

Growing up Sexually

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This *Time* *in Your* **LIFE**

The movement from childhood to adulthood is one of life's most interesting and exciting stages. This stage is called *puberty*. During puberty your body becomes sexually mature. You enter puberty as a child, but you exit puberty as an individual who is physically capable of producing another human life.

This remarkable growing-up stage brings surprising physical growth, some confusing emotional ups and downs, and a lot of challenges. Understanding these changes can help bring you a sense of ease, confidence, and even joy. After all, you are on your way to becoming a mature adult.

You and your friends may not begin the process of maturing at the same time. The changes of puberty depend on your own inherited body chemistry. The time when you begin puberty is unique to you. Some girls begin puberty when they are nine or ten years old, and others begin when they are fifteen or sixteen years old. Typically, boys begin this period of development between ages eleven and fourteen; however, it is not abnormal for this development to take place at age fifteen or sixteen.



Signs of Puberty

The human body, whether male or female, is complicated and amazing. It is one of God's most wonderful and awesome creations. Think about it: At the moment your life began, microscopic chromosomes marked you as a female or male. From the moment of your conception, everything your body needed to become a whole, mature human being was present.

Now, as puberty arrives, a second amazing creation begins. Your body responds to an internal signal, and you begin growing into adulthood. Glands begin to produce chemicals

called *hormones*, which circulate throughout your system. These hormones set off a major growth spurt: your jeans feel smaller each time you put them on; your sleeves seem shorter and tighter; your feet outgrow your sneakers before they wear out. This growth spurt is new and wonderful, although it often causes you to be a bit clumsy and somewhat self-conscious.

These growth hormones cause invisible changes inside your body. They also cause other, visible changes outside your body, which are called secondary sex characteristics.

Sexual Development in GIRLS

In girls sexual changes include the development of the breasts and the widening of the hips. Also, pubic hair appears in the genital area, and hair appears under the arms. Sexual maturity in girls is signaled by the onset of *menstruation*.

Here is a brief story of menstruation: Every girl is born with a *uterus* (the place inside her where a baby can develop) and a *vagina* (the passage through which the baby is delivered). When a girl reaches puberty, her ovaries release their first ovum, or egg cell. This process is called *ovulation*. The egg enters the uterus, which has a soft lining. This lining is designed to nurture a beginning human life. If pregnancy does not occur, the uterus naturally sheds this lining of blood and tissue through the vagina. This shedding process starts two weeks after ovulation, occurs about once a month, and lasts about three to seven days. It is called the *menstrual period*.

