



Dear Families,

Imagine having “The Talk” with hundreds of fifth graders every year. While you may be breaking out in a rash at this idea, we take great joy in our role providing puberty education to hundreds of fifth graders every year for the ARC (Adolescent Resource Center) program at Children & Families First. In addition to talking to kids about puberty, we also help parents learn how to be more comfortable with these conversations themselves.

While many kids have lessons about puberty in school, it's also important that you talk with your kids about puberty and sexuality at home. This sends a clear message that your children can come to you with whatever thoughts and questions they may have – we call this being an “Ask-able Parent.” This open communication can help strengthen your relationship.

One of our keys jobs as parents is to prepare our children for their future. What I notice is that when it comes to puberty, sometimes parents approach it with trepidation. Like, “Oh no, we have to have ‘the Talk’.” You have the power to shape your child’s perception of this important stage of life.

Parents are the first and most important educators of their children. You’ve always been your child’s safe harbor, as they explore and have new experiences, and this continues through puberty. Kids are curious and notice changes in themselves and people around them. You can talk about change in a positive way and help your child process new information.

Think of teaching your child about puberty not as “the Talk,” but as conversations that happen over time.

Sometimes kids get embarrassed, and parents do, as well. You can model how to sit with discomfort, and ways to take care of your feelings, so that your kids can too.

This is an opportunity to share your values and experiences about growing up. Storytelling is a deeply personal way to share things that you learned, through talking about what you remember, in your growing up story.

We can foster respect and empathy. Providing your child with accurate information, using correct terms for body parts, and answering questions honestly all convey respect. Talking about your own body in a kind way models positive body image.

People may worry that they don’t have all the answers. You don’t have to be perfect, but you do want to be present.
--The ARC Team at Children & Families First

Our ARC educators look forward to providing puberty education services to your fifth grader!

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Fifth Grade Puberty Program Outline

Day One

Introduction to ARC Educator

Expectations

One Voice – only one person should be talking at a time, raise your hand if you want to be called on!

Respect! Treat others as you want to be treated. Everyone deserves respect. It is especially important not to laugh at a classmate.

Students are welcome to take a breathing break when they need to, and we give an example of a brief breathing break.

What is Puberty?

- Stage in Life- everyone goes through stages in life. We start out as a baby, grow into a child and eventually become an adult. Puberty is the stage of being a preteen or tween and a teenager.
- Something that happens to everyone – everybody goes through puberty. All the adults they know already went through puberty.
- Lots of changes- we have changes in our feelings, in our body, and relationships with others.
- Normal- Going through puberty is perfectly normal! What ages do people go through puberty?

Wide range of normal- kids can begin to go through puberty as early as age 7 or as late as 16.

Average length of puberty is about four to six years.

What starts puberty? Pituitary gland and hormones – Our pituitary gland in our brain releases a hormone (a chemical signal) when it's time for us to go through puberty.

Three main types of changes

- Emotional- changes in our feeling
- Social- changes in our relationships with other people. At school, at home, with everyone.
- Physical- changes in our body

ACTIVITY

Riley Story: ARC Educator reads a story aloud about Riley. Riley represents someone going through puberty. Riley talks about having puberty changes including pimples, getting taller, and getting embarrassed more easily. Students are asked to identify three changes that Riley mentions that they think are changes in puberty.

Emotional Changes

- Being moody and having mood swings
- Feeling embarrassed
- Feeling things more strongly
- Feelings of attraction and crushes
- Importance of talking to adults at home about feelings

ACTIVITY

Brainstorm: ARC Educator asks students to identify a strategy that a student could use to feel better when you are in a bad mood. ARC Educator then asks students to volunteer to report out their strategy with the class.

Some examples that students often share include talking to an adult, taking some time to yourself, listening to music, watching something funny, making something (drawing, writing, cooking), playing a sport, and/or spending time with a pet. ARC Educator emphasizes that it is important to have different strategies to take care of your feelings, just like we have different strategies to solve a math problem.

Social Changes

- Wanting to make more decisions
- Thinking about the future more
- Spending more time with friends/peers
- Wanting independence

DISCUSSION: What do adults want to see from kids as they are growing up? Examples of responsibility and maturity

Physical Changes

ARC Educator explains that we'll expand on this and explain on Day 2

Healthy Habits- brief overview

- Sleep- it's important to turn off/put away electronic devices before bed. Most youth going through puberty need 9-10 hours of sleep every night
- Take a shower or bath daily
- Eat nutritious meals- try to make 50% of your plate fruits and vegetables
- Safe and responsible digital life
- Take care of your feelings
- It's recommended that kids and teens get at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day.

