

3. Adolescence



Objectives

By the end of this session, group members will be able to:

- Define adolescence.
- List physical changes that happen to boys during puberty.
- List physical changes that happen to girls during puberty.
- List emotional changes that happen during puberty.



Background notes

Adolescence is the time in everyone's life when they change from a child into an adult. This includes changes in our bodies and changes in our thoughts and feelings. Adolescence is the time between 10 and 19 years.

Puberty

Puberty is a time when the bodies of boys and girls change – bodies grow bigger and taller, sex organs mature, and hair often starts growing in new places. During puberty, a girl is able to become pregnant and a boy is able to father a child. New chemicals produced by the body, called hormones, create changes in the body and turn young people into adults.

Puberty normally starts between ages 8 to 13 in girls, and ages 10 to 15 in boys, although some young people start puberty a bit earlier or later. People are different, so everyone starts puberty at their own pace. During puberty, young people grow a lot. Puberty lasts for about 2-5 years. Some people grow 10 cm or more in one year!

This growth during puberty is the last time the body will grow taller. When the growth period is over, young people will be at their adult height.

Body changes in boys

Boys' shoulders grow wider, and their bodies become more muscular. Some body parts (especially hands and legs) may grow faster than others. Some boys have uncomfortable pains in their arms and legs as the bones grow faster than the muscles can stretch to keep up with them.

Some boys develop swelling under their nipples, which looks like the start of breasts. This is normal and it happens because of hormones that are active throughout the body. It will usually go away with time.

During puberty, boys will start to have erections and wet dreams. An erection is when the penis gets stiff and becomes bigger than usual. Boys can get erections sometimes when they do not want them.

A wet dream is when a boy's penis becomes erect and he ejaculates when sleeping. There are other changes as well, like the penis becoming longer and wider and the testicles becoming bigger. These are all a normal part of growing up.

Body changes in girls

During puberty, girls' bodies usually become rounder and more womanly. They gain weight on their hips, and their breasts grow, starting with just a little swelling under the nipples. Sometimes one breast might grow faster than the other, but over time the slower one catches up. Girls may have more fat on their bodies and may sometimes have pain in their breasts as they start to grow. This is normal. Gaining some weight is part of becoming a woman, and it is unhealthy for girls to go on a diet to try to stop this normal weight gain.

About one to two years after girls' breasts start to grow, they usually have their first menstrual bleeding. Also, girls might see and feel a white or clear liquid from the vagina. This does not mean anything is wrong; it is usually just another sign of their changing body and hormones.

Hair in new places and skin changes

One of the first signs of puberty is hair growing in the armpits and on and around the sex organs. Young men also start to grow hair on their faces and chests. Acne (pimples or spots) often starts around the beginning of puberty and can remain all through adolescence. It usually gets better or disappears by the end of adolescence. Young adults should wash their faces each day with soap and water to keep their skin clean.

Smells and sounds

Adolescents will notice a new smell from under the arms and other places on the body. This smell is normal. The puberty hormones change glands in the skin, and the glands make chemicals that have a strong smell. Bathing or washing every day helps reduce this smell, and so do perfumes and deodorant. Boys may notice that their voices "break" and get deeper. Girls' voices might also get a little deeper. Boys' voices will stop breaking as they get older.

Feelings

During puberty, young people might notice a change in their thoughts and feelings and how they react to things. It is normal to feel worried or uncomfortable with how our bodies look and are changing. Losing tempers more than usual and getting angry with friends or family members happen more easily. It is common to feel sad sometimes. Young people should talk with adults they trust about any feelings of anger or sadness they may have.

During this time, it is normal to become more aware of the opposite sex and start to feel attracted to them. In boys, the main sign of sexual feelings is when the penis becomes hard. In girls, it is when the vagina becomes wet. Having sexual feelings is normal and is nothing to feel guilty about. However, having sex is a big responsibility. Sex can lead to pregnancy, HIV, and other sexually transmitted infections (STI). Having sex can also change how we feel about ourselves and our partner. It is a big decision and best to wait until we are older and ready.

Physical changes		
Boys	Girls	Both
Shoulders broaden	Hips widen	Grow
Facial hair	Breasts develop	Gain weight
Voice deepens	Menstrual bleeding begins	Pubic and underarm hair
Sperm production and ejaculation		Sex organs enlarge
Wet dreams		Acne

Emotional changes
Sexual feelings
Changes in mood (sometimes feeling happy then suddenly feeling sad or angry)
Feel embarrassed easily
Feel closer to friends than family
Better able to solve problems
Rebel against parents, want to feel independent
Wondering if our bodies and feelings are normal
Wanting to try new things

Remember!

