

Topic 1 — Changes

Introduction

We begin the Years 7 and 8 program by establishing a Group Agreement so that students will know what's expected and feel safer to join in. Fundamental to the Practical Guide to Love, Sex and Relationships are the concepts of ethical and respectful treatment of one another, so developing these rules is a good place to start.

No doubt many of your students have had some puberty and sex education in primary school. Programs vary widely and some of the information they learned back then may not have had as much resonance as it will now. We take some time to review students' understanding of puberty changes, but with a particular focus on social and emotional development.

The following activities will provide the students with an opportunity to identify the things they are concerned about and the things they are looking forward to when it comes to adolescence (particularly in relation to their understanding of sexual and emotional changes).

Activities

1. Creating a safe space
2. Great expectations (of puberty)
3. Puberty changes overview

Time

50 minutes

Handouts

H1: What I Think About Myself

H2: Puberty cards

Video

Mindmatters video: *Adolescent development: the art of growing up* www.mindmatters.edu.au/explore-modules/adolescent-development-students

Background Material

For more reading about adolescent development you might like to go to www.mindmatters.edu.au/explore-modules/adolescent-development-students

<http://headspace.org.au/family/adolescent-development/>

http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/brain_development_teenagers.html

Other Material

Puberty for girls/puberty for boys. Two PowerPoint presentations for download from: www.sexualityandu.ca/en/teachers/classroom_presentations/puberty

Camp Gyno: This is actually an ad but it is a very funny approach to talking about periods: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XnzfRqkRxU>

ACTIVITY 1: CREATING A SAFE SPACE

Time: 5 - 10 minutes

Overview: It's a good idea to create a group agreement before you begin this unit of work. It helps to be clear about boundaries and expectations and students feel safer to join in. Perhaps the most helpful outcome of this activity is teaching students how to disagree respectfully. That is, how to say what they think without expressing it as a put-down. Many students worry that disagreeing with someone is a bad thing. Teaching students to frame an alternative opinion with 'My opinion is', or 'I think...' rather than 'You are wrong/stupid...' encourages further examination of an idea, minus the hostility.

You may already have a working set of class rules. If so you may like to move on to the next activity, but before you do, make sure your students know to whom they can talk, or where to go, if they need further support after class.

Key Messages

- Bodies, sex and relationships can be hard to talk about but if we establish some rules we can take care of ourselves and each other.
- Everyone is deserving of a voice and respectful treatment.

Preparation and Materials

- Butchers paper to record the Group Agreement.
- Find out who the other support people are in the school (Student Wellbeing Team, school nurse)

Method

1. Explain to the students that we are beginning a unit of work focused on the ways you change during adolescence and some of the skills and information you need to learn to manage these changes. While some people love talking about these topics, some are more reluctant, and of course, for many it can feel risky.

Ask:

- *How do we make sure everyone feels safe to participate in these sessions?*

2. Brainstorm and develop a list of rules so that everyone feels safe enough and has an equal chance to join in. If students suggest that 'we treat each other respectfully' press them to describe what that means, or how it looks if we are being respectful of each other. If the students have trouble getting started, here are some ideas:

- No personal questions. This applies to both students and the teacher.
- While I'd like everyone to join in, you have the option to pass. *Sometimes you may prefer to say nothing. You don't have to offer an opinion, and you don't always have to participate if a topic makes you too uncomfortable.*
- Use the 3rd person when you're telling a story. Instead of saying 'my brother...', say 'someone I know...'. *(Don't tell personal stories about yourself or others.)*
- Confidentiality. *We are aiming for 'what's said in the room, stays in the room' (but we can't absolutely promise it, so try to speak in the 3rd person). Don't repeat stories from this room on social media.*
- It's ok to disagree with each other, but no put-downs. *It is possible to disagree respectfully by saying something like 'my opinion is different to that one. I think...'* The focus should remain on discussing the idea, rather than disparaging the person who expressed the idea.
- Listen while others are talking. *Listening is not only a sign of respect but shows a commitment to hearing a range of different opinions.*

3. After the students have made a list, make sure you cover the following:

- Identify at least two resource people in or near the school to whom a student could go for help with concerns.
- **Confidentiality** - It is important to explain to students that absolute

confidentiality is not possible from you. That is, if you believe that they are in danger of harming themselves or likely to be harmed by someone else you have to pass that on to another trustworthy source. You will not do this without the student's knowledge and will provide support for them through this process.

