

Puberty, day 1

Grades 4-6, Lesson #11

Time Needed

50-60 minutes

Student Learning Objectives

To be able to ...

1. Explain the physical, social, and emotional changes that happen during puberty.
2. Explain that puberty is very similar for people of all genders.
3. Explain how the timing and scope of puberty changes can vary considerably and still be normal and healthy.

Agenda

1. Introduce the lesson.
2. Brainstorm puberty changes for all genders.
3. Debrief brainstorm lists, pointing out that puberty is very similar for people of all genders.
4. Use *Puberty Worksheet #1* to review terms.

Teacher Preparation

The FLASH curriculum recommends teaching the puberty classes in all-gender classrooms rather than separating classes by gender.

- It ensures that all students are receiving the same information, in the same way, thus decreasing any sense of secrecy associated with these topics.
- The experience of respectful discussion cuts down on disrespectful communication between genders when students have less supervision, such as in hallways and at recess.
- It prepares all students to communicate about sexual health related topics with a future partner, regardless of their gender.
- It supports sexual violence prevention by not creating false distinctions between genders.
- It does not place an undue burden on nonbinary and transgender students to choose a classroom to affiliate themselves with.

This lesson was most recently edited November 2021.

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Materials Needed

Student Materials: (for each student)

- One copy per student of *Puberty Worksheet #1*

FLASH Key Concepts

Puberty is when a person's body and feelings change from a child's into an adult's.

People's bodies can look very different from each other. These differences are normal and healthy.

Activity

1. Introduce the lesson.

Explain that today you will be talking about puberty. Ask volunteers to define puberty. Thank them and build on what they said, so you end up defining it as a time when a person's body and feelings change from a child's into a young adult's. Explain that today the class will be learning about changes that happen during puberty.

Today we will be learning about puberty. Who can tell me what puberty is? That's right – Puberty is a time when a person's body and feelings change from a child's into a young adult's.

Puberty can start anywhere between ages 8 and 14, and it takes several years for all of the changes to happen. Puberty involves changes in not only a person's body but also their feelings and relationships. So one person's body might start changing first, but another person may be changing emotionally and socially sooner. It's important to remember that during puberty, as always, people's bodies can look very different from each other. These differences are normal and healthy.

2. Brainstorm puberty changes for all genders.**

*The **pituitary gland** in a person's brain will trigger the changes of puberty whenever it is programmed to do so for that particular person by causing new hormones to be released. Most of the changes that happen during puberty happen for everyone regardless of their gender. Boys, girls, nonbinary, and trans people all experience very similar puberty changes. A few of the changes that happen during puberty are different depending on the body parts that people have. Some changes only happen for people who have a uterus and ovaries, and some changes happen only for people with testicles and a penis.*

****ISD Exception: The following paragraph will not be presented to students during any FLASH lesson. However, this language may be used to address student questions that are asked regarding the topic of taking medicine or hormones to change puberty:**

*Some people decide, with the help of their doctor, to take medicine or hormones to change puberty on purpose to better match their gender. They might take medicine that interferes with hormones so puberty changes don't happen at all. Or, they might take medicine made of hormones so that they have specific changes. Let's think about the kinds of changes that might happen to someone during puberty.***

Have the class brainstorm puberty changes as you write them on the board. Make three columns: (a) people with penis and testicles, (b) people with uterus and ovaries, and (c) to everyone. For each example, ask the class which column they think it belongs in, write it in the appropriate column, and correct assumptions and misinformation as you go.

- **growth spurts (everyone)** – Puberty is a time when people can grow very quickly, and people grow most in their sleep.
- **breasts develop (everyone)** – Most people with a uterus and ovaries will experience breast development, although people experience different amounts of growth. Many people with a penis and testicles also experience some breast development although it usually disappears within six months or a year. It can be

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surprising if people don't realize how common it is.

- **acne may begin (everyone)** – Acne is caused because the skin gets thicker during puberty and it begins to produce more oil. Sometimes the new, thicker layer of skin blocks the pores or openings where the oils are supposed to flow, causing a pimple. People can wash their faces gently with mild soap, but it may not prevent acne altogether. Scrubbing hard can actually make acne worse.
- **body odor (everyone)** – Explain that everyone sweats when they are hot, but that at puberty another group of sweat glands starts to produce sweat also when a person feels stressed or upset. This kind of sweat in teens and adults can have a strong odor, which people feel differently about. Sometimes people shower more often and use deodorant after puberty because of this.
- **pubic and underarm hair develops (everyone)** – Pubic hair grows around a person's genitals (around the labia or penis). Pubic and underarm hair is often coarser and sometimes a different color than the hair on the person's head. Sometimes people choose to shave leg or pubic hair, but this is a choice that people's families have different beliefs about. It's always important to talk with an adult before using a razor.
- **facial hair develops and body hair may thicken (everyone)** – The amount of hair a person gets on their face and body is genetic (inherited from a person's biological family) and will be different for everyone. People sometimes think of facial hair as a change that happens to people with a penis, but people of all genders often grow some hair on their face as well.
- **voice deepens (everyone)** – The vocal cords inside a person's throat grow and thicken during puberty, which makes people's voices deeper. People may notice their voice cracking when they speak sometimes during puberty. This is because the vocal cords don't always get thick evenly. On average, the voices of people with a penis and testicles get lower than people with a uterus and ovaries, but everyone's voice deepens during puberty.
- **genitals enlarge (everyone)** – Just like the rest of their bodies, people's genitals are growing during puberty as well.
- **erections happen more frequently (everyone)** – An erection is when the penis or the clitoris gets harder and bigger. Everyone gets erections, even babies, although they become more common during puberty. Erections can happen when a person is thinking of something sexual or they can happen for no reason at all, especially during puberty. Erections can happen anytime, including when a person is asleep or when they are out in public, and they happen to everyone.
- **sperm production and ejaculation begin (people with a penis and testicles)** – Sperm are the microscopic cells that can start a pregnancy, when they combine with an egg cell. Sperm cells are made in the testicles, and ejaculation is when the sperm come out of the penis (in a fluid called "semen"). Ejaculation can happen during sleep, or during sexual touch. Once a person can ejaculate, they are able to start a pregnancy.
- **nocturnal emissions begin (people with a penis and testicles)** – The slang term for nocturnal emission is "wet dream." Some people with a penis will ejaculate during their sleep, and some will not. Either way is normal and healthy. They may or may not have

