



Learning About My Body

BIRTH TO TWO YEARS OF AGE



The Saskatchewan Prevention Institute recognizes the importance of being inclusive, including using inclusive language. As such, gender-neutral language is used whenever possible in this book. When the terms "male" and "female" are used, it is with the purpose of referring to sex-related biological features (internal and external anatomy), not to gender identity.

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our goal is **healthy** children

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Dear Parents/Caregivers,

You are the most important influence in your child's life. You pass on your culture, beliefs, values, and knowledge to your child. You know how important it is to care for your child's mental, physical, emotional, and social well-being - all of which are related to their sexual health. Although many people believe that sexuality begins with puberty, sexual development actually begins at birth. In infancy, children form attachments with caregivers and begin to learn the proper names of body parts. As children grow and develop, they begin to understand gender identity and gender roles, different types of relationships, privacy, and family, cultural, and moral values. Sexual development also involves learning information and skills to prevent and protect themselves from unhealthy relationships and sexual abuse.

Parents and caregivers are the first and primary educators of children, and this includes sexual health. Parents and caregivers can teach children both directly through specific conversations and indirectly through daily interactions. The best time to start communicating sexual health information to your child is when they are a baby. Starting early not only helps your baby, but also helps you become more comfortable talking about sexual health with your child. As children become school-aged, many will receive information from school on relevant sexual health topics. However, parents and caregivers continue to have an important role in reinforcing these messages.

This booklet was developed by the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute to support you in your role as your child's sexual health educator. In particular, this book helps you share important messages with your child about their development and bodies.

If you have any concerns or questions about your child's development, please talk to your public health nurse or primary care provider.

Sexual Health Development Between Birth and 2 Years

Babies learn through their five senses: touch, smell, taste, sight, and sound. Most babies love to be naked. They also like to be touched and have skin to skin contact.

Babies learn to feel loved and secure through their relationships with primary caregivers. When these relationships are healthy, babies learn to feel safe and how to trust.

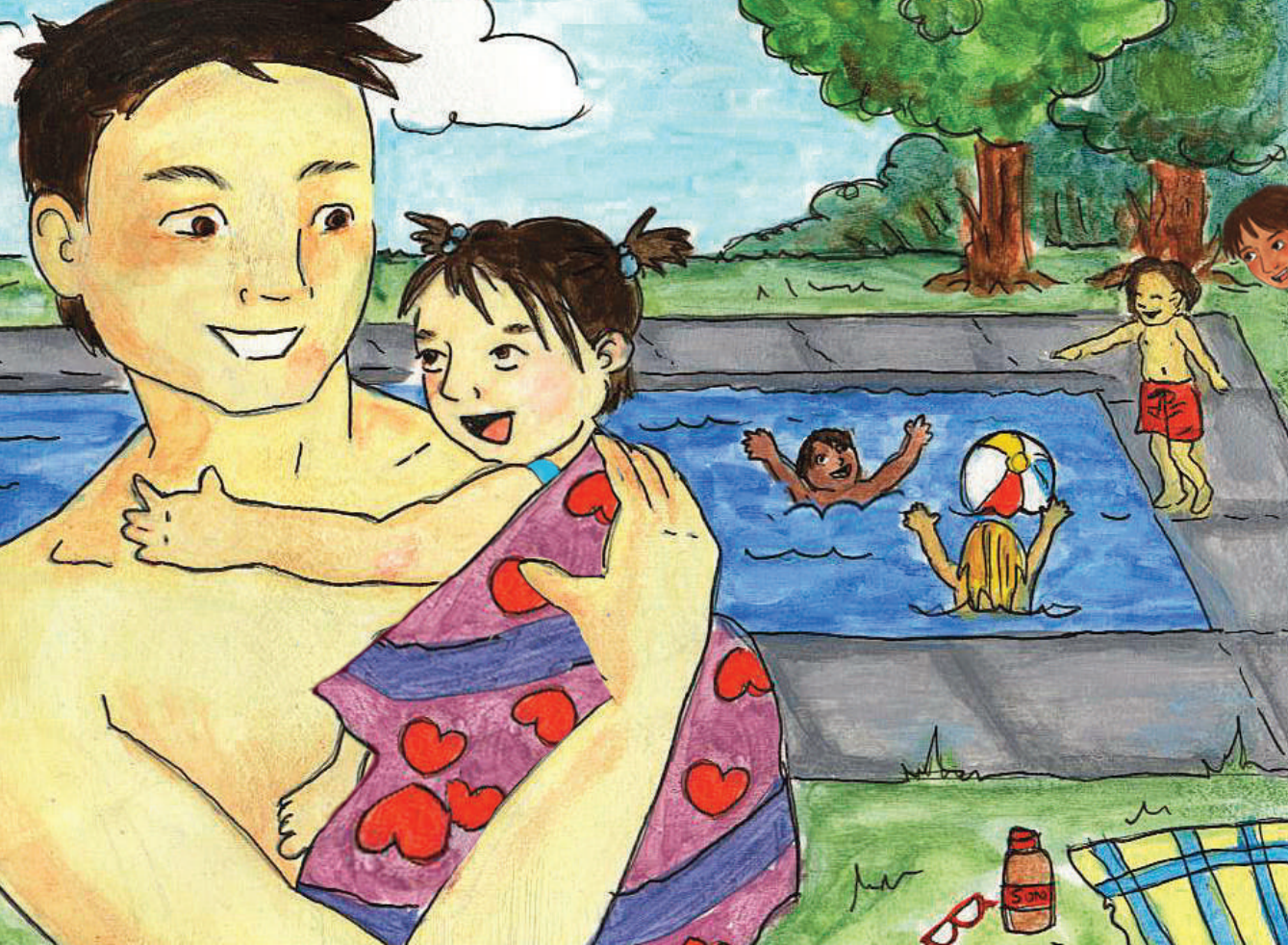
Babies learn many things in their first 2 years, including discovering their bodies. Males may begin to realize that they have a penis at around 7 or 8 months of age, and females may discover their vulva at around 9 or 10 months. It is normal for babies to touch their body parts. Erections in males and vulval lubrication in females are a natural reflex response to touch, friction, and the tendency to empty their bladders. These reflexes are not something that caregivers should feel embarrassed or worried about.