- Explain that if you think a student is about to reveal something too personal about themselves or somebody else, that you will interrupt them. **Protective interrupting** is a strategy to prevent a student disclosing in front of other students and provides them with the opportunity to disclose in a safe and confidential way.

4. Keep the Group Agreement for the remainder of the unit as a reminder for the students.

ACTIVITY 2: GREAT EXPECTATIONS (OF PUBERTY)

Time: 15 minutes

Overview: The purpose of this session is for students to identify the great and the difficult things about getting older. This activity gives you an insight into your students' current expectations of puberty and getting older. Keep in mind that puberty has different implications for some children depending on their families' beliefs and practices. It's important to acknowledge that families have different expectations of children, as they grow older, which can create different kinds of pressure for some young people too. If you have students from a range of cultural or religious backgrounds this could be a great way to learn about differences as well as commonalities.

This activity also highlights that change is not limited to physical development. We are laying the groundwork for understanding that growing older implies new experiences, as well as changes to emotions, relationships and sexual feelings. We will evaluate personal feelings about adolescent growth and change and also examine the role that self-esteem plays during this time of identity formation.

Key Messages

- Adolescence is a time of change.
- Development happens at different rates for everyone. For example, some young people physically develop faster than they do emotionally, socially and psychologically.
- Changes can be exciting, but also challenging.
- The skills and resources that you have can make it easier to go through these changes.
- There are trustworthy places and people to go to for information and support.

Preparation and Materials

- Butchers paper
- Textas (make sure you have one set of three in different colours)
- Mindmatters video: *Adolescent development: the art of growing up* - www.mindmatters.edu.au/explore-modules/adolescent-development-students
- H1: How I Think About Myself, 1 per student.

Method

1. Ask:

- What does the word puberty mean to you?

2. Write student responses on the board and as a class discuss the meaning of the word. Here are some definitions that can be used in the class discussion:

- *Puberty is when your body begins to change from the body of a child to that of an adult.*
- *Puberty refers to the physical changes when the body becomes sexually mature and ready to reproduce (have babies).*
- *Puberty occurs because new chemicals produced by the body – called sex hormones – are developing in the body, creating changes in the body, changes in emotions and sexual feelings.*
- *Puberty does not happen all at once. It happens in stages and starts according to each person's own body clock.*

3. Ask:

- What does adolescence mean?

Adolescence is describing all the other changes a young person goes through - not only physical growth and change (puberty), but also emotional, social, sexual and cognitive (brain) development.

4. Tell the students that apart from when you were a baby there is no other time in your life when you grow and change so rapidly. This can be exciting and it can be challenging. Separate the students into small groups of up to 5 students of their choosing. Provide each group with two sheets of butchers paper and ask the students to title them:

- The great things about getting older.
- The difficult things about getting older.

5. As a class, come up with an example or two for each heading. An example of a great thing could be *more independence*. A difficult thing could be *period pain* or *reaching high school*. Discuss with the class that some changes may fit into both categories. For example, more responsibility can be seen as both

great - 'I get to baby-sit!', or difficult - 'I have to baby-sit'.

6. Working in their groups give the students as long as you think they need until their ideas have run out. The groups can then post their sheets on the wall so that everyone can see, and take turns reporting back to the class.

