

PUBERTY: TAKING CARE OF ME Lesson 4

DIFFERING ABILITIES

LEARNER OUTCOME

Describe physical, emotional and social changes that occur during puberty; e.g., menstruation, secondary sexual characteristics, changing identity and mood.¹



MATERIALS:

1. Puberty Kit
2. Outside Female Body Parts Illustration



INTRODUCTION:

Knowing what will happen during puberty is the first step towards adapting well to adolescence. Learning facts about bodies and growing up can help us to stay healthy, take good care of ourselves, and make good decisions.² Developing positive coping strategies is essential to adolescent development. The following lesson examines puberty and personal hygiene focusing on ways to address physical changes.



Coping with hygiene issues that develop as a result of physical puberty changes can be challenging for students with differing abilities. They may find it difficult to follow the social rules of personal care and hygiene or they may have physical restrictions that make personal care difficult. For example, a student using a wheelchair may need extra consideration during the time she is menstruating.



APPROACHES/STRATEGIES:

A. GROUND RULES

Ensure ground rules are established before beginning this lesson. For classes that have already established ground rules, quickly reviewing them can promote a successful lesson.

You should be prepared for giggles in your class. Try to acknowledge students' reactions to the subject by saying that puberty and body parts can be difficult to talk about and it's ok to feel a bit uncomfortable.



Sexual health education occurs most effectively in a classroom where there is a mutual feeling of trust, safety and comfort. Having Ground Rules in place can be a very successful way to facilitate a positive classroom environment. Click [here](#) for more information on how to set up ground rules.

B. PUBERTY KIT

The Puberty Kit is a tool used to assist in teaching about puberty and personal hygiene. It is important for the teacher to be familiar with the kit's contents and discussion points for each item before doing the activity. Included here is a list of the kit's contents, discussion points about each item, and a suggested procedure for introducing the Puberty Kit.

Puberty kits may be available from a school nurse or your local community health centre. If pre-made kits are not available, you can put one together by collecting these items or using the pictures available [here](#).

Puberty Kit Contents List and Discussion Points

Antiperspirant: Used in addition to daily washing of the underarms, antiperspirant stops sweat from forming. Ask your parents/guardians which type to use. (See deodorant).

Baking Soda, Baby Powder or corn starch: Can be used as an inexpensive, absorbent foot powder to help with odour.

Ball Cap: Hats are good protection from the sun's heat and damaging rays. Hats or caps can become dirty. Wash them or change hats to keep dirt from the face or hair.

Deodorant: Used in addition to daily washing of the underarms, deodorant stops the sweat from smelling. Ask a parent or guardian which type to use. (Also see antiperspirant).

Hot Water Bottle: Warmth may help to soothe menstrual cramps.

Men's Boxers & Briefs: Men may choose to wear boxers or briefs. Cotton underwear allows the skin to 'breathe' and keep moisture away from the body. Underwear should be comfortably loose. The scrotum moves close to or away from the body to promote the growth of healthy sperm. It is important to change underwear every day.

Menstrual Pads in baggies: There are a variety of pads available for women to use, with different absorbencies. Keep pads in a backpack, locker, purse, or bag. Change and dispose of used pads often (wrap in toilet paper and put in garbage). Another excellent use of pads is to absorb blood from a wound, and can be kept in first aid kits.

Menstrual Pad with Wings in baggie: Pads are available at pharmacies and grocery stores and come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Choose pads that are unscented. Pads attach to the inside of underwear by sticky strips. The wings wrap around the leg openings of the underwear. Pads catch menstrual flow.

Panty liner in baggie: Similar to pads. Used to catch light menstrual flow or vaginal discharge.

Razor in baggie/Photo of male using electric razor: Some men shave their facial hair and some women shave the hair on their legs and underarms. Talk to a parent or guardian to find out what might be best for you.

Shampoo: Wash hair regularly to clean away the oil and dirt. Some people wash their hair every day, some less often.

Shaving Foam: Shaving with moisture feels better. Some people use shaving foam, or use soap and water.