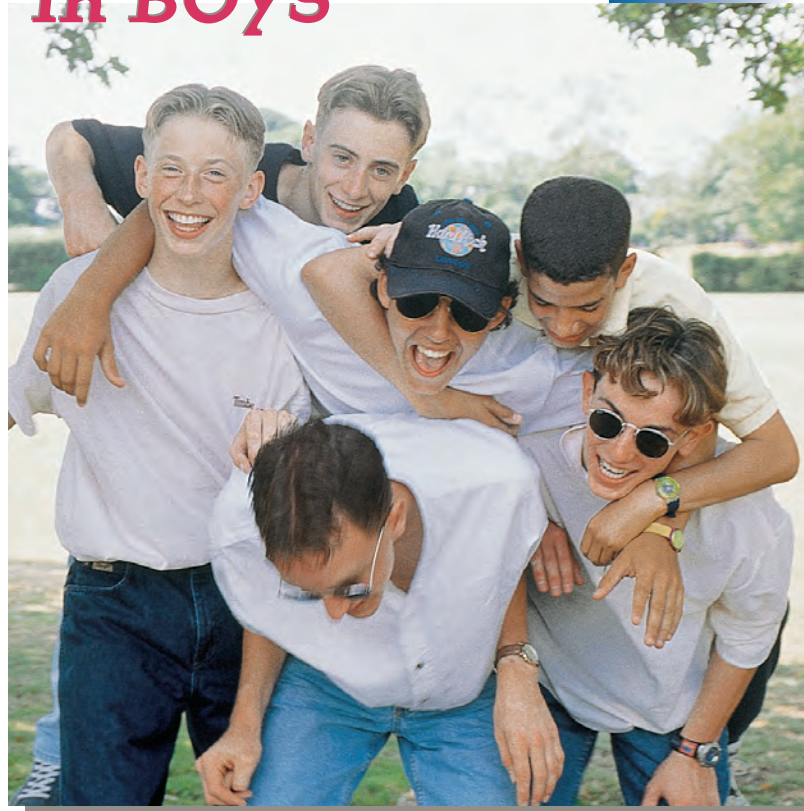


Sexual Development in BOYS

In boys sexual changes include the deepening of the voice; the broadening of the shoulders; the increased growth of the penis and the testicles, or testes; the growth of facial, underarm, and pubic hair; and the ability to ejaculate.

As a boy grows up, his body also becomes capable of reproduction. Hormones stimulate the production of sperm cells, which are contained in a milky substance called *semen*. When semen is produced, sperm travel through the *testes* (two oval glands enclosed in a pouch called the scrotum, which is located below the penis). During ejaculation the semen is forcefully released through the penis.

Occasionally an ejaculation occurs while a boy is sleeping—which is quite normal. This is commonly referred to as a wet dream. However, ejaculations can also occur whenever the penis is stimulated.