Parents and caregivers should make use of everyday situations to teach their child the proper names for body parts. This will help children feel comfortable with their own body and will help to build the foundation for future discussions about sexual health and appropriate and inappropriate touch.

As children move through this stage, they will begin interacting with others, including through play. Parents should begin to teach their child how to respectfully interact with others. For instance, parents can reinforce the need for gentle/soft touch and taking turns.

How to Use This Booklet

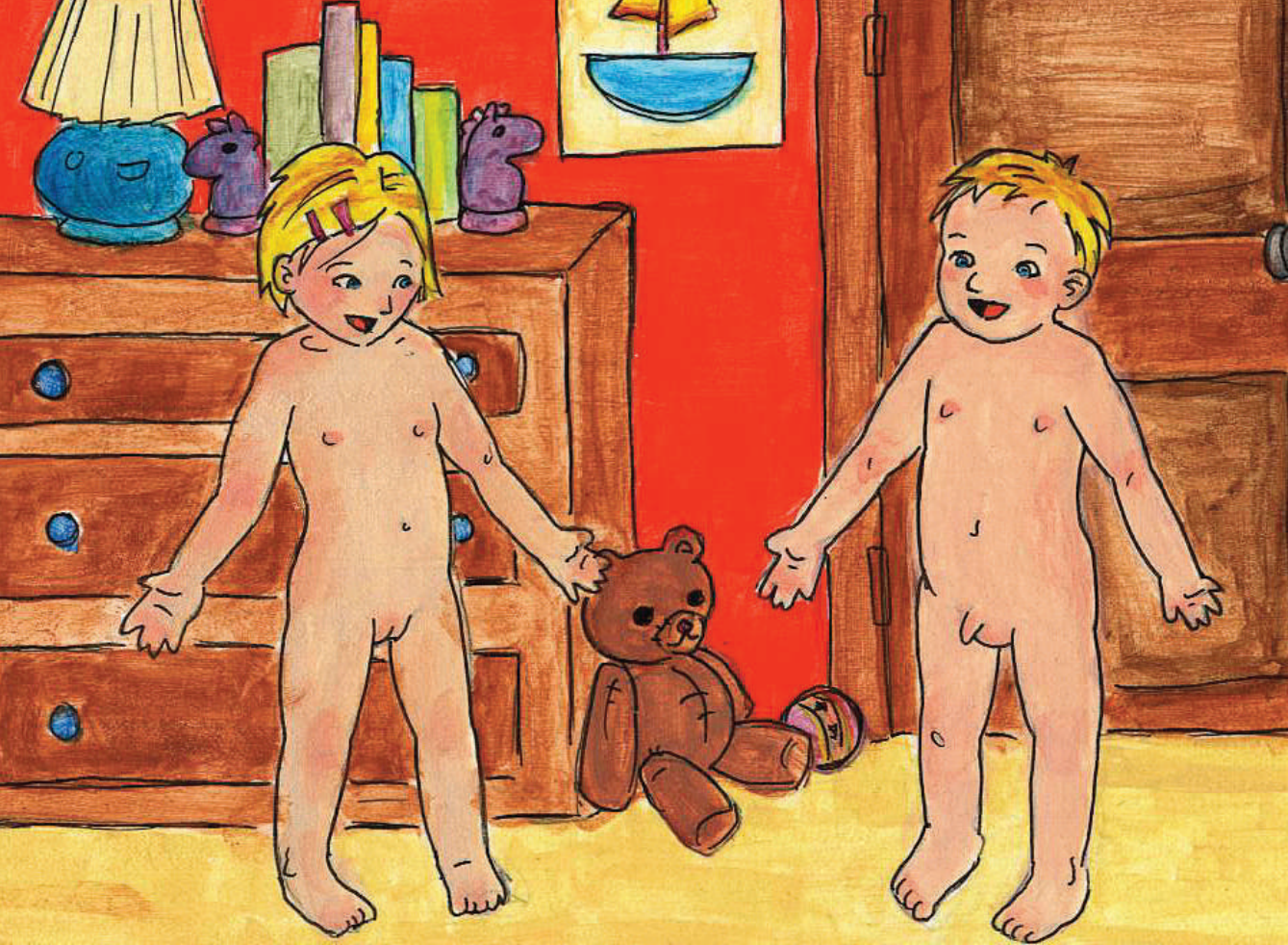
1. Be sure to read the book to yourself first before reading it to your child. It is important to be comfortable with the information.
2. Read the book out loud to your child. Use the pictures to talk about the information.
3. Have fun. The more fun you can have with your child while reading the booklet, the more they will remember the messages.
4. Reinforce the messages from this booklet in everyday life. For instance, remind your child of the proper names of body parts and the importance of asking permission to touch or hug others.



