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Grade 4

Teacher's Guide

Learning Outcome

Students explain how development and puberty are connected.

The content in this Teachers' Guide provides background information for teachers and is not for classroom use.

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Primary Care Alberta

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Introduction

This teacher's guide provides Alberta teachers with evidence-based information to support the Grade 4 human sexuality, gender identity, and sexual orientation outcomes of the Alberta curriculum.

The background information in this guide is intended to build teacher knowledge and confidence. It is not meant to be delivered directly to students.

Please review the Teacher's Guide: Preparing to Teach Sexual Health Education for additional background information on:

- self-reflection on personal values and experiences
- using an inclusive approach
- group agreements (ground rules)
- using a question box
- being prepared for disclosures and distress

Boost Your Knowledge

The following information supports teachers' foundational knowledge of the topics found in the approved learning activities for Grade 4 learning outcomes.

All **bolded words** are listed in the Key Vocabulary section.

Puberty

Learning about bodies and growing up can help students stay healthy, take good care of themselves and make good decisions. As children enter **puberty**, they can experience feelings ranging from excitement to dread. Through these activities, students examine puberty changes by learning about changes that are common to everyone and those that are unique to people with certain body parts.

Teaching students what to expect through puberty can help mitigate anxieties or worries. Helping students identify strengths like independence, communication, and standing up for oneself that can help them cope with change. Understanding the changes they are going through individually and the changes that others may be experiencing is part of becoming a healthy adolescent.

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To help students cope with these feelings, it can be helpful to:

- Explain puberty in simple terms
    - Puberty is changing from a child to an adult.
    - Puberty starts getting the body ready for **reproduction** (making and having a baby).
    - Puberty happens to everyone.
    - **Adolescence** is sometimes used to describe the time in life of people who have started puberty.
- Identify the changes they are going through
- Use scientific names for body parts
- Help students understand they aren't alone

Talking openly about reproductive body parts helps to reduce shame and stigma associated with sexual health. Through normalizing conversations about sexual health, students are better able to communicate with healthcare professionals and their parents. This helps to enhance children's body image, confidence, and openness.

- Teach students which parts are "private." This includes the parts of their body that are covered by their undergarments. These places should not be touched or looked at without their permission.
- Young people are more likely to recognize and report abuse when they know the correct terminology, including private body parts.
- 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.

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- Keep in mind that not all students have equal opportunities for open discussion with family or other adults in their life and may not be able to complete activities that involve talking with parents or guardians.

Grade 4 Learning Activities that address puberty include:

- Who am I and Who am I Becoming?
- My Future Self Collage
- Celebrating Growing Up
- Ask an Adult
- Advice Corner

Changes of Puberty

The table below lists many changes of puberty. Not all of these changes are covered in the approved learning activities for grade 4. Some are in the grade 5 learning activities (e.g., secondary sex characteristics) and grade 7 learning activities (e.g. sexual thoughts and feelings). This approach ensures that the information aligns with the curriculum learning outcome and KUSPs for each grade.

Grouping changes into the categories of social, emotional and physical changes is more inclusive than grouping them into "boy's changes, girl's changes and everyone's changes." It emphasizes the common experiences of going through puberty. Most of the changes people experience during puberty can happen to anyone of any gender.

You may wish to give a fuller explanation of some of the physical changes that only happen to females/people with a uterus (e.g., menstruation, ovulation, vaginal discharge, hips get wider), and changes that only happen to males/people with testicles (e.g., erections, ejaculation, shoulders get wider, sperm production, testicles get bigger).

Some students find it challenging to differentiate between social changes and emotional changes. The point of sorting changes into categories is not to focus on the "right answer," but rather to spark conversation about changes that students can expect and strategies for managing the changes. Depending on your class, you may consider sorting into two categories, "Physical Changes" and "Social and Emotional Changes," to achieve the goals of the activity.

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Changes included in approved Grade 4 learning activities	Additional changes included in approved Grade 5 learning activities	Additional changes included in approved Grade 7 learning activities
Social Changes		
• Friendships become more important • Wanting more independence • Taking on more responsibility at home or school • Looking for new experiences • Thinking about your identity		• Interest in dating
Emotional Changes		
• 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 Changes		
• Acne (pimples) • Breasts develop* • Grow taller • Hair gets oily • Hair grows in armpits • Hair grows on face • Menstruation (period) begins • Pubic hair grows on genitals • Skin gets oily • Start producing sperm • Sweat glands develop • Voice changes	• Erection (penis gets hard) • Ejaculation (sperm released from penis) • Hips get wider • Nocturnal emissions (wet dreams) • Ovulation (eggs released from ovaries) • Penis grows bigger • Shoulders get wider • Start making hormones for maturation • Testicles grow bigger • Vaginal discharge	

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* 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/people with testicles, it is typically temporary.

