

# Session 1

## Puberty: My Body, My Self

### Objectives

By the end of this session, the participants will:

1. Identify five physical changes experienced during puberty by both males and females and discuss their feelings about them.
2. Identify three emotional changes accompanying puberty and discuss their feelings about them.
3. Identify the age when puberty occurs.
4. Discuss their own physical development and body image.
5. Understand that sexual feelings are normal.



### Materials Needed

- Two regular notebook-size sheets of paper and pen or marker for each participant
- Six sheets of flip chart paper
- Markers
- Flip chart or chalkboard
- Tape

### Before You Begin

- Carefully read all of **Content for Session 1** (pages 26-28).
- Read each step of the session. Think about how you will perform each step and what you will add to every session.

**Facilitator Note**

Some facilitators find Step 3 challenging. Rehearse in your mind how you think this exercise might happen. Even though it might make you uncomfortable, it is important to remember that many young people use slang words for all of these terms every day. It is important to appear calm and comfortable when doing this step. You will gain their trust and openness for the rest of the sessions if you calmly accept everything they say.



**Time**

Activity	Minutes
Step 1: Let's Get to Know Each Other	15
Step 2: Setting Ground Rules	10
Step 3: Words We Use about the Body	15
Step 4: How Our Bodies Have Changed	35
Step 5: Changes in Feelings	20
Step 6: Talking about Puberty	20
Step 7: Take-Home Messages	15
<b>TOTAL MINUTES</b>	<b>130</b>

**Step 1: Let's Get to Know Each Other**

**Pair Exercise and Large Group Activity  
(15 minutes)**

Divide participants into pairs. If there is an odd number of participants, you can be someone's partner.

When everyone has a partner, tell the group that each person should think of any number between one and five. Ask the participants to introduce themselves to their partner and tell their partner the number they chose.

Next, tell the participants that each person has to tell his or her partner the same number of things about himself or herself as the number he or she chose. For example, those who picked the number five must tell their partner five things about themselves.

After about five minutes, ask everyone to rejoin as a group. Have each person introduce his or her partner to the group and explain what he or she learned about that partner.

## Step 2: Setting Ground Rules

### Large Group Discussion (10 minutes)

Ask participants to brainstorm a list of rules they think will make the course more successful. Write these rules on the flip chart or the chalkboard. Feel free to add any important rules that participants may have omitted (see below). These rules should be kept visible for all sessions and referred to as needed throughout the course.

The following are some sample ground rules:

- Listen to what other people say.
- No talking when someone else is talking.
- Be kind and give support.
- If people do not want to say anything, they do not have to.
- Do not laugh at what other people say.
- Insults are not allowed.
- The opinions and statements of boys and girls are equally valued.
- All experiences will be shared in a climate of privacy and trust.
- If you wish to speak, raise your hand and wait to be called upon.
- Questions are encouraged and may be asked at any time. There is no such thing as a stupid question.
- It is okay for the facilitator and participants to blush, feel embarrassed, or not know the answers to all the questions.
- The facilitator also may choose not to answer a question in front of participants.
- Things shared will be kept strictly confidential. They will not be discussed outside the group.
- Do not judge people because of what they do or say.

Tell the participants that they might also have questions during the course that they are afraid to raise in front of their peers and friends. Let them know that they can write questions anonymously and place these in a *Question Box* that has been set up especially for the

course. Explain that you will answer these questions after each session, or when appropriate.

### Step 3: Words We Use about the Body<sup>2</sup>

#### Large Group Discussion (15 minutes)

Post six sheets of flip chart paper around the room. Write one of the following words on each sheet of paper:

<b>Man</b>	<b>Breasts</b>	<b>Vagina</b>
<b>Woman</b>	<b>Penis</b>	<b>Buttocks</b>

Instruct each participant to move around the room and write slang words or phrases for each of the words on the sheets of paper. Encourage them to use any words or phrases they know. Let the participants know it is okay to use words they may think are “bad.” Once everyone has finished, come together and read through the lists out loud carefully and slowly.

Ask the following:

- Were you embarrassed to see, write, or hear any of these words? Why or why not?
- When do we use “slang” words and when do we use words that are more formal? Why?
- Do some of the words seem harsh or abusive?
- Do we ever use these to talk about women or men, in general? How do you think this makes men or women feel? Why do you think this happens?
- What does it mean when people use them?
- Did participants forget phrases with positive meanings? Why?

