



## Family Planning Victoria Podcast Transcript – ‘Doing It’

### Body Image and puberty

- Anne: [00:00](#) This podcast contains discussion about adult topics. Use your judgment if there are little ears around. Welcome to Doing It, this is a podcast made by the Family Planning Victoria Schools Education Team, we've decided to call it Doing It because students often ask how to do it? And parents often ask how to do it, meaning how do you talk about sex and all the things we talk about in class. My name is Anne and I'm part of the FPV Education Team, we go to schools and run classes for all year levels on bodies, growing up, puberty, sex, reproduction, all things relationships and sexuality education.
- Anne: [00:41](#) This podcast is for parents and carers of school age children so we can share what goes in our relationships and sexuality education class, then to help support those sort of conversations at home. Our first series of podcasts is about puberty which is something we generally start talking about with students from about grade three or four, by grade five, six students should be getting lots of information about puberty.
- Anne: [01:04](#) Today we're going to talk about how bodies change shape during puberty. Someone during puberty is likely to get taller from a spurt of growth, female bodies are likely to become curvier and male bodies tend to become broader across the shoulders and develop more muscle bulk. All of this can take some getting used to for the young person and for the grownups. When we talk about puberty and bodies we do talk in broad generalizations, intersex or transgender people may find that what we're saying about how bodies change is not applicable. Before we continue it's important to say this is general information and it's not true for all people.

- Anne: [01:44](#) Today I'm going to talk to Family Planning Victoria Educator Andrea. Thanks for letting me ask you questions Andrea.
- Andrea: [01:51](#) No problem.
- Anne: [01:52](#) My first question is something we describe in classes; how do bodies change as they go through puberty?
- Andrea: [02:00](#) Okay, so in classes we talk about bodies changing differently. Some bodies experience rapid change and think of things like feet growing and shoe sizes changing and comments like, "Oh wow, you're a head taller than when I saw you last time." Ankle freezers for pants, so there's really quick sort of changes that people notice. Whereas other people it's really gradual, they just slowly, slowly grow and change and that occurs. Bodies change around height, weight and shape and pubescent bodies change into their adult bodies and some general shared changes include that sort of height change, broadening of the shoulders but that's predominantly in males through to arms, legs, torsos getting longer, hands and feet all growing larger.
- Andrea: [02:46](#) Changes are specific to a persons genetic makeup, some people will be taller, more muscly, others will have larger or smaller breasts, feet size, et cetera and then there are some changes that are specific to biological bodies. Boys, or male bodies, grow taller and have broadening of chests and shoulders, genitals grow larger, specifically penises and scrotum's and testicles, the sexual reproductive organs. It's fun in class, we show students beads. We show them beads the size of a hazelnut and then we show them beads the size of walnuts, the changes from children to adults sizes, the kids faces are priceless during this.
- Anne: [03:31](#) So, that's testicle size changing? And yeah they're quite impressed to see that?
- Andrea: [03:35](#) Quite impressed to see those walnuts definitely. And then we talk to female bodies have flat chested and some are flat chested and some will notice ... We talk about breast budding and developing and hips widening. The internal sexual reproductive organs grow too, uterus ends up being about the size of a pear or an adults clenched fist. When you talk to students or young people about growing it's a really good time to actually chat to them about the process of birth and females uterus's being able to carry a developing fetus and the hips widening which can enable a baby to be born through the vaginal passage.

