

# HANDOUT #3: SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

Healthy sexual development is an important part of the journey from childhood into adulthood. Parents who are fostering or adopting need to understand what healthy sexual development looks like and how they can support children in building their own healthy sexual development and identify. Healthy sexual development takes place over time and entails various types of activities and exploration along the way. A part of sexual health means having a positive sense of one's sexuality.

AGE	HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT
Birth to 18 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boys have penile erection and girls lubricate shortly after birth</li> <li>• Do not differentiate genitals from rest of body</li> <li>• Will explore all parts of their body they can reach</li> <li>• Physical touching, nurturing essential for healthy development (Holding, rocking, feeding, bathing, play)</li> </ul>
18 months to 3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discovers own body parts, explores genitals, other parts of body</li> <li>• Shows interest in different positions of urinating between boys and girls, little modesty</li> <li>• May want to show you their genitals</li> <li>• Physical touching, nurturing still essential for healthy development</li> <li>• Young children may be seen masturbating, but it is important to remember that this type of masturbation is done for pleasure and exploration, not for orgasm</li> </ul>
3-6 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin to identify themselves as boys/girls- notice difference between themselves and others and begin to compare</li> <li>• Increased interest in body</li> <li>• Development of modesty</li> <li>• Develops social consciousness (feelings of guilt)</li> <li>• Identification with same sex parent</li> <li>• Start to determine where they fit in their gender roles, and they start to search for gender identity. For children who do not feel like they fit in the gender they were born into, it is a natural time for these thoughts and feelings to appear</li> <li>• Will continue to explore their own bodies and will be curious about the bodies of others. It is not uncommon to see children of this age attempt to explore another child's body parts, "playing doctor"</li> </ul>



AGE	HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT
7-12 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social expectations become more important</li> <li>• Conforms to expectations of others, concerned with fairness and rules</li> <li>• Develops self-esteem through accomplishments and positive relationships with adults</li> <li>• Sexual experimentation increases, also curiosity about body may lead to looking at pictures, mutual touching of genitals</li> <li>• Some children go through puberty and may start to have concerns about their body images</li> <li>• Sexual attraction may intensify and children might start leaning toward a certain sexual orientation</li> <li>• Gender identity will begin to solidify</li> </ul>
13-18 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children who have not gone through puberty earlier will go through puberty now</li> <li>• Increased concern about physical appearance</li> <li>• Uneven emotional growth, impulse control varies</li> <li>• Opinion of Peers often more important than family</li> <li>• Conflict with parents to test authority, independence</li> <li>• Begins exploring sexual intimacy with sex partner (age for this varies with social/cultural norms)</li> <li>• Begins development of own value system</li> <li>• Learn about biological sex roles and those that society has created, in order find where they fit along these lines</li> </ul>