7. Further discussion questions:

- Do you have lots of the same things identified? Have you noticed that many people share the same feelings about different aspects of growing up?
- Have some groups put your examples of 'things that will be great' in the "things that will be difficult" lists?
- Do you think it might be hardest to be the first one to start puberty, or the last? One example is that some young girls get lots more comments and attention about their bodies.
- Why might we use the word 'difficult' instead of 'bad'? (Some changes are difficult, or challenging, but they can turn out to be positive.)

8. The following points should be made:

- People react differently to change.
- What is exciting for one person can be scary for another, and vice versa.
- Some changes can be both difficult and great at the same time.

9. We also want the students to understand that the changes they are currently experiencing are more than just physical. They can begin to name and understand the social implications of getting older and acknowledge that their emotions will be affected as well.

Have 3 different coloured textas available and invite students to come up to the lists of 'great and difficult things' to circle:

- Physical changes
- Emotional changes

- Social changes

10. If time allows, students take their 'difficult things' lists from the wall and return to their seats remaining in their groups. They then swap their sheets with the group next to them. Each group must choose one difficult thing and come up with a way to make it more manageable.

11. Finish with the following points:

- Changes can be exciting, but also challenging.
- The skills and resources that you have can make it easier to go through these changes.
- This program is mainly going to focus on skills for understanding and managing relationships and sexual development.

12. You may like to supplement this session by watching the Mindmatters video: *Adolescent development: the art of growing up*

www.mindmatters.edu.au/explore-modules/adolescent-development-students

Homework:

H1: How I Think About Myself

For homework, students can take home a cope of H1 **How I Think About Myself**¹ to reflect on how they feel about themselves in terms of puberty changes and identify some strategies to cope with physical, social, emotional and sexual development.

Note: One of the statements is 'I use positive self talk'. You may need to explain what this means.

1 Adapted from 'Coping with Development', www.teachingsexualhealth.ca, Alberta Health Services

ACTIVITY 3: PUBERTY CHANGES OVERVIEW

Time: 10 minutes

Overview: This activity is a great strategy for quickly listing and explaining the main puberty changes. We have listed some good resources for explaining menstruation and fertility. Teachers often ask about dividing students into single-sex groups and there is no definitive evidence to say that single-sex or mixed groups are better. It is important that students learn about the changes for everyone, but there is no question young people often feel daunted by a mixed group. If this is the case (and you have the capacity) single-sex sessions can be valuable in allowing students to ask questions more freely.

Single sex groupings may create another issue for you if you have transgender students. If you have a student who is transgender then denying them permission to join their preferred group is unnecessarily distressing. Please allow them to go where they would prefer. If they have made their gender identity known to you, and you remain uncertain of what to do, ask them in private. This simple question and acknowledgment could make a big difference to their wellbeing.

Preparation and Materials

- Labels marked *Mainly girls*, *Mainly boys* and *Every-body*
- Two hula hoops (or skipping ropes) to make a Venn diagram on the floor
- H3 'Puberty cards' – you can prepare a few sets so that students can work in small groups, or just one set with enough for every student to have at least one card
- B1: 'Background information for the teacher'.

Method

1. Create a two-circle Venn diagram on the floor. You could use two hula-hoops or skipping ropes to create the two intersecting circles. Place the labels 'Mainly Girls' and 'Mainly Boys' in the circles, and 'Every-body' in the intersection. Distribute the Puberty Cards, at least one to each student.

2. Working in pairs or alone, ask students to place their card(s) in the appropriate place.

3. Ask students to sit in a circle around the Venn diagram, and review the results to see if you need to change the card placements.

Ask:

- Do you agree with the placement of the cards?
- Are there any cards that you would like to move?
- What is your reason for suggesting a card should be moved?
- Are there any cards you would like explained?
- Are there more similarities or differences in the changes experienced?

Point out that there are many changes that everyone experiences. Explain any puberty changes that students have questions about.