---

<sup>2</sup> This exercise is adapted from: Centre for Development and Population Activities. *Choose a Future! Issues and Options for Adolescent Boys: A Sourcebook of Participatory Learning Activities*. (Washington: Centre for Development and Population Activities, 1998) 98.

### **Stress the Following**

This exercise is to get us more relaxed talking about puberty. Today we will talk about the physical and emotional changes you are going through or will go through as part of puberty.

### **Facilitator Note**

If suitable during this exercise, you may talk to participants about the importance of appropriate behavior and actions when discussing our bodies. It is important to emphasize that everyone should be treated with respect and dignity and that boys and girls should be treated equally.

For participants who do not have strong writing skills, this exercise can be modified. Divide the group into three small groups. Give each group two words from the list. Have them brainstorm all the slang words or commonly used expressions for both terms. After five minutes, ask them to stand in front of the group and say their list.

## **Step 4: How Our Bodies Have Changed**

### **Large Group Discussion (35 minutes)**

Hand out paper and markers to each participant. Ask the participants to draw a picture of themselves at 16 years of age. Give them about five minutes to do this.

### **Facilitator Note**

If participants are uncomfortable, they can draw a picture of a “friend” rather than themselves. They may be too shy to draw all the changes if they know the drawing is meant to be themselves.

If the group is all girls or all boys, have participants also draw a picture of the opposite sex.

Write two titles on the flip chart or chalkboard:  
*Changes in Girls* and *Changes in Boys*.

Ask participants to compare the differences in physical appearance they see in themselves at their current age to the picture of themselves at age 16.

Ask them about other physical changes that they cannot see. For example, ask them, “What will happen to your voice by the time you are 16?”

Write the new changes in their bodies on the flip chart or chalkboard as in the table below.

After you cover each part of the body, read out loud the **Facilitator Main Message** listed in the third column of the table below.

Common Responses			
	Major Changes in Females	Major Changes in Males	Facilitator Main Message
<b>Skin</b>	Skin becomes oily, sometimes with pimples or acne.	Skin becomes oily, sometimes with pimples or acne.	This lasts through your teen years and then usually ends. Wash the face each day with soap and water.
<b>Hair</b>	Hair increases on legs, under arms, and in pubic area.	Hair increases on legs, chest, face, under arms, and in pubic area.	The amount of new body hair that grows is different for each young man and woman.
<b>Breasts</b>	Breasts grow, swell, and hurt just a bit.	Breasts grow, swell, and hurt just a bit.	Both breasts may not grow at the same rate or to the same size. It is normal for one breast to be a bit smaller than the other one.

<b>Body size</b>	Hips broaden, breasts enlarge, weight and height increase.	Shoulders and chest broaden, weight and height increase.	Girls can reach their full height before boys. However, by the time puberty is complete, young men are often taller and weigh more.
<b>Perspiration (Sweat)</b>	Perspiration increases and body odor may appear.	Perspiration increases and body odor may appear.	This is normal. Can help control by washing or bathing daily.
<b>Voice</b>	Voice deepens slightly.	Voice deepens and may crack.	Male voices can suddenly go from high to low or from low to high. This cracking can be a bit embarrassing sometimes. In time, it will stop.
<b>Female sexual organs</b>	Period or menstruation begins, and there is more wetness in the vaginal area.		Girls might see and feel a white or clear liquid from the vagina. This does not mean anything is wrong. We will talk about this wetness and the menstrual period later.
<b>Male sexual organs</b>		Wet dreams and erections occur, and penis and testicles grow larger.	Wet dreams and erections are completely normal. We will talk about this more later.

**Stress the Following**

Puberty is a time when the bodies of boys and girls change—bodies grow bigger and taller, genitals develop, and body hair appears.

Puberty happens because new chemicals—hormones—are developing in the body, turning young people into adults. Usually, puberty starts between ages eight and 13 in girls and between ages 10 and 15 in boys, although some young people start puberty earlier or later. Typically, but not always, girls begin puberty about two years before boys. During puberty, a girl becomes physically able to become pregnant, and a boy becomes physically able to father a child.

If you are concerned about your developing body, ask to speak with a trusted adult or health provider.

