches
28	2 pounds	14-1/2 inches
32	3-1/3 pounds	18 inches
36	5-1/2 pounds	18 inches
40	7-1/2 pounds	20 inches



**Birth:**

A baby enters the world and starts breathing air for the first time.





**Medical Concerns**

People with I/DD are subject to the same illnesses and diseases as the rest of us. Your family member's abilities may not include the ability to care for his or her own personal care needs. If s/he is able take care of their personal care needs (bathing, etc.) then s/he should learn to look for signs that something is not normal

with his or her body. Girls and women are particularly vulnerable to vaginal and urinary infections. Proper hygiene is the best means of preventing this. Teaching your female family member the importance of hygiene, such as promptly changing pads or tampons and wiping after toileting from front to back, early on will reinforce good hygiene habits throughout her life. Likewise, your daughter may be able to learn how to do breast self-examinations.

The more your family member knows about various illnesses and diseases, the better prepared s/he will be to live as independently as possible. It is important that your family member have regular medical exams, particularly if s/he is non-verbal. This is the best way to avoid serious illnesses and infections. Medications can also leave a person susceptible to secondary medical problems. An example of this is antibiotics. They can reduce the good bacteria in a girl's vagina, leaving her open to possible yeast infections. Left untreated, yeast infections can become very serious. Talk to your family member's physician about possible problems from medications. There are preventative measures that can be taken to avoid such infections as yeast. Regular medical exams are also another means for ensuring that your family member is not sexually active and/or has not been sexually abused.



**BEGINNING SOCIAL SKILLS**

**Activities and Discussion Points**

These activities can be used to help girls and boys demonstrate progress toward understanding what is needed to act in a socially appropriate manner as human beings in our society. The following pages will give you ideas and activities for helping to teach your family member these important basic skills.

**Knowledge and understanding:**

- Listening
- Having conversations
- Asking questions or asking for help
- Introducing yourself or others
- Giving a compliment

**Attitudes and values:**

- Appropriate listening and conversation

**Self-management skills:**

- Showing respect for self and others

**Interpersonal skills:**

- Learning how to talk to peers and adults
- Understanding and demonstrating appropriate and respectful behavior
- Learning how to express emotions

**Social Skills: Hints for Parents/Caregivers**

Sexuality begins and ends with developing good social skills and respecting oneself and others. Social skills are all about good communication - listening, talking, asking questions, and being able to express ourselves to the best of our abilities. To give and receive love and affection are basic human needs. Children will use a variety of ways to ensure they receive the affection and love they want and deserve. As a parent or caregiver you can help your family member grow and learn about his or her sexuality by teaching good social skills. The following pages will cover basic social skills, the foundational skills needed by everyone to interact to the best of our abilities in society.

**Note:** Multiple learning activities may need to be used to meet the needs, interests, maturity and cognitive levels of children.



## Listening Skills

### Exercise 1

A good way to teach listening skills is through general conversation or role playing. For this first exercise, sit or stand facing each other. Use a real life example of a situation that happened, such as you were sad because...then take the following steps:

1. While you are talking, have your family member look at you making sure you both make eye contact.
2. Ask him or her to think about what you are saying. Ask him/her to acknowledge that s/he is listening by nodding or vocalizing "yes" or "uh huh."
3. If your family member interrupts, reinforce that s/he needs to wait his/her turn.
4. When you are finished, ask your family member questions about what you just said to ensure that s/he was listening. Again ask your child to acknowledge with a nod of the head or a verbal statement.
5. Now reverse the roles and have your family member talk about something that happened to him/her or how s/he is feeling, while you demonstrate appropriate listening skills.

## Conversation Skills

### Exercise 2

We all talk to people, but for some children beginning a conversation can be a difficult task. Add to that an intellectual or developmental disability that inhibits verbal conversation and the discomfort or difficulty in communicating with peers or adults is compounded. Learning a few simple conversational skills will help your child interact more easily and appropriately. During this process, reinforce the method your family member uses to communicate with you while teaching the skill set. Again use a role playing situation such as asking a friend from school to be a partner on a class assignment.

