

## Puberty Tip Sheet

### What is puberty?

- The process of physical changes by which a child's body becomes an adult body capable of reproduction.
- There is a wide range of normal ages for the process of puberty: from ages 9 to 14 for girls and from ages 10 to 17 for boys.

### When should I talk to my child about puberty?

- There are 2 basic schools of thought on this issue. Consider initiating the discussion if:
  - You begin to notice the physical changes
  - Your child begins to ask questions
  - The opportunity for formal learning arises at school, church, or in the community

### Remember

- Puberty is going to happen whether you are ready for it or not!!!!
- It is your job to discuss the changes your child will experience in whatever way your child will best understand.

### Identify the Changes

- Common:
  - Grow taller, more sweating and body odor, oilier skin that may lead to acne, body hair will start to appear, weight increases, interest in romantic love, desire to be liked and accepted by peers
- Boys:
  - Facial hair will start to appear, penis and testicles get bigger, muscle mass increases, voice becomes deeper, erections become common
- Girls:
  - Breasts grow, hips widen, periods begin, premenstrual syndrome

### Normalize the changes

- When discussing puberty with your child it is important to normalize these changes. Here are some good ways to do so:
  - Your body is growing and changing
  - Your body will change on the outside (what you can see) and on the inside (what you will not be able to see)
  - These changes happen to everyone
  - Your body may change differently from other kids (some change earlier, some change later)
  - Everybody changes!

### Keep these things in mind...

- What are your child's language and communication skills?

- What is the level of your child's reasoning skills?

### **Prepare yourself for the discussion**

- How comfortable are you in talking to your child about these issues?
- How prepared are you to talk to your child about these issues?
- What is the goal of your discussion?
- Determine your own comfort level in discussing these issues with your child
- Do some homework to increase your comfort with the topic
- Discuss your thoughts with your spouse or another adult
- Consider your child's level of development as you prepare for the discussion
- Look for social and emotional age-appropriate materials to use
- Find appropriate peers to work with you in modeling proper interactions and behavior
- Communicate with your child's teachers and care providers

### **Talk early and talk often!**

- Aspects you should focus on:
  - Terminology- consider the terms you use to identify body parts
  - Hygiene- explain proper hygiene, how to maintain it, and why it is important
  - Your demeanor- be serious, calm and supportive
  - Consistency- be consistent and repetitive
  - Information sharing- break larger areas of information into smaller, more manageable blocks
  - Multimedia- consider incorporating multiple instructional mediums
  - Order- teach all steps and teach them in the correct order

### **Remember**

- Children with ASD often need a longer period of time to understand and adjust to any changes in their lives
- Some adolescents with ASD have limited ability to comprehend the experience
- Adolescent mood changes coexist with ASD

### **Tools you can use at Home**

- Visual supports
- Social Narratives
- Modeling
- Your Medical Professional
- Books
- Websites