

**Home-School Links**

It is recommended that this Home-School Links page be sent home in advance of doing the lesson in class

Dear Parents/Guardians,

The aim of this lesson is to provide children with opportunities to understand the changes that take place in both males and females during growth to adulthood. Children experience a range of life changes as they grow. As changes occur physically, socially and psychologically, they learn to adapt to societal and cultural changes around them. A focus on some of these changes advances the development of self-knowledge and self-esteem in children. The following information is given here so that you will be familiar with the content of the class lesson and you may wish to prepare or revise information with your child.

In the materials that follow there is a very simple explanation of menstruation. Before this is taught, the children need to recognise and understand that just as the womb prepares to receive a fertilised egg, there are other kinds of readiness required for pregnancy such as emotional and psychological maturity.

The subject of menstruation ideally should be presented when children have been given the opportunity to learn about the wonder of how the human body operates. You might begin with a series of experiments on the five senses. Your child could, for example, examine the eye's response to changes in lighting and identify foods by taste alone. Other topics might include the skeleton, the nervous system and the digestive system. The latter, tracing the passage of food through the body, is an ideal preliminary to other lessons as, with the right approach, the embarrassment factor can be dispensed with. So by the time the topic of menstruation is introduced the children are comfortable with talking about the human body.

Introduction

You are part of the world of nature. You have seen how things grow and change in the natural world. You have seen how a seed goes through many changes to become a flower. Do you remember the changes that butterfly eggs go through as they grow into butterflies? Do you remember the changes that happen in the nine months it takes a fertilised egg to grow into a baby that is ready to be born.

Once born, compared to most of the world of nature, we grow very slowly. Most other mammals can stand and run within minutes of being born. It took you at least a year. Because of this, you had time to learn and develop safely and healthily. From photos you can see how you have grown since you were born. This didn't happen overnight and we didn't see it happen. We grow fastest as a baby. In the first year a baby triples in size. If this were to happen every year, by the time baby was three s/he would weigh the same as a fully grown adult.

How tall you grow depends mostly on chemicals which move around your body. These are called hormones. Hormones are like messages from the brain. The growth hormone reaches every cell in your body. This is what makes cells grow, so that your body can grow. You grow in other ways too. You will grow up to be a man or woman. Hormones cause these changes in your body too. When you reach a certain age a special hormone travels around your body. This special hormone starts the changes that turn boys into men and turn girls into women.

Girls usually start to change at an earlier age than boys. Most of the important changes take place in girls between the ages of nine and eighteen. Most of the important changes in boys start when they are eleven and by the time they are fourteen boys start to be taller and to weigh more than girls. Have you noticed this? A group of boys and girls may be the same age

but they are different heights. We all grow differently. At ten many girls will be taller than boys of the same age. But the boys grow faster as teenagers. They often catch up and then overtake the girls in height.

Changes in Shape

As well as growing taller other changes happen too. The body's shape changes for instance. If it didn't it would grow bigger but keep it's baby shape. Can you imagine what that would look like? A girl's hips get wider. Can you guess why this might be? A girl's hips get wider because she may be a mother when she is grown up and nature is preparing her for this. The hips have to be wider to hold the womb and carry the growing baby inside the woman. A girl's breasts develop. Once again nature is preparing for motherhood. A mother can feed her baby with milk from the breasts. A boy changes shape. His body becomes more muscular and stronger. His shoulders broaden. A boy's penis grows too. He is changing into a man.

Menstruation

A girl menstruates or 'gets periods'. This is another way nature prepares for a baby. Every month an egg travels down a tube into the womb. Do you remember we heard about the way the womb prepares a special lining, in case there is a baby? The womb does this every month. When there is no baby, the lining dissolves and leaves the body through the vagina. The lining is mixed with a little blood and the egg.

Voice Changes

A girl's voice begins to sound more like a woman's. A boy's voice becomes lower. He begins to sound more like a man.

Changes in friendship patterns

Boys become interested in girls and girls get interested in boys. They begin to share more of the same interests.

Mood Changes

As boys and girls grow and change they may find that their moods change quickly. One moment they may feel very happy and the next they may feel lonely and sad. The special hormone that is travelling around the body is part of the reason this happens. Your feelings and emotions may change too. This is because you are growing up. It wouldn't do for your body to grow up and your mind and feelings to stay the same as a child's. These changes are exciting but sometimes they can leave you feeling confused.

Body Hair

Boys of course start to get hair on their face. Eventually they will need to shave unless they want to grow a beard. Boys also grow hair on their chests and legs. In both boys and girls hair grows under the arms. Hair also grows around a boy's penis and a girl's vagina. This is called pubic hair.

Skin Changes

In boys and girls, skin becomes more oily. They also perspire more. Because your skin will be more oily and you will perspire more, it is also a time to remember to wash well all over daily.