Soap (bar soap): A mild, unscented soap in bar or liquid form is used for showering or bathing daily and for washing the face twice daily. Scented, deodorant soaps



Self-care is an important skill for all teens to learn. Some students may take longer to learn and practice hygiene skills. Teaching that taking care of our bodies helps us stay healthy is important. Your students may need lots of prompting to remind them about hand hygiene and the same may be true of other hygiene habits. You may wish to use a checklist approach with your students every morning when they come to the classroom – compile a list of essential hygiene tasks that need to be performed before school i.e., brush hair, clean teeth, clean underwear.

Socks: Wash feet and change socks every day.

Tampons in baggie: There are 2 types of tampons in the Puberty Kit, with & without applicators. Best not to use tampons until you are a teenager. Tampons need to be changed often (at least every 4–6 hours). To dispose of used tampons & applicators, wrap them in toilet paper and throw them in the garbage. You may need parental support to help remind you to remove them. Avoid super-absorbent tampons. Using tampons incorrectly and leaving them in too long can make you sick.

Toothbrush, Floss, & Toothpaste: Brush teeth at least twice a day. For fresh breath also brush the tongue. Floss once a day.

Washcloth: A clean sponge or washcloth can be used twice daily to wash the face with warm water and mild soap. No other skin care products are necessary unless advised by a doctor or parents.

Women’s Cotton Underwear: Cotton underwear is more comfortable than synthetic underwear as this natural fibre allows the skin to ‘breathe’. Trapped moisture could cause infections.

Procedure:

Introduce the **Puberty Kit**. Tell the students that you are going to use it to teach them about things that they can use to help them with the challenging parts of puberty.

1. Have students (or pairs of students) choose an item from the kit. You may consider giving students items, which would allow you to be sensitive to student needs, or to cluster products (*i.e., washing items such as shampoo, soap and washcloth could go together*).
2. Have students brainstorm answers to these questions:
 - a. What is the item?
 - b. How would the item be used?
 - c. How does this item relate to puberty changes?
 - d. Is this item for a male, female or both?
 - e. Why is it important to use these products?
 - f. Is this item used daily, several times a week, weekly or monthly?
3. Have your students present each item to the class. Add comments to the discussion when needed. Students who are unsure about what the item is or how it would be used can simply state that they do not know.



Growing up and changing can be exciting and scary at the same time. Encourage students to talk about problems and concerns they may have about growing up with a trusted adult. Ask students to give examples of people in their lives who they can talk through things that are bothering them. Some may say their parents but they may also include teachers and school staff.

4. Allow students to pass the items around so that they have a chance to examine them.
5. In some circumstances, it may be necessary to demonstrate how to use an item. For instance, demonstrate how to roll or spread on deodorant by doing so on the back of your hand or on a piece of paper.
6. Debrief this activity using the following questions:
 - a. What items from the kit are most helpful for shaving? Menstruation? Preventing acne? Smelling good? Looking good? Feeling good?
 - b. Where can you find or buy most of the items in the puberty kit?
 - c. Who can you talk to about getting items in this kit?



Looking and smelling good are concepts that some of your students may not be able to associate with easily. In Canada there is an assumption that looking and smelling good is a positive social asset but it is important to remember that not everyone may have access to tools for hygiene e.g., some families may not have access to laundry facilities.

C. MALES AND FEMALES-TAKING CARE OF YOUR BODY

Male Self Care: Circumcision

Explain that when a baby boy is born, there is a flap of skin over the tip of the penis. Some parents decide to have a doctor remove this piece of skin and some decide to leave it on. If the flap of skin is removed, it means the penis is circumcised. It is normal either way. Young men who are not circumcised, should clean beneath the foreskin of the penis regularly. Do not force the foreskin back to clean. Gently push it back.

Male Self Care: Erections

1. Discuss the following questions with your students:
 - a. What are some of the good things about being a male?
 - Encourage students to provide appropriate comments.
 - b. What starts happening more often to a young man's penis at puberty?
 - Young men start having erections.

