

## How and When to Tell Your Kids about Sex

### Preparing Boys for Puberty

#### What to Expect with Boys

Boys typically begin the transformation of puberty about two years later than girls. Teenage boys between ten and thirteen go through a period of general physical development. They get taller. Their shoulders broaden, their muscles get larger, and they get stronger. Many boys experience slight swelling of their breasts around their nipples and some tenderness there. This is a normal reaction that some boys have to the changing hormones in their bodies and is not necessarily a sign of anything being wrong in their development. Their perspiration begins to smell stronger, like an adult's, so most boys need to begin using deodorant. Their skin and hair gets oilier. They begin to develop hairier arms and legs, and hair under their arms. They get the beginnings of a beard and mustache. Pubic hair, which begins growing in straight, gradually becomes more curly and coarse. They can begin to develop pimples or acne, and their voice begins to change.

A number of changes are specific to the boy's sexual development. His penis and scrotum grow larger. Boys will often notice that their scrotum is looser and that the skin of the scrotum develops more wrinkles. With the onset of puberty, boys begin to have more "spontaneous" erections – erections that appear to happen for no particular reason. This is usually very embarrassing for boys. It's essential to inform them that this will be happening and is no cause for alarm. Tell boys about orgasm in the way we discussed a few pages back. Many boys begin to experience wet dreams, where they ejaculate in their sleep. Sometimes this is in response to a sexual dream, but not necessarily. Many boys have their first ejaculation during a wet dream. Wet dreams are often a point of deep embarrassment for boys. They have no voluntary control of this response, and should never be criticized or disciplined in any way for them. It is best simply to tell your son ahead of time that this will happen, let him know that you understand that it might be an embarrassment, and give him permission to change his own sheets as often as he might like. Many boys will experiment with masturbation during this period of transition. Boys begin to think about sex during this time, including moving from general sexual feelings to more specific sexual thoughts.

Emotional changes are underway. The development of stronger sexual feelings and of sexual interest in girls can be intimidating and anxiety-producing for boys. They worry about their normalcy and not being accepted, and they are sensitive to embarrassment with their peers and about anything they perceive as a failure or a mistake. Typically they have a strong interest in girls but attempt to hide it. They develop an intense interest in being "manly" and are likely to be overly concerned and defensive about this.

In their social relationships, most boys desperately want to be accepted by their

peers. The struggle to learn how to relate to girls is difficult. They need to try out new ways of relating to them, but are afraid of failure. They can often overreact to their own perceived failures. The approval of their group of friends becomes very important, and no one wants to be perceived as less than a man.

The transition of boy to man should be celebrated too, even though this transition is harder to mark for boys than for girls. A father can acknowledge the growth and change he sees in his son, and welcome his son into manhood.