Day Two

ARC Puberty Program Outline

Body Changes for everyone

- Pimples may become more common
- Underarm hair grows
- Sweat more and body odor
- Arm, leg hair and pubic hair

Overview of male and female reproductive systems using illustrations/diagrams modeled from Nemours Kidshealth site and explanation

Reproductive cells- egg cells (ova/ovum) and sperm cells

Discussion of body changes that are different depending on our reproductive system

- Changes in body shape that people with a female reproductive system will have – breasts grow, and hips widen and waist narrows
- Changes in body shape that people with a male reproductive system will have chest widens, facial hair, chest hair

Day Three

Explanation of:

- Ovulation and menstruation
- Erections, ejaculation, and nocturnal emissions
- Age-appropriate discussion of human reproduction basics, how the sperm gets to the egg, fertilization, how a pregnancy grows in the uterus, and how a baby is born

For reproductive system topics, we use medical illustrations/diagrams modeled from Nemours Kidshealth illustrations to show the reproductive system.

Day Four

Classes are separated into groups based on their reproductive system. The focus is on providing more information for those groups. In the female reproductive system group, we review the female reproductive system and talk about periods and period hygiene. In the male reproductive system group, we review the male reproduction system and changes in puberty.

ARC Educator responds to questions that are within the scope of the puberty session and standards.

In addition to answering questions, the ARC Educator also reviews:

- What a role model is
- Body changes in puberty
- Good hygiene routines- including showering, changing clothes, taking care of hair, taking care of teeth

Are You an Askable Parent?

As a parents or caregiver, it is very important for you to be *askable*. What does that mean? How do adults become *askable*?

To be *askable* means that young people see you as approachable and open to questions. Being *askable* about sexuality is something that most parents and caregivers want but that many find very difficult. Adults may have received little or no information about sex when they were children. Sex may not have been discussed in their childhood home, whether from fear or out of embarrassment. Or, adults may worry about:

- Not knowing the *right* words or the *right* answers;
- Being *out of it* in the eyes of their young people;
- Giving too much or too little information; or
- Giving information at the wrong time.

Being *askable* is important. Research shows that youth with the least accurate information about sexuality and sexual risk behaviors may experiment more and at earlier ages compared to youth who have more information.^{1,2,3,4,5} Research also shows that, when teens are able to talk with a parent or other significant adult about sex and about protection, they are less likely to engage in early and/or unprotected sexual intercourse than are teens who haven't talked with a trusted adult.^{6,7,8,9} Finally, youth often say that they want to discuss sex, relationships, and sexual health with their parents—parents are their preferred source of information on these subjects.^{10,11}

Because being *askable* is so important and because so many adults have difficulty initiating discussions about sex with their children, adults may need to learn new skills and become more confident about their ability to discuss sexuality. Here are some tips from experts in the field of sex education.

Talking with Young People about Sexuality

- 1. Acquire a broad foundation of factual information from reliable sources.** Remember that sexuality is a much larger topic than sexual intercourse. It includes biology and gender, of course, but it also includes emotions, intimacy, caring, sharing, and loving, attitudes, flirtation, and sexual orientation as well as reproduction and sexual intercourse.
- 2. Learn and use the correct terms for body parts and functions.** If you have difficulty saying some words without embarrassment, practice saying these words, in private and with a mirror, until you are as comfortable with them as with non-sexual words. For example, you want to be able to say “penis” as easily as you say “elbow.”
- 3. Think through your own feelings and values about love and sex.** Include your childhood memories, your first infatuation, your values, and how you feel about current sex-related issues, such as contraceptives, reproductive rights, and equality with regard to sex, gender, and sexual orientation. You must be aware of how you feel before you can effectively talk with youth.
- 4. Talk *with* your child.** Listen more than you speak. Make sure you and your child have open, *two-way* communication—as it forms the basis for a positive relationship between you and your child. Only by listening to each other can you understand one another, especially regarding love and sexuality, for adults and youth often perceive these things differently.
- 5. Don't worry about—**
 - Being “with it.” Youth have that with their peers. From you, they want to know what you believe, who you are, and how you feel.
 - Being embarrassed. Your kids will feel embarrassed, too. That's okay, because love and many aspects of sexuality, including sexual intercourse, are highly personal. Young people understand this.

