

Sexual Development in Children

Birth to Age Two

- begin to develop a positive or negative attitude towards own body
- start to learn expected behaviours for different genders
- explore body parts, including genitals
- experience pleasure from touch to all parts of the body, including genitals
- may experience an orgasmic response to rubbing of genitals, perhaps against a toy or blanket
- erections can occur while fetus is still in the uterus and shortly after birth
- vaginal lubrication and clitoral erections may occur shortly after birth

Ages Five to Eight

- learn what is acceptable/unacceptable to adults and which adults are comfortable with the subject of sexuality
- more affected by external influences (e.g., peers, media)
- show a strong interest in gender roles that are often stereotypes
- may continue body exploration and self-pleasuring
- try to look at people when they are nude or undressing
- may become modest
- may use sexual language to tease, shock, joke, and/or impress friends

Ages Three and Four

- enjoy exploring their body parts (including genitals, nipples, anus) and self-pleasuring; may touch these body parts when in public places
- show curiosity about bodies; try to look at people when they are nude or undressing
- engage in body exploration games (aka. playing doctor) with friends and siblings
- interested in touching people's breasts
- experiment with adult words including 'bathroom words' and swear terms
- establish a clear belief about their own gender, but also explore various gender roles through play (i.e., dressing up, dramatic play)
- curious about how babies are made but still develop their own ideas about where babies come from regardless of what they are told

Ages Nine to Twelve

- may continue body exploration and self-pleasuring; aware of erotic element of activities
- may show new interest in physical appearance
- increasing influence by peers and media; may show interest in sexual media
- may show signs of puberty; may have fantasies and crushes

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