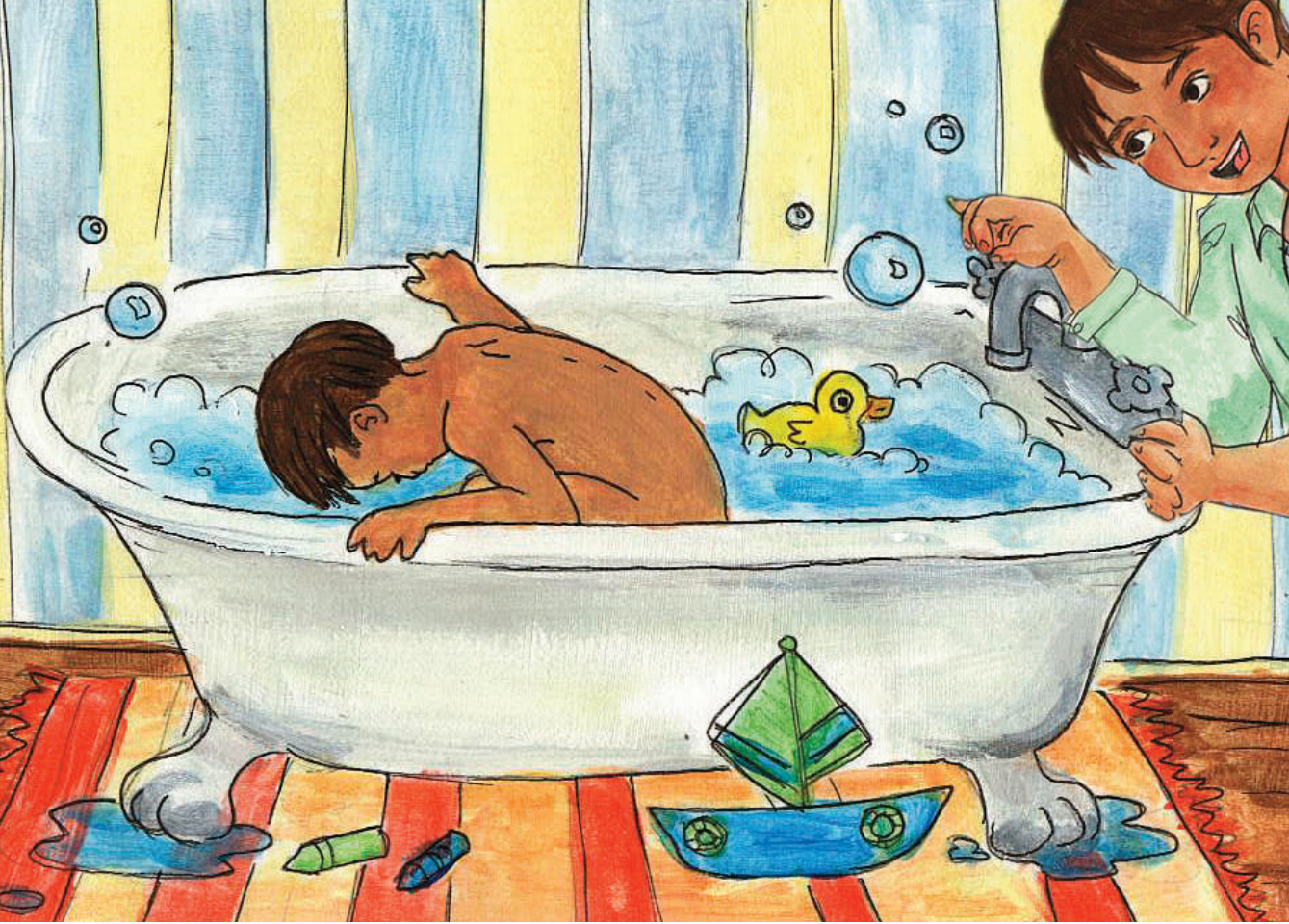
Alex and daddy like to go swimming together at the pool. After they get out, they cuddle and daddy dries Alex off. Alex loves being held and hugged.



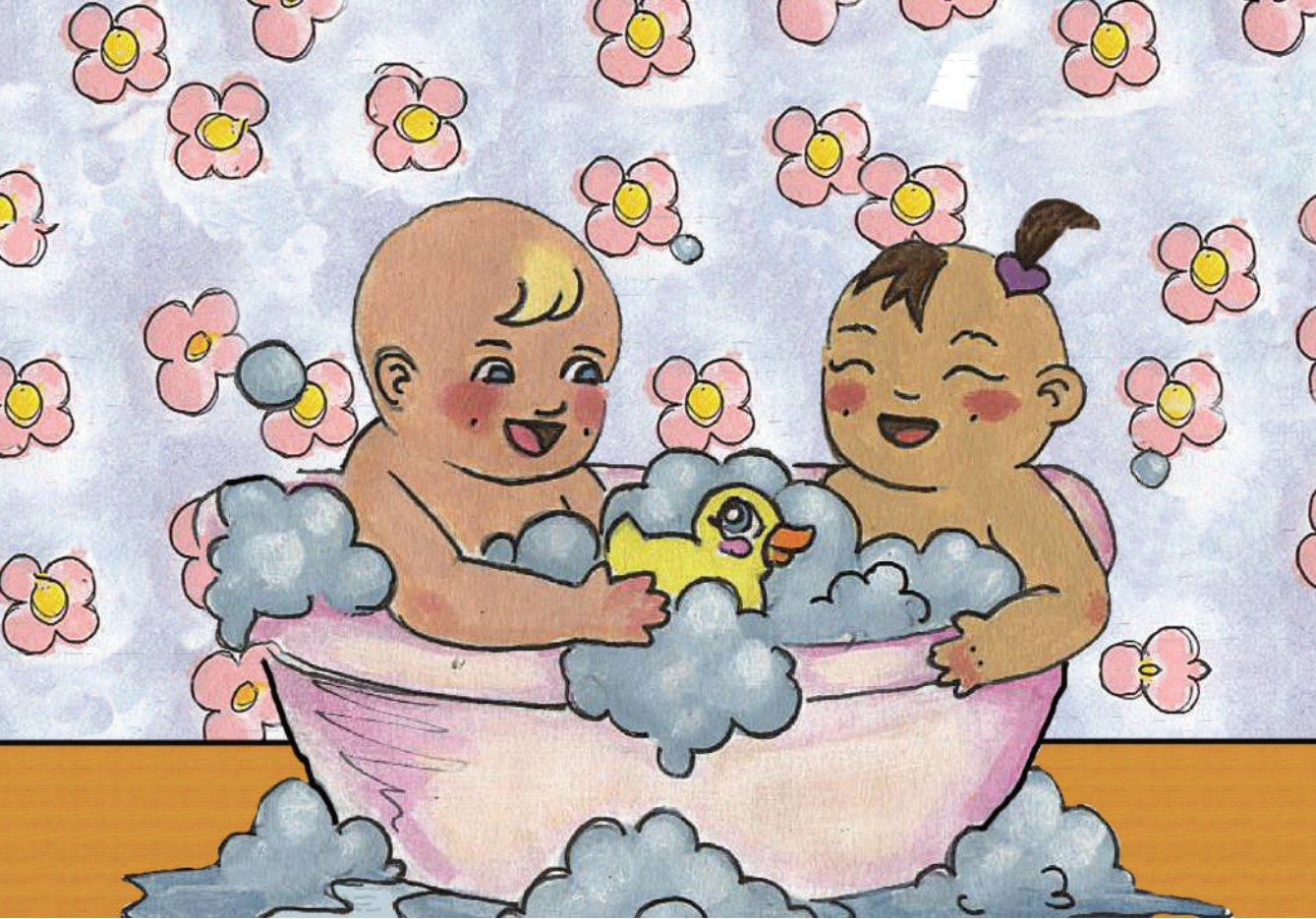
Bryce loves to run around the house without a diaper. The air feels good against Bryce's skin. Then it is time to put a diaper back on. Mommy always tickles Bryce's toes and tummy and makes it fun.