- Deciding which parent should have this talk. Any loving parent or caregiver can be an effective sex educator for his/her children.
- Missing some of the answers. It's fine to say that you don't know. Just follow up by offering to find the answer or to work with your child to find the answer. Then do so.

Talking with Young Children

- 1. Remember that if someone is old enough to ask, she/he is old enough to hear the correct answer and to learn the correct word(s).**
- 2. Be sure you understand what a young child is asking.** Check back. For example, you might say, "I'm not certain that I understand exactly what you are asking. Are you asking if it's okay to do this or why people do this?" What you don't want is to launch into a long explanation that doesn't answer the child's question.
- 3. Answer the question when it is asked.** It is usually better to risk embarrassing a few adults (at the supermarket, for example) than to embarrass your child or to waste a teachable moment. Besides, your child would usually prefer it if you answer right then and softly. If you cannot answer at the time, assure the child that you are glad he/she asked and set a time when you will answer fully. "I'm glad you asked that. Let's talk about it on the way home."
- 4. Answer *slightly* above the level you think your child will understand,** both because you may be underestimating him/her and because it will create an opening for future questions. But, don't forget that you are talking with a young child. For example, when asked about the differences between boys and girls, don't get out a textbook and show drawings of the reproductive organs. A young child wants to know what is on the *outside*. So, simply say, "A boy has a penis, and a girl has a vulva."
- 5. Remember that, even with young children, you must set limits.** You can refuse to answer personal questions. "What happens between your father and me is personal, and I don't talk about it with anyone else." Also, make sure your child understands the difference between values and standards relating to his/her question. For example, if a child asks whether it is bad to masturbate, you could say, "Masturbation is not bad; however, we never masturbate in public. It is a *private* behavior." [values *versus* standards] You should also warn your child that other adults may have different *values* about this subject while they will hold to the same *standard*; that is, they may believe it is wrong and a private behavior.

Talking with Teens

- 1. Recall how you felt when you were a teen.** Remember that adolescence is a difficult time. One moment, a teen is striving for separate identity and independence, and the next moment urgently needs an adult's support.
- 2. Remember that teens want mutually respectful conversations.** Avoid dictating. Share your feelings, values, and attitudes *and* listen to and learn about theirs. Remember that you cannot dictate anyone else's feelings, attitudes, or values.
- 3. Don't assume that a teen is sexually experienced or inexperienced, knowledgeable or naive.** Listen carefully to what your teen is saying and/or asking. Respond to the teen's actual or tacit question, not to your own fears or worries.
- 4. Don't underestimate your teen's ability to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of various options.** Teens have values, and they are capable of making mature, responsible decisions, especially when they have all the needed facts and the opportunity to discuss options with a supportive adult. If you give your teen misinformation she/he may lose trust in you, just as he/she will trust you if you are a consistent source of clear and accurate information. Of course, a teen's decisions may be different from ones you would make; but that goes with the territory.

Being *askable* is a lifelong component of relationships. It opens doors to closer relationships and to family connections. It's never too late to begin!

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Below are some helpful books and websites that can give you some more information to help you have conversations about this important stage of life with your children. You can decide which sources of information are best for your family.

Want to take the Askable Parent 6 week challenge? <https://amaze.org/askableparent/>