Grade 4 Learning Activities that address the changes of puberty include:

- Social, Emotional and Physical Puberty Changes
- Dear Chen Letter Writing
- Puberty Kit
- Advice Corner

Learning Activities

There are multiple activities to choose from, to help you meet the learning outcome. 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, but all can be used alone. Use your professional judgment to choose the activities that are appropriate for your class, school and community to meet the learning outcome.

Below are some suggestions about order, flow, and additional considerations when using these activities in your classroom. Use them to plan each lesson in this unit.

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Who am I and Who am I Becoming?

This can be a great introduction to the unit, by inviting students to consider their current and future selves. Talking about this activity offers an opportunity to link the familiar concept of "growing up" to the new vocabulary of "puberty." Consider whether this activity works for your students as a personal reflection, small group or whole class discussion.

My Future Self Collage

This is another good introductory activity. It includes opportunities for artistic expression as well as considering the future self and the changes puberty brings.

Social, Emotional and Physical Puberty Changes

With this activity, you can start with an introductory discussion to find out what your students understand about the word "puberty," especially if you have not completed the "Who am I" activity. After you have introduced the idea of puberty, adolescence, and physical, social and emotional changes, you can break the class into small groups. Get them involved in talking to each other about the changes that people go through during puberty by sorting the cards into categories. Depending on your class, you may consider sorting into two categories, "Physical Changes" and "Social and Emotional Changes," if differentiating between social and emotional changes is too challenging for your students. Help your students to focus less on the "correct answer" and more on understanding the shared experiences of the changes that people experience in this stage of life.

Dear Chen Letter Writing

This activity will likely be more successful if students have already learned about the changes of puberty, for example by completing the Social, Emotional and Physical Puberty Changes activity. It can help you assess what students understand about puberty changes. It also introduces the sources of support that will be helpful for all students to be familiar with in the coming years. This could also be used as a unit closing activity.

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Puberty Kit

This kit is about coping with the changes of puberty, particularly the hygiene-related changes. It is important to have already discussed the changes of puberty, for example by using the Social, Emotional and Physical Puberty Changes activity. One way to use this kit is to hand out one picture to each student, and ask them to share what they think the picture has to do with puberty changes. This could be done as a whole class discussion or in smaller groups. Another idea is to have students match the descriptions with the pictures, in small groups or as a whole class activity.

Celebrating Growing Up

When puberty activities focus primarily on managing changes, they may unintentionally frame puberty as something negative or challenging. This activity takes a more affirming approach by inviting students to recognize and celebrate the changes they experience. It also creates space for students to express their strengths, creativity, and cultural traditions — or to use their imagination — to shape meaningful and joyful celebrations.

Ask an Adult

This homework-based activity is an opportunity to involve parents/families in sexual health education. The goal of this activity is to spark sexual health conversations at home that complement and extend the classroom lessons.

Keep in mind that not all students have equal opportunities for open discussion with family or other adults in their life. Ensure your students understand that they can choose the trusted adult. This could be a parent, guardian, grandparent, foster parent, older sibling, aunt, uncle, coach, or family friend.

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

Advice Corner

This is another homework-based activity, with similar goals and considerations. Please refer to Ask an Adult activity (above) for suggestions and considerations for use.

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Due to the sensitive nature of human sexuality topics, it is recommended that this homework-based activity is reviewed or discussed but not graded. Consider debriefing with a class discussion. You could ask questions like:

- What did this activity teach you about puberty?
- What are some other questions that young people might have about puberty?
- How can we answer them?

Key Vocabulary

Term	Definition
Adolescence	The period of rapid growth and development that begins with puberty and ends in adulthood.
Menstruation (period)	Monthly shedding of the lining of the uterus.
Penis	The external sex organ that releases semen and can become erect.
Puberty	The process of changing from a child to an adult, signaling changes in a person's reproductive capability, and the start of the body getting ready for reproduction.
Reproduction	Occurs when a sperm cell and an egg cell join (fertilization) and implant in the uterus (implantation).
Scrotum	External sac containing the testicles.
Semen	Thick fluid containing sperm.
Sperm	Reproductive cell made in the testicles.
Testicles (testes)	Sperm producing glands.
Vagina	A passage leading from the uterus to the outside of the body.
Vulva	The external genitals, including the labia and clitoris.

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