Here are Sarah and Mitch. They see that they look alike in some ways and different in some ways. They both have a head, hair, ears, eyes, a nose, shoulders, arms, hands, a chest, a belly button, legs, and feet. Sarah is a female and has a vulva. Mitch is a male and has a penis.



Henry likes to look at their own body and touch all of the different parts. Henry is learning to use the proper names for body parts.



Here are Aiden and Cynthia playing in the bathtub together. Their mommy is always right beside them so they can feel safe. The bubbles are lots of fun and they like to touch them. They are curious about their bodies. They like to laugh and play together, smell the soap, and feel the warm water.

Aiden and Cynthia are learning all about their bodies and the things around them. It is lots of fun.

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:

An Overview of Healthy Childhood Sexual Development, National Sexual Violence Resource Center

<https://www.nsvrc.org/publications/an-overview-on-healthy-childhood-sexual-development>

It's Easier Than You Think: Tips for Talking With Your Kids About Sexual Health, Saskatchewan Prevention Institute

<https://skprevention.ca/sexual-health/information-for-parents/>

Sexual Development and Behavior in Children: Information for Parents and Caregivers, The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/sexual_development_and_behavior_in_children.pdf

Supporting Your Child's Positive Sexual Development, Centre for Sexuality

<https://www.centreforsexuality.ca/learning-centre/stages-of-child-sexual-development/>

Teaching Sexual Health for Parents

<https://teachingsexualhealth.ca/parents/>

MESSAGES FOR PARENTS

Birth-2 Years



At this age, many children will:

- Explore their own body, including genitals.
- Enjoy touch as well as skin-to-skin contact.
- Like to be naked.

Healthy Sexual Development

- Your child will develop the capacity to trust caregivers.
- Your child will experience pleasure through touch.
- Begin to teach your child how to respectfully interact with others (e.g., soft touch, taking turns).

Promotion of Sexual Health and Prevention of Sexual Abuse

- Teach your child the correct names for body parts including genitals (e.g., penis, scrotum, vulva, vagina, buttocks). This promotes positive body image and builds the foundation for future discussions about appropriate and inappropriate touch.
- Teach your child to say “no” to unwanted touch or behaviours, regardless of who is approaching them.
- Throughout your child’s development, be aware of possible signs of sexual abuse (e.g., trauma to the genitals, resistant or fearful of touch from others, and sexualized/inappropriate sexual behaviour).

*For further information on this booklet or other resources
created by the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute, visit:*

www.skprevention.ca