

Grade 4

Puberty Changes



Learner Outcome

Students explain how development and puberty are connected.

The [Knowledge, Understanding, and Skills and Procedures](#) for this outcome that are covered in this lesson are listed at the end.

How to Use

This lesson plan contains several activities to achieve the learner outcome above. You may choose to do some or all of the activities, based on the needs of your students and the time available. Some of the activities build on the ones that come before them, however all can be used alone.

For a quick lesson, combine activities A, D and G.

Classroom Activities & Timing

See also the [Differing Abilities](#) lesson plan on *Puberty*.

- A. Ground Rules (5-10 minutes)
- B. Talking about Bodies (15-20 minutes)
- C. Good and Harder Changes (10-15 minutes)
- D. Social, Emotional and Physical Changes (20-25 minutes)
- E. Dear Chen Letter Writing (15-25 minutes)
- F. Ask an Adult Homework
- G. Question Box (5-10 minutes)

Required Materials

HANDOUT: Talking About Bodies

Newsprint or poster paper

HANDOUT: They Tell Me I'm Going Through Puberty

CARDS and ANSWER KEY: Puberty Changes

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HANDOUT: Dear Chen Letter

HANDOUT: Ask an Adult

All the student handouts are also available in the [Grade 4 Workbook](#).

Background Information for Teachers

As children enter puberty, they can experience feelings ranging from excitement to dread. Teachers can help students deal with these feelings by helping them to identify the changes that will occur and the tools they have to manage these changes. You can also encourage students to seek an adult with whom they can communicate about sexual health. Honest, open communication between parents or other important adults and children through childhood and the teen years can help lay the foundation for people to mature into sexually healthy adults.

Part of becoming a healthy adolescent includes understanding both the changes they are going through individually, and the changes that others may be experiencing. Learning about and appreciating changes of puberty is an important part of adolescence. These lessons help students establish a comfort level with talking about human sexuality, examine puberty changes and discover those that are unique to people with certain body parts and those that are common to everyone.

Inclusive Language

Language is complex, evolving, and powerful. In these lessons, [inclusive language](#) is used to be inclusive of all students, including those with diverse gender identities, gender expressions and sexual orientations. This includes the use of 'they' as a singular gender-neutral pronoun.

A person's sex can be assigned at birth as male or female. Some people are intersex (the reproductive, sexual, or genetic biology of a person is unclear, not exclusively male or female or otherwise does not fit within traditional definitions of male or female). Assigned sex is independent of gender.

Gender identity is a person's internal sense of identity as girl/woman, boy/man, fluid among genders or no gender (regardless of what sex they were assigned at birth).

For many people, their gender is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth (cisgender). For others, their gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. They may use terms like transgender, trans, non-binary, gender fluid, gender queer, agender or others, to describe their gender identity. The umbrella term 'trans' is primarily used here, to describe people whose gender identity and sex assigned at birth differ. While this umbrella term does not fit everyone, the intention is to be as inclusive as possible.

A. Ground Rules

Ensure [ground rules](#) are established before beginning this lesson. For classes that have already established ground rules, quickly reviewing them can help ensure a successful lesson.

B. Talking About Bodies

If gender identity or expression are new concepts for your students, use the [‘Every Body’ Tool](#) to explain the differences between sex, gender identity and gender expression. See the Background Information section for more on [inclusive language](#).

Students can be embarrassed to talk about puberty and genitals. Being able to talk about all body parts, with the scientific names, may be a new experience for them. To introduce what may be significant new vocabulary and ease them in to talking about these topics, start with this exercise.

1. Give each student the **Talking About Bodies** handout.
2. Give them a few minutes to work on their own to complete as much as they can.
3. Have students partner up to share what they have come up with, and to try and complete the entire exercise.
4. Share the answers: lip, ear, eye, gum, jaw, leg, arm, rib, toe, hip.
5. Ask the group to name any body parts they can think of that are different on boys and girls. You may need to prompt them by talking about ‘private’ body parts, or parts that are ‘covered by bathing suits’; teach them the word *genitals* at this time. They may only know slang words for their genitals. If a student uses a slang word, accept their contribution, and share with the class the scientific name for the part. Ensure these words are listed:
 - penis
 - scrotum
 - testicles
 - vulva
 - breasts
6. Explain that knowing these words will help when they are talking about some of the changes of puberty that you will be talking about in later activities.
7. You may need to explain the difference between vagina and vulva, as the two terms are often used interchangeably or incorrectly. The vagina is the opening and passage inside the body, and the vulva is the part outside of the body (what touches underwear or a bathing suit).

Ensuring all-gender discussions and groupings helps students develop understanding of all puberty changes regardless of gender identity or expression.