2. Explain erections to your students. Explain that usually the penis is soft and hangs down, but a penis can also get big and hard. This is called an erection. There are slang words for erections that you may hear e.g., a “boner” (although the penis does not actually contain a bone).
3. Point out that erections are normal and a part of growing up. They happen for many reasons or for no reason at all. It can happen when you least expect or want it. It can be embarrassing when it happens.
4. Thoughts and feelings about sex can make an erection happen.
5. Stress that erections are private. It is important to know what to do when a young man has an erection. Ask your students if they have any ideas of what a young man should do if he has an erection in a public place. If your students are unable to come up with ideas, provide them with some suggestions:
 - a. If a young man has an erection when he is around other people, he should try to go to a washroom to readjust his penis in private.
 - b. If he cannot go to a washroom, he should sit down. Erections are not as noticeable when seated.
 - c. He can put a book or a coat over his lap.
 - d. He can sometimes control his erections by what he thinks about. Thinking of something boring can help erections go away faster.

What would you do? – scenarios

Read the following situations and have your students tell what they would do in each case. Their responses need to be appropriate.

- a. A young man is sitting at his desk at school and suddenly has an erection. (Stay seated. No one will probably notice since he is sitting down.)
- b. A young man has an erection when he is at a school dance. He is standing alone along the side of the wall. (Sit down for a moment.)
- c. A young man has an erection when he is about to get in the lunch line in the cafeteria. (Go to the washroom or hold his coat in front of himself for a minute.)
- d. A young man is home **alone** watching TV when he has an erection. (He is not in public, so he does not need to do anything.)
- e. A young man has an erection when he is standing by the side of the pool. (Go to the change room or washroom.)

Male Self Care: Ejaculation and Wet Dreams

1. Explain that young men may start to have something new happen as they go through puberty. When they have an erection young men may produce ejaculate, a sticky white fluid that comes out of the penis. Ejaculate or semen also has some slang words e.g., “cum”

2. During puberty young men may have “wet dreams”. Explain that sometimes when a young man is asleep, he has an erection. Then a small amount of white sticky stuff, called semen, may come out of the penis. If a young man wakes up and he has white sticky stuff on his pyjamas or underwear, he knows he has had a wet dream. Stress that wet dreams are normal.
3. Further explain that if a young man has a wet dream, he should wipe himself off with a tissue or damp wash cloth. Then he should change his pyjamas or underwear and put the sticky ones into the dirty clothes hamper.
4. Wet dreams and having an ejaculation are private.

Female Self Care: Underarm, Leg and Pubic Hair Removal

1. Growing underarm, leg and pubic hair is a normal part of puberty and for girls can start from any time around age 8.
2. Some girls and women choose to remove their leg and underarm hair and some let the hair grow naturally; it is an individual decision.
3. Hair removal can be done using a razor, creams, waxing or a hair removal device.
4. Discuss safety with your students explaining that razors can leave cuts, creams can cause rashes and ingrown hairs can become infected. DO NOT use hair removal creams to remove pubic hair as this can increase the risk of infection.



Removal of leg, underarm and pubic hair is a very common practise in North America but girls and women in other countries choose not to remove hair. Media images often show young women hair free and this can lead to unhealthy stereotypes that body hair is bad and unnatural. It is important to emphasize that hair removal is an individual choice and is not necessary as it carries no health benefits.

Female Self Care: Care of the Vulva and Vagina

1. Start by showing the **Outside Female Body Parts** illustration.
2. Explain that generally showering and bathing is enough to keep the area around the vulva and vagina clean and healthy. Using a mild soap and water is best.
3. Girls and women do sweat but normally there is no odour from the vagina/vulva. A bad smell can be a sign of an infection that should be checked out by a doctor.
4. Sprays, washes (vaginal douches) and wipes should not be used as they often have perfumes and chemicals that can cause irritation.
5. Wearing and changing cotton underwear regularly will help the skin breathe.
6. During menstruation it is important that females change their pads and/or tampons regularly and take extra care to bathe daily to avoid unpleasant odours.

Female Self Care: Menstruation

The following is a brief discussion about menstruation. For a more comprehensive lesson to use with female students please see lesson 5.