4. Conclusion: The Question box

Providing a question box is a good way to complete this learning. Often students are embarrassed to ask a question in front of the rest of the class. Using the question box enables students to be anonymous. The use of a question box also has the added benefit of allowing the teacher time to reflect on how to answer the students' questions. Ask students to write a question or topic suggestion they would like to explore further at a later date and get them to place it in the class question box.

You can either answer the questions at the next session or collate a list of questions to post on the wall and challenge students to find the answers.

Teachers note:

About 1 in 2,000 babies are born Intersex, which means the baby has a mixture of characteristics that are typically considered male and female. It's a naturally occurring biological condition. There are 40 different variations and they can be chromosomal, hormonal, genetic or physical. Most intersex kids grow up identifying as men or women. The Organisation Intersex International Australia recommends that when you teach young people about "girl parts" and "boy parts", that we acknowledge in a matter-of-fact way that some people's parts are different.

WHAT I THINK ABOUT MYSELF

Check one column for each of the following statements:

	Most of the time	Sometimes	Almost never
1. I like the way I look.			
2. I am important to my family and friends.			
3. I feel confident talking to males and females.			
4. I get along well with others.			
5. I help others to be their best.			
6. I take responsibility for my actions.			
7. I can forgive myself.			
8. I appreciate my body and what it does.			
9. I believe in myself.			
10. I am a good friend.			
11. I enjoy getting up in the morning.			
12. I do my best.			
13. I know my values about sexuality.			
14. I feel positive about what I eat.			
15. I use positive self-talk instead of putting myself down.			
16. The future looks bright.			

17. I am respectful in my relationships.			
18. I accept compliments from others.			
19. My feelings matter.			
20. I can ask for what I want			
21. I enjoy regular physical activity			
22. I can talk to my friends or family when I am feeling sad.			

Give yourself

- 1 point for every check in the *Almost Never* column
- 2 points for every check in the *Sometimes* column
- 3 points for every check in the *Most of the Time* column

Scores

60-75 Keep it up!

47-59 You're on the right track toward positive self-esteem.

25-46 You might want to talk to someone you trust about ways to improve your self-esteem. Feeling down about yourself is one of the many characteristics of low self-esteem. Learning about its causes, and taking practical steps to build your self-esteem, can help to overcome your negative thoughts. But if you feel like nothing's working, there is also professional support available.

<http://au.reachout.com/working-out-your-strengths> <http://au.reachout.com/steps-to-improve-self-esteem>

Feel hungrier

Arms and legs get longer making you sometimes appear clumsier

Need more sleep (9.25 hours a night!)

Body starts making
sex hormones

Brain undergoing
massive remodelling

Body shape
changes

Breasts change

(which starts as tiny swellings
beneath the nipples)

Internal body
organs grow larger

Sweat more.
Smell stronger.

Can become interested
in having a boyfriend
or girlfriend

Grow
underarm hair

More interested in how
you look (appearance)

More concerned
about body image

Hair gets oily

Grow pubic hair

Face shape
changes

Hair grows
on face

Grow taller

Hair on arms
and legs is more
noticeable

Friends become more
important than they
were before

Get acne

Some people are more
easily embarrassed
and are worried about
whether others like them

Oily skin

Start having sexual
thoughts and feelings

Deeper
friendships

Emotions feel more
powerful than they
did before.

Weight
increases

More attracted
to other people

Sexual body parts
start growing a
little bigger

Weight
increases

Production of a
hormone called
Oestrogen

Ovulation — eggs
start to leave the
ovaries

Hips widen

Start making a
vaginal discharge

The vagina, uterus,
and ovaries get
bigger

Periods start

Vaginal
wetness

Clitoris hardens
and becomes more
sensitive

Breasts and nipples
grow larger and
they become more
sensitive

Production of a hormone called testosterone

Penis grows bigger

Shoulders get wider

Wet dreams

Start making
sperm

Ejaculation —
semen released
from penis

Bigger muscles

More erections
(penis gets hard)

Testicles and
scrotum get
bigger