

Sexuality at Different Ages

From birth to death, we are all sexual persons.

Our sexuality is part of everything we are and everything we do. It includes:

- Our bodies
- Our personalities
- Our relationships with friends and family
- Our sexual relationships

Our sexuality shows itself in different ways at different times in our lives.

Early Childhood (birth – 3 years)

- We hold and touch our children. This teaches them about trust and love.
 - Babies need to suck. Breastfeeding may be enough, or they may need to suck their fingers or a soother.
 - It is normal for your baby boy to have an erection. Sometimes there is a discharge from a newborn baby girl's vagina. This is also normal.
 - Your little boy will touch his penis. Your little girl may also touch her genitals. This is normal – like discovering the toes.
 - Children will touch and explore their bodies. This feels good. Also, children are curious.
 - Young children are curious about the differences between boys and girls.
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Childhood (3 – 7 years)

- Children often look at or touch each other's bodies when playing. Usually, this is about finding out how the body looks and how it works.
 - Children learn their sex (gender) roles – how to behave like a girl or boy.
 - Children may use bathroom talk. They may think it's funny to talk about urinating (peeing) and bowel movements (poo). You can say, "I don't want to listen to bathroom talk. You can talk about that later."
 - They may find that touching the genitals (private parts) feels good. This is OK. Teach your child appropriate behaviour. You can say, "Touching yourself is private. Please do it in your bedroom." If it is against your beliefs, you can tell your child that you don't believe it is OK. Don't punish your children or tell them lies to scare them.
 - Children begin to learn about sexuality and relationships from TV.
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Early Adolescence (8 – 11 years)

- Children may become shy about their bodies. They may start closing their bedroom and bathroom doors.
 - The first signs of puberty may appear. These happen at different ages in different people.
 - Children may have close friendships with children of the same sex (gender).
 - Girls may have their first period (menstruation) as early as 9 or 10.
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Adolescence (12 – 18 years)

- Changes of puberty continue. Hormonal changes cause the child's moods to change quickly.
 - Girls have their period (menstruation).
 - Boys can produce sperm. They may have wet dreams (nocturnal emissions).
 - Teens often care a lot about being accepted by their friends. They may worry about their appearance.
 - Teens become aware of their adult sexuality. They may have sexual dreams and feelings.
 - They may be attracted to someone of the opposite or same gender.
 - They may touch themselves for sexual pleasure (masturbate).
 - Their relationship with the family may change. They need to figure out who they are – what they think and believe.
 - They may want to be more independent. They may want to spend more time with their friends. Teenagers still want and need their family.
 - They need sexuality education – even if they are not in a sexual relationship. They will have sexual relationships at some time in their lives, so they need information about birth control and STIs. (Most teenagers say they get too little information.)
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Adulthood (19 – 45 years)

- People may have sexual relationships. They make decisions about safer sex, birth control, and marriage or long-term relationships. Closeness with another person is important.
 - Masturbation may be part of a person's sexual expression.
 - Many women will give birth.
 - Women may notice changes to their menstrual cycles in their late thirties.
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Adulthood (46 years)

- Women experience menopause (change of life). The changes will vary from woman to woman.
 - Sex may feel different and there will be physical changes in the body. Erection will take longer and may require more touching. There may be less lubrication (wetness) in the vagina. When couples understand the changes and can talk about them, they can still have a satisfying sexual relationship.
 - People still need physical affection and closeness with other people.
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