C. Good and Harder Changes

This activity allows students to consider both the positive and difficult changes that accompany puberty and begin to identify their support systems for coping with the changes.

1. Write these titles on separate pages of newsprint, and post them on the wall:
 - **The Good Things About Growing Up**
 - **The Harder Things About Growing Up**
2. As a class, come up with an example or two for each heading. An example of a harder change could be moodiness. A good change could be more independence.
3. Discuss some changes that may fit in both categories. For example, more responsibility can be seen as both good (“*I get to baby-sit!*”) or harder (“*I have to baby-sit.*”). A growth spurt, which may be the first sign people notice that puberty is beginning, can make people feel more grown-up, but also feel clumsy.
4. Have students walk around the room writing their ideas under each title.
5. Debrief the activity by discussing:

Why do we go through puberty?

- Puberty happens to everyone. Changing from a child to an adult is called puberty.
- “Adolescence” is sometimes used to describe people who have started puberty.
- Puberty starts getting the body ready for reproduction (making and having a baby).

Why are some changes harder or easier?

- People react to change differently. Some changes may be listed as being both good and harder. Feelings about change are personal. A harder change (as identified by the students) does not have to be a problem. There are different ways to cope with change.

What can we do to make change easier?

- Knowing what to expect and what kinds of changes are likely to occur, can help us be prepared.
- Focus on our strengths (e.g., communication, standing up for ourselves and independence) that will help us with puberty.
- Identify support systems (i.e., family, school, and community members) who can provide help/support.

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Are there any changes listed on the two lists that probably won't happen to people when they are going through puberty?

- Identify any changes listed that are incorrect or unlikely and explain why the change is not likely.

D. Social, Emotional and Physical Changes

This activity helps students see that many changes that happen in puberty are common to all, and only a few are specific to people with certain body parts. For a version of the Puberty Changes cards with pictures and words, see the [Differing Abilities lesson on Puberty](#).

1. Read **They Tell Me I'm Going Through Puberty** to the students. You can also give the students the handout to follow along as you read, or have volunteers take turns reading parts of the story.
2. When you are done, ask students "Can you tell Chen's age or gender from this story?" Have students share their answers with a nearby classmate and discuss their reasons.
3. Post these titles on the wall:
 - **Social Changes**
 - **Emotional Changes**
 - **Physical Changes**
4. Hand out the **Puberty Changes** cards to each student, until all the cards are distributed. Explain that each card contains a change that someone MIGHT experience during puberty. Each person may or may not experience any of the changes listed on the cards.
5. Have students place each card under the title which best fits the puberty change described.
6. As a class, review the card placements, and make the necessary changes. Explain any changes that students don't understand.
7. You may wish to give a fuller explanation of some of the physical changes that only happen to females/people with uteruses (menstruation, ovulation, vaginal discharge, hips get wider) vs. changes that only happen to males/people with testicles (erections, ejaculation, shoulders get wider, sperm production, testicles get bigger).
8. Menstruation and sperm production will be covered in more detail in Grade 5, but should be included here at an introductory level.

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Answers

Type of Change	Change
Social	Friendships become more important Interested in dating Wanting more independence Taking on more responsibility at home or school Looking for new experiences Thinking about your identity
Emotional	Mood swings Sometimes feel lonely and confused Stronger feelings of wanting to be liked Stronger feelings of wanting to fit in Concerned about appearance (looks) Sexual thoughts Sexual feelings
Physical	Acne (pimples) Breasts develop* Erections (penis gets hard) Ejaculation (sperm released from penis) Grow taller Hair gets oily Hair grows in armpits Hair grows on face Hips get wider Menstruation (periods) begins Nocturnal emissions (wet dreams) Ovulation (eggs released from ovaries) Penis grows bigger Pubic hair grows on genitals Shoulders get wider Skin gets oily Start making sex hormones Start producing sperm Sweat glands develop Testicles grow bigger Vaginal discharge Voice changes

* Most people experience some breast changes during puberty because of the production of sex hormones. Many of these changes are temporary such as hard breast buds and tenderness. For females/people with ovaries, breast growth is typically permanent. For males/those with testicles, it is typically temporary.

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9. Re-read **They Tell Me I'm Going Through Puberty**.
10. Ask students if their ideas about Chen's age or gender have changed.
11. Follow up with a discussion emphasizing that:
 - no change that is happening to Chen would indicate one sex or gender over another
 - the changes Chen is experiencing are normal and could happen to anyone
 - changes like those Chen is experiencing happen to different people at different times, and can begin as early as age 8 and continue until 18
 - changing from a child to an adult is called puberty

E. Dear Chen Letter Writing

This activity requires completion of Activity D first.