**Step 5: Changes in Feelings****Small Group Activity  
(20 minutes)**

Divide the group into small groups of three to four participants each. Ask each group to think about and discuss for several minutes some of the emotional and social changes happening to them as they start puberty. If they are younger, ask them what they imagine they will feel as they grow older. Ask them to think about the following:

- Changes in the way they feel about themselves.
- Changes in their relationship with their parents.
- Changes in friendships and feelings of love.

Ask each group to share with the entire group three new emotional changes or new feelings they are experiencing or will experience.

Ensure that the following are mentioned as common feelings of those entering puberty:

- Struggling with a sense of identity and questions about oneself.
- Moodiness, anger, and depression.
- Need for more independence and privacy.
- Relationships with friends and opinions of others become more important.
- More concern or worry about appearance and body.
- Worry about the future (school, family, job, etc.).
- New “crushes” on movie stars, pop artists, teachers, peers, or fellow participants.
- Curiosity about sexual organs.
- Feeling sexually attracted to people.

#### **Stress the Following**

All of these new emotions are normal. Feeling anxious about growing up is normal. Having sexual feelings is normal and is nothing to feel guilty about. Acting on such feelings, however, is a big responsibility. All people are sexual beings. Talking to parents and other trusted adults about sexuality can be helpful. We are going to talk more about this later.

## **Step 6: Talking about Puberty**

### **Pair Exercise (20 minutes)**

Divide the group into pairs. Assign one of the following role-plays to each pair. If there are too many pairs, more than one pair can do the same role-play. Ask each pair to act out the situation using the information they just learned. If culturally appropriate, encourage them to be creative and encourage girls to act out male roles or boys to act out female roles (in some societies,

girls and boys, or participants of different ages, might not be comfortable performing with each other; arrange the pairs the way you think would be most effective). Give participants five minutes to prepare each role-play.

**Role-play #1:** One person plays the mother (aunt, grandmother); the other plays a 12-year-old girl. The girl is worried because she has not developed breasts, although most of her friends have. The mother (aunt, grandmother) comforts the girl, letting her know that the age when breasts start forming varies and that breast sizes vary.

**Role-play #2:** One person plays a 12-year-old boy; the other plays the older brother. The boy is sad because everyone at school teases him about his cracking voice. The older brother explains why his voice is cracking and what to say to people when they tease him.

**Role-play #3:** Both people play 10-year-old girls. One girl teases the other girl because she is taller than all the other girls in the group. The tall girl explains that boys and girls grow at different paces and to different heights. She also explains why she does not like being teased and asks the other girl to be a nicer person. The teasing girl apologizes.

**Role-play #4:** One person plays a 12-year-old boy; the other plays his father (uncle, grandfather). The boy is worried because he is growing hair under his arms and a little on his face. The father (uncle, grandfather) comforts him and tells him that most boys develop hair in new places as they grow older.

**Role-play #5:** One person plays an 11-year-old girl; the other plays her friend. The friend is worried because she has not yet started having periods but the 11-year-old girl has. The girl comforts her friend, letting her know that the age when girls start menstruation varies.

**Role-play #6:** One person plays a 13-year-old boy; the other plays his friend. The friend is worried because he is not as tall and big as the 13-year-old boy. The boy comforts his friend, letting him know that the age when boys start the physical changes of puberty varies.

## Step 7: Take-Home Messages

(15 minutes)

Close the session by stressing the following:

- All of these physical and emotional changes are natural.
- Each person develops at an individual pace, some early, some late. It is important not to tease or make fun of others who may develop earlier or later.
- Young people often feel uncomfortable, clumsy, or self-conscious because of the rapid changes in their bodies.
- Menstruation and wet dreams are normal. These will be discussed later.
- During puberty, a girl becomes physically able to become pregnant and a young boy becomes physically able to father a child. In other words, they become fertile. We will talk more about this later.

End the discussion by asking the following questions:

- To whom could young people go with questions or worries about puberty? (*Encourage them to talk to parents, facilitators, counselors, grandparents, aunts, uncles, doctors, nurses, etc.*)
- What would you say to a friend who wished he or she never had to enter puberty?
- Do you have any questions about what we discussed today?

**Stress the Following**

Stress that you will cover more about puberty in the next session and that participants will get a chance to ask all the questions they have.

Thank them for being an enthusiastic group. Tell them that it is hard to talk about one's body sometimes and that you are proud of them for participating and sharing with each other.