Following are suggested steps in this skill set:

1. Greet the student by saying hi and/or shaking hands. (remember that children often have non-traditional handshakes and that our traditional handshake may be inappropriate to use with others his/her own age, so you may need to teach your child several types of handshakes). Choosing the right time to approach the person is stressed during this exercise. This means learning not to interrupt the other person if s/he is talking to someone else.
2. After greeting the person, it would be appropriate to make small talk, e.g. asking how s/he is.
3. Next you use the skill learned in Exercise 1 to make sure that the person is listening to you - nodding or verbalizing that you are listening.
4. When it is clear that the person is listening to you, bring up the subject you want to talk about.
5. Say or ask what you want.
6. Then using the listening skills learned in Exercise 1, listen to what the person has to say back to you.
7. Respond back to the other person, letting him or her know that you heard and understood what s/he said to you.
8. Finish the conversation by saying thank you, good-bye, or another appropriate statement.

## Giving Compliments

### Exercise 3

Giving compliments to others is not something that is done often enough by anyone in today's society. Compliments, praise, or in psychological terms, positive reinforcements, are needed by everyone to help us feel good about ourselves and what we are doing in our lives. Teaching this skill at a very young age is the best way to instill it as a positive social skill. It will not hurt us as adults to relearn this social skill either. Again, using role modeling, pick various scenarios, (school, home, friends, church, neighbors), to reinforce the right way to pay a compliment. The appropriateness in each situation will be different. If your family member is a 10-year-old girl whose female best friend just started wearing a bra, then it is ok for her to compliment her friend on being able to wear a bra. If your family member is a 10- or 12-year-old boy, then that would not be appropriate. It would also not be appropriate for any child to say "I like your breasts" to any adult. You and your significant other may make intimate remarks to each other in the privacy of your home in front of your younger family members. This is a natural thing to do. However, being children, they may repeat what they hear to friends and neighbors. Your responsibility is to teach them that certain compliments are only appropriate between a couple who are in a loving relationship and that that is the only time these compliments are appropriate. Teaching them this at a young age (and to report anyone trying to say these things to them) will also help protect them against sexual abuse.

1. Choose a scenario.
2. Discuss the appropriate words (gestures or body language) for the compliment.
3. Discuss when would be the right time to give the compliment.
4. Practice giving the compliment.

## Apologizing

### Exercise 4

Apologizing is something else that we are not very good at. For any of you who had or do have pets, you know that they are wonderful at apologizing. As humans we could take a few lessons from them! However, you can help your family member learn this skill. Probably the hardest part of teaching this skill is helping your family member recognize when an apology is needed. You need to discuss recognizing hurt feelings. The best way to do that is by discussing a variety of situations when you have been hurt by others or when you have hurt someone. Choose a situation you are going to use for role modeling and the follow the steps below. (Remember that many of the types of scenarios that you want to role model can be found on TV shows, videos, and even in favorite stories.) If you are not comfortable role modeling social skills such as apologizing, you can start out using these tools to get the messages across and then move into role modeling.

1. Make a decision whether you think you need to apologize.
2. Go over the various ways you could apologize.
3. Practice saying the apology.
4. Decide when it would be best to give the apology.
5. Approach the person and give the apology.
6. Wait and listen for what the person has to say back to you.
7. Respond back to the other person letting him/her know you heard his or her response.



## Feelings

### Your own feelings

Understanding how we are feeling and being able to express our feelings are other areas of communication that needs to be learned. These are areas of communication that most of us have a difficult time with. Recognizing what we are feeling is the first step in understanding who we are and how we can best interact with others and our environment. Among the feelings we need to learn to recognize are: joy, happiness, love, sadness, disappointment, anger, fear, frustration, anxiety, embarrassment, excitement, confusion, misunderstanding, and physical sexual feelings. As your family member moves into puberty s/he will need to learn how to recognize what s/he is feeling in order to know how to act appropriately.

Making flashcards of all the feelings is a useful tool to use when talking to your family member about what s/he is feeling. Another useful tool is to make a picture board showing photos of people expressing a variety of emotions. Write the corresponding feeling under each picture. This way you'll have a tool for those individuals who may only be able to point to or look at the correct feeling. A sample "Feelings Worksheet" may be found on page 81.