1. Distribute the handout **Dear Chen**.
2. Have students write a letter to Chen explaining what will happen to people during puberty.
3. Collect the letters for evaluation. Ensure that students address:
 - physical changes (changes to the body)
 - emotional/social changes (thoughts and feelings)
 - support people (e.g., family, community members)
4. Debrief the activity by asking students:
 - What was the hardest part of the letter to write?
 - If you had a letter like this addressed to you, what would you want it to teach you?

F. Ask an Adult Homework

Students begin to build a support network to help them manage change and thrive in puberty.

1. Distribute the **Ask an Adult** handout for students to complete as a homework assignment.
2. Explain that students can complete this interview with any adult they trust, including a parent, grandparent, foster parent, older sibling, aunt, uncle, coach, or family friend.

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3. Explain that this is not a graded assignment and there are no right or wrong answers.
4. Dedicate time to debrief this activity during the next lesson.

Keep in mind that not all students have equal opportunities for open discussion with family or other adults in their life.

Due to the sensitive nature of human sexuality topics, it is recommended that homework is reviewed or discussed but not graded.

G. Question Box

Answer any questions from the [question box](#) in the previous lesson. Have students submit any new questions and address them next class.

Addressing the questions at the next class allows you time to review the questions and prepare responses.

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?

Learning Outcomes

This lesson addresses the following Grade 4 [Physical Education and Wellness curriculum](#) outcomes:

Knowledge

- Puberty is a period of rapid growth and progression from childhood through adolescence to adulthood.
- Puberty marks the beginning of the life stage of adolescence.
- A growth spurt can be an indicator of the beginning of puberty.
- Puberty prepares the human body for reproduction.
- Puberty prepares people to function as adults, with healthy
 - bodies
 - choices
 - relationships

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- thoughts
- emotions
- Differences in physical characteristics can occur during and after onset of puberty.
- The progression of puberty can be experienced in unique ways.
- Physical changes in puberty include
 - growth of body hair
 - skin changes
 - voice changes
 - sperm production
 - menstruation
- Puberty can result in social-emotional changes, such as
 - increased intensity of feelings
 - friendships becoming more important
 - emphasis on body image
 - wanting to fit in and be liked
- Adolescents may have questions about puberty and its associated changes.
- Puberty can be supported using credible sources, such as
 - parents or caregivers
 - health professionals
 - counsellors
 - spiritual leaders
 - Knowledge Keepers
 - Elders

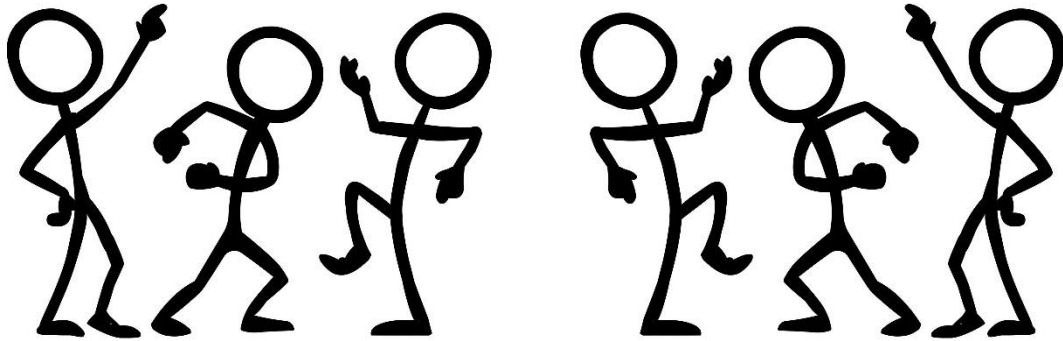
Understanding

- Puberty can allow individuals to take on new roles and responsibilities and experience new learning opportunities.
- Puberty is a process of maturation that includes physical and social-emotional changes.
- Awareness of changes that happen in puberty can support mental health and emotional well-being.
- Sources of support are available for adolescents during puberty.

Skills and Procedures

- Recognize that puberty marks the beginning of a new life stage as individuals move toward becoming mature adults.
- Describe changes that happen during puberty.
- Identify credible sources in the community to support individuals through the changes that occur during puberty.

Talking About Bodies



Can you name 10 parts of the body spelled with only three letters?
Try to avoid slang. See if you can find 5 that are above the neck
and 5 that are below.

They Tell Me I'm Going Through Puberty

Hi, I'm Chen and I'd like to tell you about what's happening to me. It seems that every day brings a new change. It's almost like I'm getting a new body! They tell me I'm going through puberty.