**Possible Questions and Answers****Q. Is it normal for some boys and girls to mature earlier than others?**

**A.** Yes. Some boys start puberty as early as 10 years old, others not until they are 14 or 15. Some girls start puberty as early as age eight, others not until they are 13 or 14. However, if a girl does not start menstruating by the age of 16, she should consult a health provider.

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

**A.** During puberty, there is an order in which certain physical changes usually occur: For girls, breasts begin to grow; for boys, growth of the testicles is usually the earliest sign. However, bodily changes can occur in a different order and still be considered normal.

**Q. Why do some boys experience breast tenderness during puberty?**

**A.** Occasionally one or both of a boy's breasts can become slightly enlarged or sore. This is related to the rising levels of hormones in the body.

**Q. Why do many teenagers have skin problems?**

**A.** During puberty increased hormonal activity leads to increased activity in the skin glands. Oil produced by the glands blocks skin pores and mixes with bacteria to cause pimples or spots. To help keep skin clear, teens should wash faces and hands frequently.

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

**A.** It takes a different amount of time for each girl. If a girl starts later than other girls, it does not mean that her breasts will always be smaller. There is no link between what size breasts will be and when they start to develop.

**Q. Do all women have to wear a bra?**

**A.** No, but some find it is more comfortable.

**Extra Activities**

The following are optional activities you may do with the group.

**Activity 1: Interviews with Adults about Puberty**

Begin by dividing the group into small, same-sex groups. Ask each group to think of a list of questions that they would like to ask an adult of the opposite sex and same sex. Suggest that participants think of questions about physical changes and emotional changes that the adult went through during puberty. Possible questions include:

- What did you like best about being age 10 to 14?
- What did you like least about being age 10 to 14?
- What emotional changes did you have during puberty?
- How did your social life change in puberty?
- Where can I get accurate information about puberty?
- Do you have any advice for anyone about to enter puberty?

Ask each participant to then use the questions his or her group has listed as the basis for an interview with an adult of one's choosing.

Discuss the results of the interviews. Make a list of the changes the males and females experienced. Compare the lists to note similarities and differences between the two sexes.

## Activity 2: Growth Diaries

Ask participants to keep a growth diary for self-observation and reflection. The end product will include: a) a print notebook that participants will enjoy reviewing and perhaps sharing with others later in life; and b) a personal essay about the process of maintaining the notebook. This exercise may be more appropriate for 12- to 14-year-olds, depending on their literacy level.



### Materials

- Blank notebooks
- Camera for snapshots
- Access to scales and tape measures for participants to weigh themselves and track other measurements
- Rulers

Explain to participants that the activity will proceed over many weeks. To avoid misunderstandings at home, consider informing parents or caregivers about this activity before you assign it to participants.

The single most important fact to share with participants about their growth diaries is that they will remain *confidential*. Neither you nor other participants should at any time have access to anyone else's growth diary.

1. At the beginning of the assignment, present each participant with a photo of himself or herself. Tell each participant to paste this photo in the front of a notebook.

2. Show participants how to arrange their notebook pages in columns and rows to track the data they will collect on a regular basis during the rest of the assignment (see following sample table).

Advise participants to designate one section of their notebook as a journal, in which they will comment on their physical changes (or lack of changes) and accompanying emotional changes.

### Sample Growth Diary

Change	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6	Month 7	Month 8	Month 9
Height									
Weight									
Chest									
Hips									
Waist									
Skin condition									
Presence of period (for girls)									

3. Tell participants in more detail what you mean by asking them to “comment on their physical changes . . . and accompanying emotional changes.” Explain that it is not unusual for young adolescents to feel pride or embarrassment, excitement or fear, as they grow. Those emotions are what you want participants to write about so that they will be able to remember them when they are older.
4. Remind participants that you are expecting them to maintain their growth diaries every month. After Month 9, present each participant with a second picture of himself or herself to include in the growth diary.

5. Toward the end of the assignment, tell participants more about the personal essay that you expect from each of them about the process of keeping the growth diary. Go over what the personal essay should contain:

- Title.
- Clear statement about the process of keeping the growth diary.
- Coherent and unified paragraphs with topic sentences.
- Support for the statement and topic sentences: examples, statistics, sound opinions, and other details.
- Strong conclusion.

