



# Puberty information for parents of boys with a disability

Puberty is a period of time in early adolescence when a young person goes through physical changes that lead to their body being capable of reproduction.

It usually takes between two and five years to complete. These changes are caused by chemicals produced by the body called hormones. In boys, puberty starts when the pituitary gland produces hormones that travel to the testes and trigger the production of testosterone. Boys with a disability go through puberty the same as other boys. They usually start puberty around the age of 14 or 15, but some may start as early as 10.

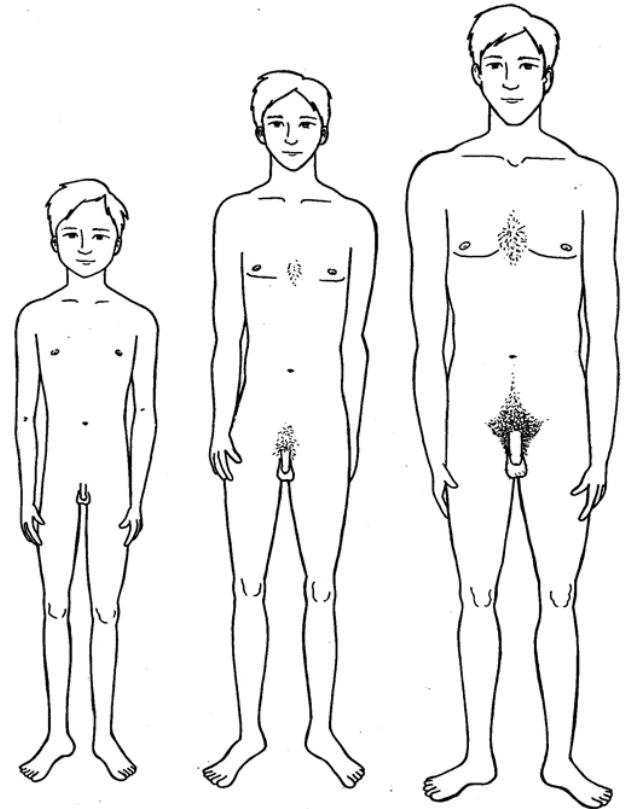
Your son's experience of puberty and his capacity to reproduce may be affected by his disability. Talk to your doctor or health professional for further information so you are prepared to answer your son's questions and help him through this stage of his development.

You should start talking about the changes your son will experience during puberty *before* they actually occur. It's a good idea to talk to his teacher to find out what sexual health and relationship education is being taught at school to reinforce this at home. Also talk about changes that occur during puberty for girls, so that he will understand it's something that everyone experiences.

## Changes for boys

The hormone testosterone circulates in the blood and triggers the start of many changes, including:

- growing taller
- chest and shoulders broadening
- a more muscular body
- penis and testicles becoming larger and darker
- voice starting to break and getting deeper
- hair growing on the face, body and pubic area
- oily skin
- increased sweating
- acne
- mood swings
- more frequent erections
- wet dreams
- ejaculation of sperm



## Private body parts

Use terms that you are comfortable with to explain private body parts to your son, so that you have a common understanding; however, it is best to teach the correct words rather than slang terms. As your son learns about his reproductive parts, he should also be taught about private parts, especially the penis, anus, mouth and lips. No-one should touch these private parts without his permission. It should also be explained that he can not touch anyone else's private parts without their permission. This is a good time to reinforce concepts of public and private spaces and remind him that the genital area and anus should be covered in public.

## Personal care

When discussing puberty with your son, take the opportunity to reinforce hygiene and cleanliness. As the body starts to produce more oils and sweat there is an increase in body odour, so washing and changing clothes regularly become more important. If your son is uncircumcised, it is important to wash under the foreskin gently with soap and water so it doesn't smell.

If your son has a carer who looks after intimate personal care, you should be aware that he may feel embarrassed about having his private parts touched or seen. You or a carer should ask permission on each occasion that intimate care is provided.

## Wet dreams and erections

A wet dream is when a male ejaculates semen while asleep. They usually begin at about 13 or 14 years. You should reassure your son that wet dreams are normal and most boys experience them at some stage. If this occurs encourage your son to wipe up the semen with a tissue and put it in a toilet or bin. You may also need to change the bed linen more often. Your son may also have spontaneous erections. This can be embarrassing and uncomfortable for him. Explain that this is normal during puberty.

## Masturbation

It's natural and normal for boys to explore their bodies and masturbate. It's a safe way for them to discover sexual pleasure. It's important not to make them feel guilty or ashamed. Talk to them about where and when it is appropriate. If your son has reached puberty, masturbation can lead to ejaculation, so it's important to talk about personal hygiene and how to clean up the semen. Always respect their privacy and knock before entering the bedroom or bathroom.

## Emotional changes

As your son goes through puberty he is also likely to experience emotional changes which can affect the way he thinks or acts. He may:

- want more independence
- want to spend more time with friends
- be attracted to men or women
- have mood swings
- become more sensitive or aggressive
- want to challenge adults

It can be a difficult time for your family. Listen to your son's point of view. When you disagree, clearly explain why, express your concerns and try to compromise if possible. Also discuss your family's values and beliefs with your son so he can understand what influences your views and opinions. It's important to communicate openly and honestly.

You can get more information on puberty and other sexual health issues by contacting SHine SA's Sexual Healthline or going to [www.shinesa.org.au](http://www.shinesa.org.au).

You can also go to the Hormone Factory website at [www.thehormonefactory.com](http://www.thehormonefactory.com) for lots of interactive information about puberty for young people and parents.

## SHine SA contact details

### East/West Primary Health Care Team

GP Plus Health Care Centre  
64c Woodville Road, Woodville SA  
Tel: 8300 5300  
Clinic appointments: 8300 5301

### Northern Primary Health Care Team

43 Peachey Road, Davoren Park SA  
Tel: 8256 0700

### Southern Primary Health Care Team

19–23 Beach Road, Christies Beach SA  
Tel: 8186 8600

### Workforce Development & Resources

64c Woodville Road, Woodville SA  
Tel: 8300 5317  
Email: [SHineSACourses@health.sa.gov.au](mailto:SHineSACourses@health.sa.gov.au)

### Library & Resource Centre

64c Woodville Road, Woodville SA  
Tel: 8300 5312  
Email (Library): [SHineSALibrary@health.sa.gov.au](mailto:SHineSALibrary@health.sa.gov.au)

### Sexual Healthline

Available 9 am – 1 pm, Monday – Friday  
Tel: 1300 883 793  
Country callers (toll free): 1800 188 171  
Email: [sexualhealthhotline@health.sa.gov.au](mailto:sexualhealthhotline@health.sa.gov.au)

Website [www.shinesa.org.au](http://www.shinesa.org.au)

National Relay Service: [www.relayservice.com.au](http://www.relayservice.com.au)  
133 677 (TTY/Voice) 1300 555 727 (Speak & Listen)