One thing that's happening is this new hair that's growing in places it's never been before. Like under my arms. I know this is normal and all, but it still takes getting used to.

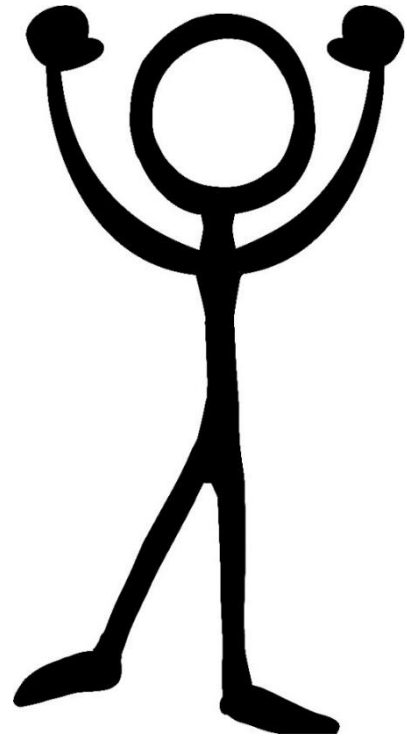
I don't mind some of the changes I'm seeing. In fact, some things I even like. I'm taller than I was last year. I know I'm smarter just because I'm able to think and write about what I'm going through now.

But then, there are some changes that aren't so good. Like B.O. (body odour). The first time I noticed it, I thought I had some kind of disease or something. Now I realize it's not too bad if I wash and use deodorant.

The worst part so far is acne. I remember I was getting ready to go to a birthday party, washing up and stuff, when I looked in the mirror and saw this big zit staring back at me. I held hot washcloths on it for a long time. It went down, but not the whole way. I went to the party anyway. I noticed that many other kids had the same or worse luck with their zits. I wonder how common this is.

There's one thing I get a little embarrassed about. It's even hard for me to say this. When I was at the party the other night, I was with someone I like (and I'm not mentioning any names). I got this new feeling. It was strange but kind of nice. They tell me it's normal. Is it?

They tell me I'm going through puberty. That means I have to go to school with my zits and my B.O. But I'm taller and smarter. I think I'll survive.



Can you tell Chen's age or gender from this story?

Dear Chen,

Guess what? You are about to enter puberty! Congratulations. This means that...

To help you out, I am writing you a letter explaining some of the changes that will happen to people as they grow up. You should know about what happens to people of all genders because...

There are lots of **physical** changes (changes to the body) that will happen. Here is a list of some changes you can expect to see happening to you and your friends:

When we grow up, our **thoughts, feelings and relationships** might change too! It's normal to experience:

Name: _____

It seems like a lot for anyone to go through, doesn't it? Puberty means a lot of change. Sometimes it's great. Sometimes it's difficult. The best thing is that we don't need to go through puberty alone. We can get help from lots of people. Here are some people you can go to for help:

Helper	How they can help

I hope this letter helps you out, Chen!

From,

Ask an Adult

Puberty can be a challenge. It helps to have a parent or an adult you trust to talk to about your questions or concerns. All adults have gone through the changes of growing up. Having your parent or a supportive adult share their experience of growing up can help you during your own experience of puberty.

1. Take this handout home. Share it with a parent, guardian, or other adult you trust and ask that person if you can complete it together.
2. Plan a time with the adult for the interview. Give the adult this handout so that they can think about the answers before the interview.
3. Interview the adult using the questions provided.

Questions

What was the first sign you noticed that you had started puberty? How old were you?

What was difficult about puberty?

How did you handle the difficult parts of puberty?

What was the best thing about puberty?

Grow taller

Skin gets oily

Acne (pimples)

Voice changes

Hair grows on face

Hair gets oily

Hair grows in armpits

**Pubic hair grows on
genitals**

Sweat glands develop

Breasts develop

Hips grow wider

Shoulders get wider

Start producing sperm

Penis grows bigger

Testicles grow bigger

**Start making sex
hormones**

Nocturnal emissions

(wet dreams)

Erections

(penis gets hard)

Ejaculation

(sperm released from penis)

Ovulation

(eggs released from ovaries)

**Menstruation (periods)
begins**

Mood swings

Sexual thoughts

Sexual feelings

Vaginal discharge

Interested in dating

**Friendships become
more important**

**Sometimes feel lonely
and confused**

**Stronger feelings of
wanting to be liked**

**Stronger feelings of
wanting to fit in**

**Want more
independence**

**Thinking about your
identity**

**Concerned about
appearance (looks)**

**Looking for new
experiences**

**Taking on more
responsibility at home
or school**