- All of these physical and emotional changes are normal.
- Everyone develops at their own pace; some earlier, some later. It is important not to tease others who may develop earlier or later.
- Young people often feel uncomfortable, clumsy, or embarrassed because of the changes in their bodies.
- Menstruation and wet dreams are normal.
- During puberty, a girl becomes physically able to become pregnant and a young boy becomes physically able to father a child.



Session guide

1. Facilitate a discussion by asking group members the following questions:
 - How do boys' bodies change during puberty?
 - How do girls' bodies change during puberty?
 - What are changes that happen to both boys and girls during puberty?
 - What emotional changes happen during puberty?
2. After discussing all of the questions, share the information from the Background Notes section. Below are answers to some common questions young people have about adolescence. Use these to answer any questions your group members may have.



Main points

- Adolescence is the time when people change from children to adults. It is from age 10 to 19.
- Puberty is the word used to describe how the body changes. During puberty girls are able to become pregnant and boys are able to father children.
- Adolescence is a time when many physical and emotional changes take place.

Common questions about adolescence & puberty

Is it normal for some boys' and girls' bodies to change earlier than others?

Yes, some boys start puberty as early as 10 years old, but others not until they are 14 or 15. Some girls start puberty as early as age 8, and others start when they are 13 or 14. If a girl does not start menstruating by the age of 16, she should see a health provider.

Why do some parts of the body mature more quickly than others?

During puberty, changes to our body usually happen in order. For girls, breasts begin to grow first; for boys, growth of the testicles is usually the first sign. Sometimes changes will happen in a different order and this is also normal.

Why do some boys have sore breasts during puberty?

Sometimes one or both of a boy's breasts can be a little swollen or sore. This is normal, because during puberty we have more hormones in the body that are helping our growth and this can cause pain.

Why do some teenagers have skin problems?

During puberty hormones cause changes in our skin. Oil produced by the glands blocks skin pores and mixes with bacteria to cause pimples or spots. To help keep skin clear, we should wash our faces and hands often.

How long does it take for breasts to be fully developed?

It takes a different amount of time for each girl. If a girl's breasts grow slower than other girls, it does not mean that her breasts will always be smaller. There is no connection between what size breasts will be and when they start to develop.

Do boys get a period?

Boys do not get a period, or menstruate, because they have a different reproductive system than girls. Menstruation is the breaking away of the lining of the uterus – the place where a pregnancy develops. Since only women have a uterus, only women have periods.

What is the normal length of the penis?

Penises do not have a normal size, shape, or length. Some are fat and short. Others are long and thin. There is no truth to the idea that a bigger penis is a better penis.

Is it normal to have one testicle hanging lower than the other one?

Yes. Most men's testicles hang unevenly.

Is it a problem for the penis to curve a little bit?

It is normal for a boy or man to have a curving penis. It normally becomes straight during an erection.

How does a girl know when her period is about to start?

Most girls get their first menstrual period between the ages of 12 and 14. Some may start earlier and others may start later. The best way a girl can know is to look for signs. Underarm hair and a whitish discharge from the vagina are signs that the period probably is not too far away.

What if a girl's period never starts?

Periods will start sooner or later. However, if a girl reaches age 16 and has not yet had her first period, she should visit a health provider.

Can a girl get pregnant when she has her period?

Yes. If a woman has a short cycle – 21 days from first day to last day – then she is ovulating on day seven of her cycle (the seventh day from the first day of her period). Because some periods last seven days, it is possible that her period is ending when she is ovulating.

Can a girl get pregnant the first time she has sex?

Yes. It is possible to get pregnant each and every time one has unprotected sex, even if it is the first time.

Does menstruation hurt?

Some young women feel some cramping in their stomachs before and during their monthly period. This pain is usually not a serious problem and can be treated with panadol or other pain relievers, exercise, a hot shower/bath, or a hot water bottle. Sometimes the pain is worse than other times. A young girl may also experience back pain, headaches, vomiting, and not being able to go to the toilet. The pain usually lasts just two or three days at the beginning of the period. Period pain is usually worse during adolescence and may become less as the young woman becomes an adult.

What are hormones?

Hormones are special chemical messengers that tell your body how and when to change and to grow. We have many different kinds of hormones. Our bodies are always making hormones. For example, growing much taller during adolescence is caused by a growth hormone, which is released by the brain. Sex hormones also start to be released during puberty. For girls, the sex hormones are produced in the ovaries, and for boys, they are produced in the testicles. These sex hormones cause the difference between the shape of men's and women's bodies. Other hormones control the menstrual cycle or help maintain and support a pregnancy.