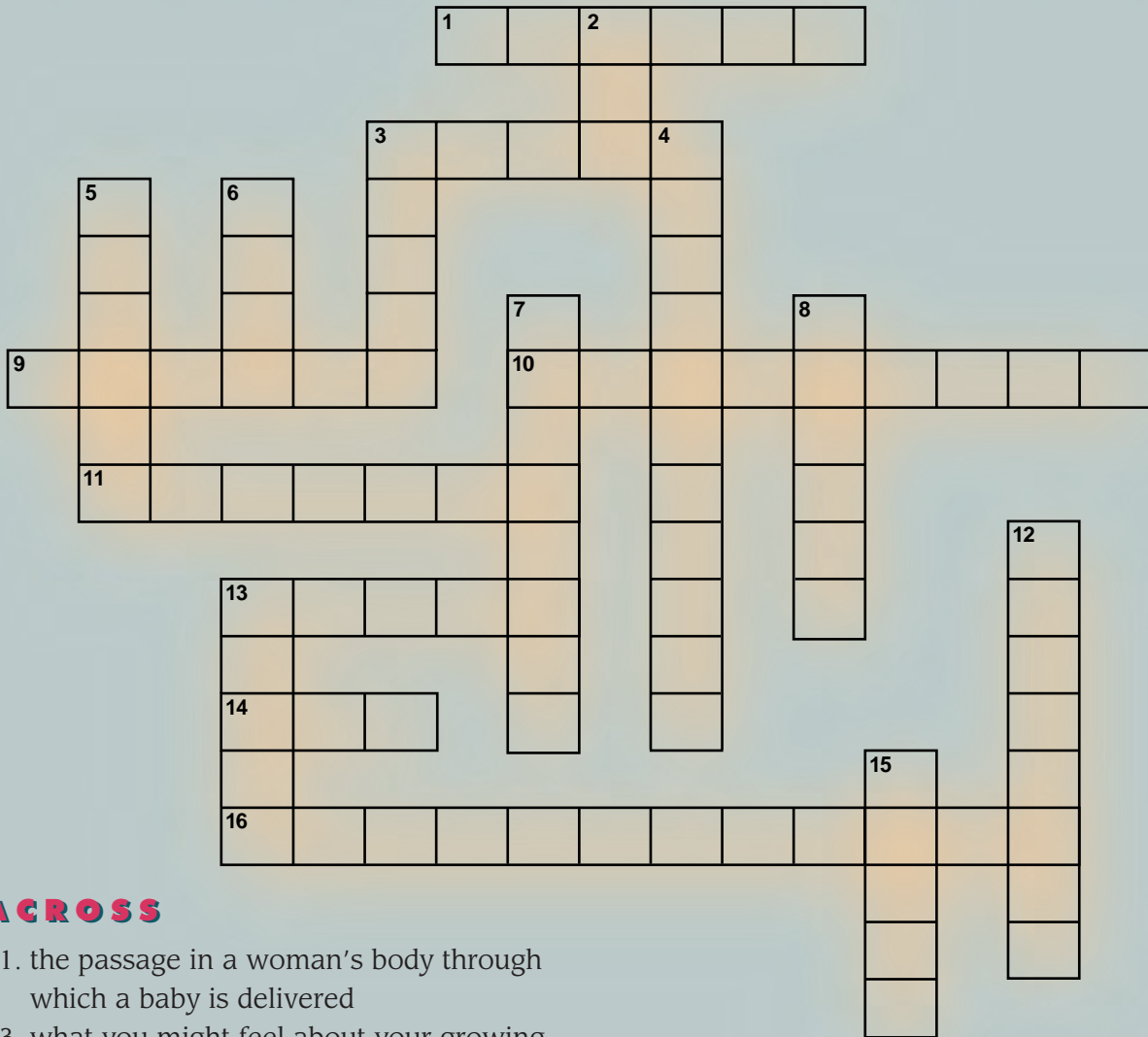


The Journey to MATURITY

Understandably, you may worry about unpredictable changes. Everyone does, and facing so many changes at once can be confusing and embarrassing. These physical changes are accompanied by a surprising change in feelings too. They become strong and intense and unpredictable. Nothing stays the same, and you may wonder why this is happening to you.

Actually, wonderful things are happening to you, even though that is sometimes hard to believe. The changes that puberty brings are a necessary step in a process that leads to maturity. While you are in the middle of puberty, the unpredictability of it may seem overwhelming and worrisome. When you feel confused or overwhelmed, take time to talk to your parents or another trusted adult. They know about and have been through the process, and they can help you. Their help and your own understanding of puberty can make this process easier.

WORDS TO KNOW



ACROSS

1. the passage in a woman's body through which a baby is delivered
3. what you might feel about your growing body
9. where a baby develops before birth
10. the monthly process of producing an egg cell, or ovum
11. the pouch that holds the testicles
13. the fluid containing sperm
14. During ovulation the woman's body produces an _____.
16. The onset of this monthly process signals that a girl has reached sexual maturity.

DOWN

2. the creator of your sexuality
3. the male sex organ

4. During this process the semen is forcefully released through the penis.
5. two oval male sex glands
6. An external sign of sexual development is the growth of pubic _____.
7. chemicals that stimulate the physical changes of puberty
8. a person you can talk to when you need information or help
12. _____ get strong and unpredictable during puberty.
13. the male sex cell
15. _____ are likely to develop physically at an earlier age.



A TIME *for* CHANGE



Neena has entered puberty earlier than most of the other girls in her seventh-grade class. Physically she is noticeably more developed than most of the eighth-grade girls.

- Will this affect the way the other girls in Neena's class treat her? Explain your answer.
- Might the boys in the seventh and eighth grades treat Neena differently than they treat the other girls? Why or why not?
- Do you think that Neena's parents will be stricter with her because she is physically developed? Why or why not?

Carl always thought that he was the slowest and clumsiest boy in his class. But lately he seems to be getting thinner, taller, and more skilled athletically. His mom and stepfather have both told him that they notice it.