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been dreaming at all. The nocturnal emission can be their body's response to the higher level of hormones in their bloodstream during a growth spurt.

- **ovulation and menstruation begin (people with a uterus and ovaries)** -- The slang term for menstruating is “having a period.” About once a month, starting at puberty, the ovary will release an egg, which is called ovulating. If that person has vaginal sex with a person with sperm, a pregnancy may begin. The uterus has a lining of blood to help a pregnancy grow. If that person doesn't become pregnant, the blood comes out through the vagina, which is called having a period, or menstruating. People can use a pad or tampon or menstrual cup to catch the blood while they are having their period. People have different beliefs about what kind of product is right for someone to use when they first start getting their period, so it's good to talk with a family member about it ahead of time.
- **crushes and attractions may begin (everyone)** – People can have crushes at any age, but they may feel more intense at puberty. A crush is the feeling of liking someone else in a romantic way. Most people will have crushes eventually, but not everyone will. People may notice crushes in elementary school or not until they are older. A person may have crushes on people of a specific gender, or on people of any gender.
- **self-consciousness may increase (everyone)** – Most people go through a time of worrying what other people think about them. During puberty these feeling may be stronger than when a person was younger or when they get older.
- **concern for others may grow (everyone)** – As people mature during puberty, their brains change in a way that makes it easier to empathize and imagine what things might feel like for other people.
- **sudden mood changes may begin (everyone)** – During puberty people's bodies and brains are changing rapidly. Sometimes these fast changes can make people's moods change quickly too.
- **friction with parents or guardians may grow (everyone)** – During puberty people often want more independence and begin to have their own thoughts and beliefs about things. Families are still responsible for the child's safety, and sometimes this can cause friction while everyone is adapting. Families can love and care for each other very much and still have friction.
- **freedom to make decisions grows (everyone)** – People's parents and guardians often trust them with more of their own choices, especially as they take on more responsibilities.
- **understanding of self may grow (everyone)** – As people mature during puberty, they will likely begin to learn more about themselves. This can help people have more empathy for others and can help their self-confidence.

3. Debrief lists, pointing out that puberty is very similar for people of all genders.

Ask the class what they notice about the lists. Do most changes happen only to people with a penis and testicles, only to people with a uterus and ovaries only, or to everyone? Affirm

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that almost all puberty changes happen to everyone, and that puberty is a very similar experience for all people, regardless of gender.

4. Hand out *Puberty Worksheet #1* and use it as a discussion tool.

Answers:

1. b having a period = menstruation
2. a the penis or clitoris getting larger and harder = erection
3. f the cell from a person with a penis and testicles that can start a pregnancy = sperm cell
4. c sperm coming out of the penis during sleep = nocturnal emission
5. d the cell from a person with a uterus and ovaries that can start a pregnancy = egg cell
6. e the time when a child begins to change into a young adult = puberty
7. g the gland in the brain that triggers the beginning of puberty = pituitary

Homework:

Students' options:

- Family homework: What is something you want me to know about going through puberty?
- Individual homework: List 2 physical changes of puberty that are experienced by all people going through puberty, regardless of their gender.

Puberty Worksheet 1

NAME _____ DATE _____

DIRECTIONS: Put the letter of each word next to the correct definition of the word.

- | | | |
|-----------------------|-----|---|
| a) erection | ___ | 1. having a period |
| b) menstruation | ___ | 2. the penis or clitoris and getting larger and harder |
| c) nocturnal emission | ___ | 3. the cell from a person with a penis and testicles that can start a pregnancy |
| d) egg cell | ___ | 4. sperm coming out of the penis during sleep |
| e) puberty | ___ | 5. the cell from a person with a uterus and ovaries that can start a pregnancy |
| f) sperm cell | ___ | 6. The time when a child begins to change into a young adult |
| g) pituitary | ___ | 7. the gland in the brain that triggers the beginning of puberty |