Explain that the challenge in writing these personal essays is for participants to make clear to you what they thought about keeping the growth journal—positives and negatives of the process—without sharing intimate feelings that they do not want to share with you.

#### **Facilitator Note**

For low-literate or younger participants, you can modify this activity—ask the participants to keep a picture diary. Using the notebook, they can draw pictures of themselves each month illustrating any new physical or emotional changes.

### **Activity 3: Letter to Sibling about Puberty**

Explain to participants that they are to write a letter to an imaginary brother or sister about to enter puberty. In the letter, each participant should explain what he or she will go through and offer tips to better prepare for these changes.

#### **Facilitator Note**

For low-literate or younger participants, you can modify this activity—ask the participants to make up a poem, story, or song instead of writing a letter.

# Content for Session 1

## **What is Puberty?**

Puberty is a time when the bodies of boys and girls physically change—bodies grow bigger and taller, genitals mature, and hair often starts growing in new places on the body.

During puberty, a girl becomes physically able to become pregnant and a young boy becomes physically able to father a child.

## **Why is Puberty Happening?**

New chemicals produced by the body—hormones—are developing in the body, creating changes in the body and turning young people into adults.

## **When Does Puberty Start and How Long Does it Last?**

Puberty typically starts between ages eight to 13 in girls, and ages 10 to 15 in boys, although some young people start puberty a bit earlier or later. Each person is a little different, so everyone starts and goes through puberty at one's own pace.

During puberty, young people are experiencing a major growth change. It lasts for about two to five years. Some people grow four or more inches in one year! This growth during puberty will be the last time the body will grow taller. When the growth period is over, young people will be at their adult height.

## **How Do Our Bodies Change?**

### ***Boys' Size and Sexual Organs***

Boys' shoulders will grow wider, and their bodies will become more muscular. Some body parts (especially hands and legs) may grow faster than others. Many boys have uncomfortable growing 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 underneath their nipples, which looks like the start of breasts. This is caused by the hormones that are pulsing through the body and will usually go away with time.

During puberty, boys will start to have erections and wet dreams. They will notice other changes as well, such as the lengthening and widening of the penis and the enlargement of the testicles.

### ***Girls' Size and Sexual Organs***

Girls' bodies usually become rounder and more womanly. They gain weight on their hips, and their breasts develop, starting with just a little swelling under the nipples. Sometimes one breast might develop more quickly than the other, but should even out over time.

Girls will notice an increase in body fat and occasional soreness under the nipples as the breasts start to enlarge—this is normal. Gaining some weight is part of developing into 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 develop, they usually experience their first menstrual period—one more thing that lets them know puberty is progressing. It means that the puberty hormones have been doing their job.

Girls might see and feel a white or clear liquid from the vagina. This does not necessarily mean anything is wrong; it is usually just another sign of their changing body and hormones.

### ***Hair***

One of the first signs of puberty is hair growing where it did not grow before. Hair will grow under arms and in the pubic areas (on and around the genitals). At first it is light and sparse. Then it becomes longer, thicker, heavier, and darker. Eventually, young men also start to grow hair on their faces and chests.

### ***Skin***

Acne (pimples or spots) often starts around the beginning of puberty and can remain all through adolescence (the teen years). 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.

### **Sweat**

A new odor under arms and elsewhere on the body might develop. This is body odor, and everyone gets it. The puberty hormones affect glands in the skin, and the glands make chemicals that have a strong odor. Bathing or washing every day helps reduce this odor, as does deodorant.

### **Voice**

Boys will notice that their voices may “crack” and eventually get deeper. Girls’ voices might get a little deeper, too. The cracking of boys’ voices will end as they mature.

### **Emotions**

During puberty, young people might feel overly sensitive or become easily upset. Feeling anxious about how the changing body looks is one of the things young people are most sensitive about. Losing tempers more than usual and getting angry with friends or family members happen more easily. It is common to feel sad or depressed sometimes. Young people should talk to adults they trust about any feelings of anger, sadness, or depression they may have.

### **Sexual Feelings**

During puberty, it is normal to become more aware of the opposite sex and to feel more sexual. In boys, the main sign of sexual feelings is an erection of the penis. In girls, it is wetness of the vagina. Sexual feelings can come from reading a romantic novel or thinking about another boy or girl. Having sexual feelings is normal and is nothing to feel guilty about. Acting on such feelings, however, is a big responsibility, and it is best to wait until one is older.