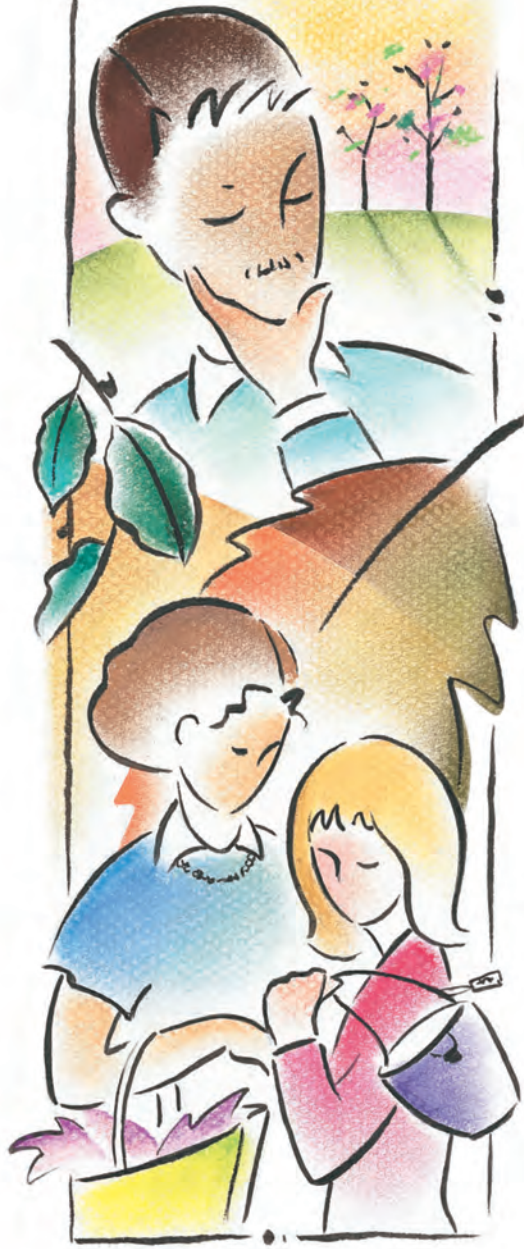
- Do you think Carl will continue to think the same way about himself?
- Do you think Carl could cause or speed up this kind of change in his body?
- How will this affect the way Carl is treated by others?

Jeremiah is an eighth grader who has not entered puberty yet. When he answers the phone at home, callers usually think his older sister is answering. Jeremiah hates to shower with the rest of the boys after gym class because he is afraid they will make fun of him. He is determined to show other people that he is as mature as anyone else.

- What negative behaviors might Jeremiah try out to prove his maturity?
- Name some positive ways that Jeremiah can deal with his slow rate of development.

Candice has not begun menstruating yet. She wonders if her classmates can tell. She gets angry a lot and worries that something is wrong with her.

- Would any of her classmates really care whether Candice has begun menstruating?
- What advice would you give Candice?



Noah has a slight mustache, and his voice is deeper than the voices of most of the other boys he hangs around with.

- How do you think Noah feels about himself?
- How do you think the other boys in his school or neighborhood treat Noah?
- Might Noah's friends treat him differently than they would treat someone like Jeremiah? Why or why not?

Tamika's mom and aunts have begun to treat her as one of the women of the household. Besides giving her more important chores, they also have been inviting her to go shopping and to the theater with them. Tamika feels great about it but wonders why she is suddenly being treated more like an adult.

- Give Tamika two reasons that might explain the new way she is being treated by the adult women in her family.
- Would Tamika have any reasons *not* to like the way she is being treated?

In a Word

- Though the changes you are experiencing may seem confusing or scary, they are perfectly natural.
- Your emerging sexuality is a wonderful gift from our Creator, whom you can trust.
- As you grow up sexually, different physical developments occur.
- You cannot influence when puberty occurs, but you can decide to adjust to these new physical developments when they do occur.
- Everyone is called to treat others with respect and kindness regardless of whether their body is developing earlier or later than others'.



A Time for Every Purpose

There is an appointed time for everything,
and a time for every affair under the heavens.

A time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to uproot the plant.

A time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to tear down, and a time to build.

A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance.