1. Begin by asking what students know about 'periods'.
 2. Having your period is private. It is not something that should be talked about in public as this can embarrass others. Girls often feel most comfortable talking with a woman they trust (parent/guardian, aunt, sister) or their health care provider if they have questions.
 3. Explain that about once a month for a few days, girls who have reached puberty have a period. Another name for having a period is menstruation. There are also slang words e.g., having your monthly.
 4. Menstruation can begin as early as 8 or as late as 16. Every girl has her own internal clock.
 5. The lining of the uterus builds up every month to prepare the body to nourish a baby if a woman is pregnant. If a baby is not conceived, 4–6 tablespoons of blood is shed through the vagina as it is not needed. This is a normal part of life for a woman, and it needs some body care that we will discuss today.
 6. Then ask your students the following questions:
 - a. How many people have seen ads/commercials on TV about pads or tampons?
 - b. How many people have talked to their parents/guardians about this?
 - c. How many people have seen commercials about pads with wings? What are the wings for?
 7. Using the **Puberty Kit** (see discussion about the Puberty Kit in section B of this lesson plan), show the students some menstruation pads and tampons. Discuss these items as described. Let your students know that various sizes are available and it is best to use the unscented ones. Young women should talk to a parent / guardian about what's best to use. Also, tampons are often not used by young women when their period first starts.
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QUESTION BOX

Have students fill out questions and address them next class.



The process of asking questions is an important learning activity that helps students clarify and validate information being presented. Question Box is a method of individualized instruction which has been proven to enhance learning. Click [here](#) for more information on how to use the question box.



SELF REFLECTION

During the lesson, were:

- Ground rules being followed?
- Good practices established regarding group work and discussion?

What will you change for future classes with this group?

What will you change for future use of this lesson?



STUDENT ASSESSMENT

During the lesson, did students:

Knowledge:

- Identify various changes that occur during puberty?
- Describe ways to cope with change?
- Identify support systems that can help during puberty?

Skills:

- Demonstrate appropriate listening and speaking skills during class discussion?

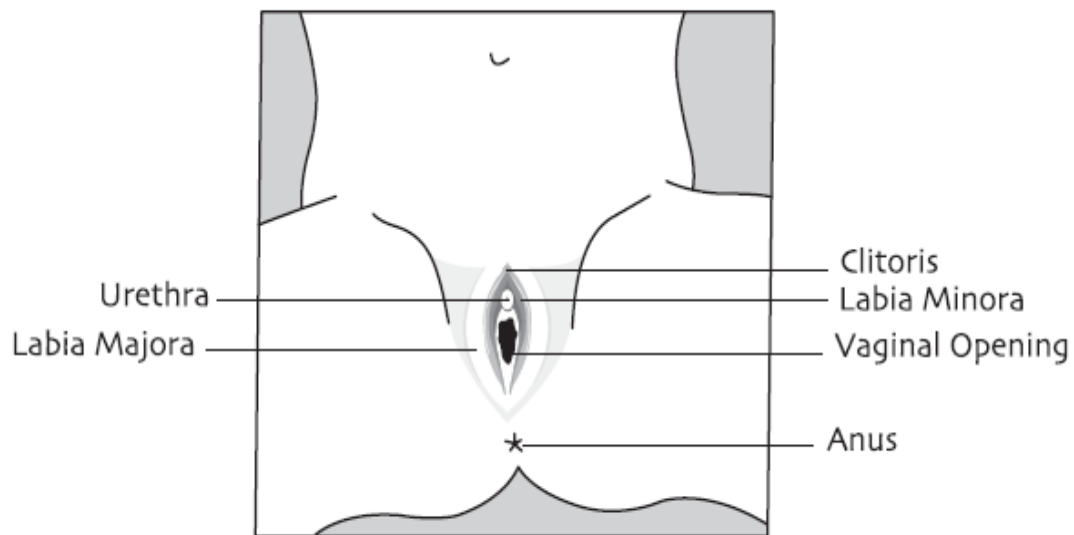
Attitudes:

- Acknowledge that changes will occur during puberty?
- Accept that change is part of puberty?

¹ Alberta Education. (2002). *Health and life skills guide to implementation: Kindergarten to grade 9*. Retrieved from <http://www.education.alberta.ca/media/352993/pos.pdf>

² Harris, R.H., & Emberley, M. (2009). *It's perfectly normal: Changing bodies, growing up, and sexual health (15th Anniversary Edition)*. Somerville MA: Candlewick Press.

OUTSIDE FEMALE BODY PARTS



Note: The vulva is the whole area of soft skin between a female's legs, but does not include the anus.

Adapted from *Sexuality: an Education Resource Book, Canada*: Globe/Modem Curriculum Press, page 234