You will need to explain what each feeling means many times so that your family member learns to differentiate between all the various feelings. Once your son or daughter learns the basics of these feelings s/he will be better able to understand and communicate what s/he is feeling. You can help your family member understand what s/he is feeling by describing how you feel, inside, when you experience each emotion. Remember though, that how your family member reacts internally to emotions may not be the same as how you react. Allow for individuality. The following is an example of how you might proceed to describe each feeling.

### Exercise 5

1. Help your family member focus on what is going on inside his/her body. Does s/he feel a tightening of the stomach, or maybe butterflies? Does s/he feel hands, arms or mouth getting tight? Is s/he blushing? Does s/he feel like s/he just cannot stay still? Does s/he feel like s/he wants to cry? These are all things a person may feel when experiencing different emotions. If your family member doesn't know what it means to have butterflies or tight muscles, show him or her. Tighten the muscle of your forearm and put a hand on it so s/he can feel it. For butterflies get a feather and lightly flutter it back and forth on the inside of the forearm. (The inside of the forearm is more sensitive than the palm of the hand).
2. Once s/he can recognize how his or her body reacts, focus on an event that may have occurred to make him or her feel that way. You may have to go over everything that happened that day in order to hit upon the one thing that is still affecting him/her. Remember it may not be a big event. Sometimes the things that affect us the most are the little things - like not getting that first cup of coffee in the morning!
3. Once you have found the event, focus on naming what s/he is feeling. Use the flashcards or picture board to help identify and put a name to the feeling.
4. The last step is to practice communicating what s/he is feeling to you. Use the steps from Exercise 2 to help your family member do this.

### Other people's feelings

It is not only important to understand our own feelings; we must also understand and recognize other people's feelings. Relationships, whether family, friend, romantic, or co-worker, take an ability and willingness to understand how the other person is feeling. It requires good listening skills and an ability to know how to respond appropriately if the other person's feelings, such as anger or love, are directed at us. Developing skills to help understand how another person is feeling will also help to protect your child should untoward advances be directed at him or her. The first step to recognizing other people's feelings is understanding those feelings from your own point of view as demonstrated in the previous exercise. Go through the following exercise using role playing and the picture board, your own personal examples, or a situation that has occurred recently where your family member did or did not react appropriately to another person's feelings. The exercise below will help your family member recognize unwanted verbal and physical advances.

### Exercise 6

1. Put yourself in the role of the other person. If the person was angry, then make yourself look angry physically. Have your family member look at you closely. Or, use the picture board and show him or her the picture of an angry person.
2. Say what a person who is angry might say when expressing this anger to another person. Have your family member use good listening skills (Exercise 1) during this time.
3. Have your family member discuss what s/he sees in the other person's physical reaction, i.e. tight muscles, squinted eyes.....
4. Help your family member put a name to the feeling s/he is seeing, i.e. anger or whatever feeling you are trying to demonstrate.
5. Discuss appropriate ways in which to show that your family member understands what the other person is feeling. This may include a "yes nod," a simple touch on the arm, or in some situations moving away from the person and leaving him or her alone. (In the case of unwanted sexual advances the appropriate course of action is to leave immediately and tell a trusted individual what happened).
6. Decide what response is the best and then have your family member practice that response.

**Remember:** The better the ability of your family member to communicate effectively and appropriately, the better self-image s/he will have. This translates into a better quality of life. Another reason for good communication skills is so that, should s/he need to report a person for unwanted advances (sexual or violent; verbal or physical), s/he will be able to be as accurate as possible in relating the situation.

### Links to the Resource Guide:

Below are corresponding references to the accompanying Resource Guide. The selections were chosen to help you find additional information that can help you and your child through this learning process.

#### Grades K - 2

The Way I Feel Board-book, page 18

#### Grades 3 - 5

The Way I Feel, page 18

What is a Feeling?, page 18

\* Any of the resources as appropriate: pages 20 and 21