Helpful Books

For Kids

- American Medical Association. **American Medical Association Boy's Guide to Becoming a Teen.** Jossey Bass, 2006.
- Dunham, Kelly. **The Boys' Body Book: Everything You Need to Know for Growing Up YOU!** Applesauce Press: 2019.
- Dunham, Kelly. **The Girls' Body Book: Everything You Need to Know for Growing Up.** Applesauce Press: 2019.
- Frith, Alex. **Usborne What's Happening to Me (Boys).** EDC Publishing, 2007.
- Gupta, Aditi. **The Menstrupedia Comic: A Friendly Guide to Periods for Girls.** ISBN/UPC 978-81-931742-0-3 January, 2015.
- Harris, Robie H. **It's So Amazing!: A Book About Eggs, Sperm, Birth, Babies and Families.** Candlewick Press: 2014.
- Harris, Robie H. **It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex, and Sexual Health** Candlewick Press: 2021.
- Hickman, Ruth. **Going Through Puberty: A Boy's Manual for Body, Mind and Health.** Lesson Ladder Inc: 2013.
- Holmes, M., Hutchison, & Lowe, K. **You-ology: A Puberty Guide for Every Body.** American Academy of Pediatrics. 2022.
- Klein, L. & Leff, C. **Celebrate Your Body 2.** RockRidge Press. 2019.
- Loulan, Joann & Worthen, Bonnie. **Period. : A Girl's Guide.** Book Peddlers: 2001
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- Metzger, Julie. **Will Puberty Last My Whole Life? REAL Answers to REAL Questions from Preteens about Body Changes, Sex, and Other Growing Up Stuff.** Little Bigfoot: 2018.
- Natterson, Cara. **The Care & Keeping of You 2: The Body Book for Older Girls (American Girl Library).** Wisconsin: Pleasant Company Publications: 2013.
- Natterson, Cara. **Guy Stuff: The Body Book for Boys,** 2017.
- Reynolds, Kate. **What's Happening to Ellie? A Book About Puberty for Boys and Young Men with Autism and Related Conditions.** Jessica Kingsley Publishers: 2015.
- Reynolds, Kate. **What's Happening to Tom? A Book About Puberty for Girls and Young Women with Autism and Related Conditions.** Jessica Kingsley Publishers: 2014.
- Simon, Rachel E. **The Every Body Book. The LGBTQ+ Inclusive Guide for Kids about Sex, Gender, Bodies and Families.** Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2020.
- Taylor, Sonya Renee. **Celebrate Your Body (and Its Changes Too!): The Ultimate Puberty Book for Girls.** Rockridge Press, 2018.

Resources for Families

Wrobel, Mary. **Taking Care of Myself: A Hygiene Puberty and Personal Curriculum for Young People with Autism.** Future Horizons: 2003.

For Caregivers

Berman, Laura. **Talking to Your Kids About Sex: Turning the Talk into a Conversation for Life.** DK Publishing: 2009.

Bennett, V. K., & Natterson, C. ***This is so awkward.*** Rodale: 2023.

Couwenhoven, Terri. **Teaching Children with Downs Syndrome about their Bodies, Boundaries and Sexuality.** Woodbine House: 2007.

Chirban, John T. **How to Talk to Your Kids About Sex: Help Your Kids Develop a Healthy, Positive Attitude Towards Sex and Relationships.** Thomas Nelson Inc.: 2012.

Kowal-Connelly, Suanne. **Parenting Through Puberty, Mood Swings, Acne, and Growing Pains.** American Academy of Pediatrics, 2018.

Owens-Reid, Danielle. **This is a Book for Parents of Gay Kids: A Questions and Answer to Everyday Life.** Chronicle Books: 2014.

Richardson, Justin & Schuster, Mark. **Everything You Never Wanted Your Kids to Know About Sex (But Were Afraid They'd Ask): The Secrets to Surviving Your Child's Sexual Development from Birth to the Teens.** Three Rivers Press: 2004.

Roffman, Deborah. **Talk to Me First: Everything You Need to Know to be Your Child's Go To Person About Sex.** Da Capo Lifelong Books: 2012.

Schwier, Karin Melberg. **Sexuality: Your Sons and Daughters with Intellectual Disabilities.** Brooks Publishing Co.: 2000.

Health Information Websites & Videos

<https://amaze.org/> -Great videos information on sex ed for parents, kids and younger children on a broad range of sex ed topics.

<https://amaze.org/parents/> - Library of videos for parents

www.common sense media.org -Want to know how kids are using social media? Is the newest movie right for your child? Information about social media, privacy and ratings on shows, movies and video games and information on electronic media.

www.youngwomenshealth.org -Award-winning websites from the Children's Hospital of Boston that discuss teen health.

<https://www.menstrupedia.com/> - Based in India, but available in many languages, this website demystifies puberty. It has videos and information for girls and boys and caregivers about puberty.

<https://powertodecide.org> -The Parents and Champions section of Power To Decide provides parents and teens with a wealth of information on talking to their kids about responsible decision making regarding preventing pregnancy. Nationwide data and studies are also available for view.

www.loveisrespect.org/ -Great website regarding healthy relationships and avoiding dating violence.

www.dethrives.com/teens/ -Delaware Thrives is run by the State of Delaware and focuses on helping teens plan their futures.

Resources for Families

<https://kidshealth.org/> -Website with informational videos and articles for kids and parents about all things growing up by Nemours. Available in English and Spanish

[HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org/) - [From the American Academy of Pediatrics](https://www.healthychildren.org/) -Health and wellness information from the American Academy of Pediatrics from prenatal until young adult.