A time to scatter stones, and a time to gather
them;
a time to embrace, and a time to be far from
embraces.

A time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away.

A time to rend, and a time to sew;
a time to be silent, and a time to speak.

A time to love, and a time to hate;
a time of war, and a time of peace.

(Ecclesiastes 3:1–8)

During this session I learned that at this time of my life, I

When I think of puberty and the changes going on in me, it makes me feel

One thing I can do to make this time of my life easier and more enjoyable is



The Change Exchange



1. Mary is confused. She and Ellen were the best of friends last year. Now Mary cannot figure out why she is no longer interested in being so close to Ellen. Mary knows that she wants to become better friends with some of the other girls at school.
 - What would you tell Mary?
 - What would you tell Ellen?
2. Ricardo has a whole set of new feelings about Nicole. He wants her to like him. Ricardo really wants to be around Nicole, and he wants to talk to her all the time. But when he sees Nicole in school, he just blushes and doesn't know what to say. Ricardo cannot seem to help himself.
 - If you were Ricardo's older brother or sister, what would you tell him?
3. Bobby used to love basketball, but lately his interest in computers has picked up. He has begun hanging around with kids who are into computers. He doesn't see much of his old basketball friends any more. They are angry at Bobby and think he is a snob.
 - How do you think Bobby feels?
 - What advice would you give Bobby?
4. Erica and her mom fight constantly. Erica wants more independence, and she wants to be treated more like an adult. She wants to be able to put on makeup and jewelry. She likes trying on sexy clothing and wants to look like a woman. Her mom says: "You are only thirteen! Besides, how can I treat you like an adult when you won't even clean up your room?"
 - What do you think is going on in Erica's mind?
 - What do you think is going on in her mom's mind?

5. Aaron and his dad have always got along well. They have always been close and affectionate. But lately Aaron feels uncomfortable when his dad hugs him. This has never bothered Aaron before.

- Why do you think Aaron is suddenly uncomfortable about being close to his dad?
- What should Aaron do ?

6. Cynthia thinks that the guys in her class are so immature. Instead she is very interested in the guys at the high school.

- Why do you think Cynthia feels this way?

7. Wesley hates dances. He thinks they are stupid. Yet all his friends love going to them. Wesley's best friend, Terrence, is a dance freak who never stops. Wesley isn't sure if he should find new friends, or just tell his old ones to go to the dances without him.

- Do you think something is wrong with Wesley?
- Do you think Wesley will "grow out of it" and get into dances?

8. Five months ago Russ wasn't interested in girls at all. Now he cannot stop thinking about them. He is too embarrassed to talk to his friends about this, and he thinks that they won't understand anyway.

- Do you think there is something wrong with Russ? Why or why not?

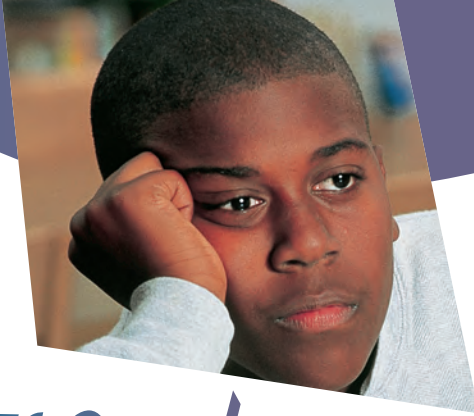
9. Christin is going on the class trip with everyone else. The rumor is that some kids will start pairing off and kissing on the bus. Everyone says that Paul, who has a crush on Christin, can't wait. She doesn't want to get involved in the "kissing trip" but doesn't know how to handle it.

- If Christin were in your class, do you think she would be pressured to pair off with Paul?
- How should she deal with the situation?



*The
Change
Exchange*

Feelings Grow Too



Maybe you have noticed a change in how you feel about things lately. If you have entered puberty, you might have found that your feelings are intense and unpredictable. On some days you may wake up and feel that everything is more beautiful than ever before. Everything you do seems just right, and all the people in your life—even those who normally bug you—seem more likable than ever.

