

Talking to Boys About Puberty On Parenting - The Washington Post

By: Lauren Knight

This past summer has flown by. The hours, days, and weeks passed so quickly that I hadn't realized until I took a closer look at my oldest son (who is on the verge of turning 8) just how quickly things can change over the course of three months.

Since ending the last school year, he has lost four teeth, gained two very professional-looking adult front teeth, grown nearly two inches, and skipped a whole shoe size.

I know this is only the beginning; his growth spurt is a sign of big changes on the horizon. Thoughts of the physical and emotional changes of puberty that will start in just a few years has me feeling a little nervous. How do I talk to him about these changes without making him uncomfortable, and more importantly, how can I keep the lines of communication open so that he feels that no matter what, he can come to me with any and every question?

I think (and hope) that it started long ago, when he first started asking me questions about his body as a toddler. Questions deserve answers, openness begets openness. I hope that the ongoing discussion can flow as easily, but I am preparing for the inevitable need for more privacy and discretion, which can sometimes come between a boy and his mom's open conversations.

Long gone are the days of "the talk," where one or both parents sit down (usually far too late in a child's development) and try, with great discomfort, to discuss the birds and the bees all in one awkward discussion.

A far more effective approach is to discuss children's bodies from an early age, and to take opportunities to expand their knowledge about such issues years before they are actually experiencing them. Just as you would prepare a child for changes they may experience in their lives such as an upcoming move or what to expect when they start school, it is just as important to prepare him for what to expect when his body and emotions start changing, even years before those changes actually start taking place.

For many boys, puberty can begin at 10 years old. Start talking with them about it at around 8, and there will be plenty of time to discuss what will be happening, and what is normal.

An important thing to remember is that when a child asks a question, whether it's about an insect, a rocket ship, a plant, an animal, or a fact of life, this means that he is interested and open. An interested, open child is a teachable child. Children deserve correct answers to their questions in clear, basic terms.

One place to start is with language. From the time your child is a toddler, use the appropriate names for body parts rather than giving them nicknames, and answer questions matter-of-factly. Any shame or embarrassment you show will be reflected by your child; children pick up on these feelings early on and as a result, can feel embarrassed about their bodies and thus reluctant to bring up questions they



may have. Keeping the lines of communication open early on can certainly help later on when more complicated issues arise.

Be aware that your child may not ask many questions about his body, especially if he is shy. If this is the case, it is important for you to take the lead. Don't wait until he is going through puberty to broach the topic; if your child begins to experience the changes of puberty before you have had the chance to talk to him, he might feel anxious and confused.

A good way to start one (of many) discussions about puberty is to begin by marveling at how much your son is growing. Show your amazement and awe; your attitude can be contagious, especially for an 8-year-old who is not yet wary of his parents' enthusiasm. Discussing physical growth is a great segue to discussing other changes, such as the growth of the body, genitals, and facial hair, deepening of the voice, and hormonal changes such as a change in the smell and amount of perspiration he will produce.

In addition to talking to your child about the inevitability of puberty, give him books about the topic so he can explore the topic on his own. [The Boy's Body Book](#), by Kelli Dunham, is a great introductory guide to questions relating to puberty, relationships, bullying, school pressure, peer pressure, healthy living, and stressful situations. It also has a great section on emotional changes and answers the question, *Is it okay to cry?* with a reassuring, resounding Yes!

[Where Did I Come From?](#) by Peter Mayle describes the reproductive process from intercourse to birth, illustrated effectively and with humor, but if you're looking for a book for a younger child, try [The Baby Tree](#), by Sophie Blackall and [It's Not the Stork!](#) by Robie H. Harris. Harris also wrote versions for slightly older kids: [It's So Amazing: A Book about Eggs, Sperm, Birth, Babies, and Families](#) (best for kids aged 7-10) and [It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex, and Sexual Health](#) (ages 10 and up).

If you don't feel your child is quite ready for all this information, at least keep these or similar books on hand so that you feel ready to answer questions about puberty and reproduction. Read through them ahead of time and you won't stammer or be taken off guard when your child asks you the inevitable.

Above all else, reassure your son that the changes of puberty are a normal and amazing part of becoming an adult, and that you will be there for him every step of the way.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2015/08/28/talking-to-boys-about-puberty/>

By: Lauren Knight

August 28, 2015

Lauren Knight blogs at [Crumb Bums](#).

