



## MESSAGES FOR PARENTS

# 5-8 Years

At this age, many children will:

- Gain a deeper understanding of gender roles and develop a sense of gender identity (e.g., understanding that they are male, female, nonbinary).
- Have a preference for same-gender friendships and “gendered” activities, clothing, and behaviours to express their gender.
- Have a basic understanding of sexual orientation (e.g., heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality).
- Begin to show early signs of puberty (e.g., growth of pubic hair, breast development).

### Healthy Sexual Development

- Provide your child with basic information about the human reproductive system, including sexual intercourse.
- Prepare your child for the physical changes associated with puberty.
- Continue to use the correct names for body parts (e.g., penis, scrotum, vulva, vagina, buttocks).
- Avoid the use of slang words to describe body parts and sexuality.

### Promotion of Sexual Health and Prevention of Sexual Abuse

- Watch for signs of possible sexual abuse or exploitation (e.g., physical trauma to the genitals, sexually related behavioural acts, and early initiation of sexual acts).
- Reinforce and expand your child’s knowledge of their rights (e.g., “your body belongs to you”) and the responsibilities related to sexuality (e.g., equal relationships, boundaries, consent).
- Teach your child to think critically. Discuss how norms and values related to gender, relationships, and family are influenced by society and the media.

# Resources

The best time to start communicating sexual health information with your child is in the early stages of development. Your child may come to you with questions about sex, sexuality, and sex-related matters. Remember, you do not need to know all the answers, but you do want to be a reliable educator for your child. Take time to find accurate answers to your child's questions and return to the conversation when you feel comfortable and prepared.

To become more comfortable with discussions on sexual development, we encourage you to visit your local library or bookstores for books and DVDs. Remember to choose materials carefully; some may be more explicit than you thought. Think about the level of detail that would be good for your child's stage of development and their personal preference.

Below is a list of recommended websites:

1. Teaching Sexual Health for Parents  
<http://teachingsexualhealth.ca/parents>
2. Stages of Child Sexual Development  
<https://www.centreforsexuality.ca/learning-centre/stages-of-child-sexual-development/>
3. It's Easier Than You Think: Tips for Talking With Your Kids About Sexual Health  
<https://skprevention.ca/sexual-health/information-for-parents/>