But on other days, you may feel that everything is bad news. You are grouchy, tired, and depressed. People in your life—even your best friend—seem to be a pain in the neck.

Some days you may even find it difficult to like yourself: your hair looks terrible; you feel too tired to eat; you wish you could skip school for about a week; you suspect that your best friend has somehow betrayed you and that all your teachers are trying to flunk you.

Worst of all you may discover that your feelings don't stand still. You don't know why you feel up or why you feel down. Often you cannot tell how you are going to feel from one day to the

next. You find yourself excited when your friends are down and sad when your friends are happy.

Although this emotional roller coaster is confusing, it is a normal part of growing up. Your feelings are growing and changing along with your body. You are uncertain about how to act on these new feelings. These feelings can cause embarrassment, and they can cause you to doubt yourself and your abilities.

No matter how uncertain you are about some things, you're probably sure of one thing: you want to get along better with friends of the other sex. Perhaps persons of the other sex who seemed uninteresting to you for years suddenly seem interesting to you and maybe even interested *in* you. You find yourself trying to figure out how to relate to them in new ways. Don't be surprised if you blush or stammer or are unable to think of anything to say. Give yourself a break; it takes time and practice to learn how to handle these new feelings.

The physical changes that you are going through in puberty also bring on new sexual thoughts and imagination. You might find yourself daydreaming about being romantically or sexually involved with a celebrity whose poster you have on a wall in your room. Or you might start thinking about a sexy movie scene or advertisement that you saw last week, perhaps imagining yourself as a character in it. These thoughts are called

fantasies, and they are a normal part of being a sexual person. Most of the time, sexual fantasies seem to come from out of nowhere—in the middle of a class, at a ball game, during a car ride, or even during a test. Don't let them worry you.

Sexual fantasies might also bring on increased sexual desires. This is normal too. However, if we allow ourselves to get into the habit of deliberately creating these fantasies, we become frustrated and unhappy. That is one reason why Christians believe that it is a serious mistake to look at pornographic movies or magazines, tell sexual jokes, describe somebody else in a sexual way, sexually harass someone, or do other things that can lead us into the habit of deliberately fantasizing about sexual activity.

As new sexual feelings develop, you might find it more difficult to respond to family members in old, familiar ways. You might be embarrassed when they give you compliments or when they are affectionate. You also might be surprised to find that you feel attracted to people you admire—even people of the same sex as you. Admiring and being attracted to people of both sexes is a normal part of growing up.

During this time when everything is changing, you try to understand how to act and how to be liked and accepted by the boys and girls around you. In order to be liked and accepted, you might be willing to try almost anything—the latest hairstyle, the latest fashion in clothes, the latest fads in recreation. You may even be tempted to try some dangerous and unhealthy behaviors like drinking or smoking or experimenting with sex. Anything seems better than being left out.



Though these changes seem difficult to manage and these pressures are tempting, you can manage. At home, work at keeping your new feelings from causing tension between you and the people you live with. Help the members of your family understand your feelings, and try to understand theirs. Try to understand your own feelings too. Sometimes you will want to be alone; other times you will want people to listen to you. Even when you think that no one understands you or really cares, people do care and are trying to help. Try to be patient with them and with yourself as well.

You may need to quietly think things over more often than you are used to. You might want to broaden your circle of friends and get to know other people or to try new hobbies and activities that you haven't considered before.

Finally, talk to God a bit more. After all, God created you and designed this process of change that you are going through. Ask for help from parents and other adults, but keep in mind that God also understands and will help you. A lot is changing; you are getting older and better. You are becoming an adult.

In a Word

- Puberty brings new feelings in addition to new physical changes.
- These new feelings are neither good nor bad. They are normal.
- You need to learn how to express, understand, and deal with these feelings.
- As a Catholic Christian, you can choose to express your new feelings in morally acceptable ways.