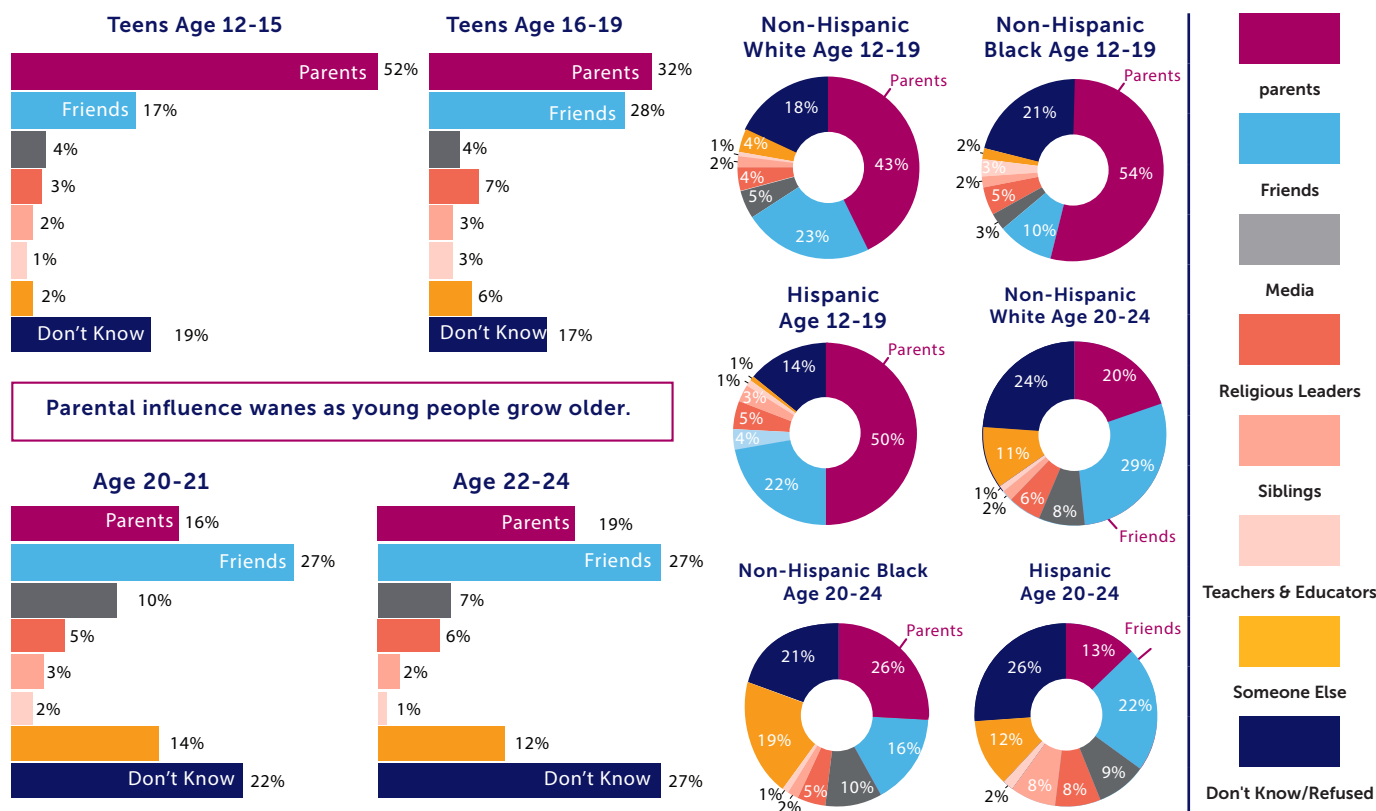
SURVEY SAYS

POWER TO DECIDE, THE CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT UNPLANNED PREGNANCY

Parent Power

Power to Decide has been assessing public sentiment on a number of topics for two decades. One of the most consistent findings over the years has been the power of parental influence. Specifically, in survey after survey, teens say parents most influence their decisions about sex. Our findings this year paint a similar picture: Parents matter. For the first time we have also asked centennials (age 12-19) and millennials (age 18-24) about who influences their decisions about sex. As the following make clear, parental influence wanes as young people grow older.

Who most influences your decisions about sex?



The following data are from the TRU Youth Monitor 2016, a survey of 3,038 individuals age 12-24 and fielded online in November and December 2015. The sample is representative of the U.S. population, including non-Hispanic Whites, Hispanics, and non-Hispanic Blacks. Hispanic respondents were able to take the survey in either English or Spanish. The margin of error is +/- 1.78% at the 95% confidence level.