- Anne: [04:18](#) Hmm, so when they have gone through those puberty changes it means their body can grow a baby?
- Andrea: [04:23](#) Absolutely.
- Anne: [04:24](#) And lots of kids don't know that, they think, "Well I'm only 10 and I've got my period but surely I can't make a baby because I'm too young."
- Andrea: [04:31](#) Yeah, but not with physical changes then their body has the ability to do so and that is really surprising to some kids in these classes.
- Anne: [04:40](#) Boys and girls are going to get taller?
- Andrea: [04:42](#) Get taller.
- Anne: [04:42](#) And generally girls first?
- Andrea: [04:44](#) Generally, girls first. Yeah so it's common for students to firstly notice that they start to store a bit of fat so prior to that growth spurt there are those body changes and they might notice that they've gained a little bit of weight so you should discuss this to normalize that weight gain, especially in a society where young people often receive negative image messages about weight.
- Anne: [05:08](#) And girls often do notice those changes earlier, so breast budding?
- Andrea: [05:13](#) Breast budding, nipple development, sort of the pointier breasts before they round out, that breast tissue rounds out.
- Anne: [05:22](#) So, what do you tell students about breast development and bra sizes and all those sort of changes?
- Andrea: [05:29](#) Again, speaking to each person about developing bodies at a rate that's right for them, some people may notice breast development and fatty stores around the breast area around ages eight to ten. Others might not notice any changes until they're further along in the teen years, 14 to 16 years, but the majority of girls it's between 10 and 13 years. Explain the stages of breast development, the shape of breasts from breast budding to pointy shapes to rounder and more curvaceous. Although, the vast difference in breast size and weight of breast and that they can grow unevenly, so one breast may be a different size to another. Reassuring people that this evens out

in the majority of cases and wearing bras is a really big deal for young girls. Thinking about having something quite tight fitting around your torso and it can feel really restrictive, also, if you're large breasted, the weight and size of breasts can lead to tighter neck, back, shoulders, indentations from the bra straps and of course the expense of buying a good fitting bra.

Andrea: [06:33](#) Buying bras also can be really, really embarrassing for young people. Where possible with your young person normalize wearing bras. Note that there are so many breasts in the world, people working around bras, wearing them, feeling comfortable is just something that many, many of us have to get used to.

Anne: [06:54](#) And it's okay to go into a shop and ask for help, a lot of girls might feel uncomfortable with that but it's really normal for the person helping in a shop, it's their job and it's fine to go in and ask for what to look for for fit.

Andrea: [07:09](#) Yeah and they will be aware of young people coming in and feeling a little bit nervous and definitely it is their normal activity that they're doing so I'm sure they'll be skilled at making someone feel at ease. Often, younger girls also do start with just the soft cotton crop top style and these are popular to start wearing, especially during sports or at school just to feel comfortable in themselves.

Anne: [07:35](#) For young people clothing sizes starts to change also, so as well as dealing with all those bra sizes and choosing underwear and all of that, their clothing will go from children's sizes to adults sizes.

Andrea: [07:48](#) Absolutely. And it's probably a conversation also about how the shape of clothing changes. Usually in upper primary school there's a shift where a young person will want more autonomy over what they're choosing to wear, their appearance and so what an adult might want them to wear might be quite different to what they want to choose to wear. And you might notice that something like a girls size 12 top is similar to a ladies size 10, however, the cut of the ladies size 10 start to be more fitted and to have breast and waist line.

Anne: [08:21](#) Curvier, lower, usually lower down as well?

Andrea: [08:24](#) Yeah, a lower neck line, children's tend to be less fitted and funnily enough the adult shirt length itself in the torso can also be shorter than the child's.

- Anne: [08:35](#) Oh, I didn't know that.
- Andrea: [08:37](#) Yeah, yeah. Yeah so you know, find out-
- Anne: [08:42](#) That's why no adult women's clothing fits me. Yeah.
- Andrea: [08:46](#) So, young people will find basically what's going to work for them but then they'll probably grow out of it as well, or only want to wear it a couple of times.
- Anne: [08:55](#) Do you think boys and girls feel differently as their shape changes?
- Andrea: [08:59](#) I think yes and no. Regardless of what gender they identify they feel differently within themselves. Some people will be like, "Woo hoo! Loving it. I've been wanting to grow taller, my new bodies really awesome. Like suddenly where I was doing layups in basketball and could hardly hit the hoop, now I can slam dunk, I'm getting taller and stronger and this is really great." Others might feel really gangly and uncoordinated, thinking they've lost all control over their extremities, "I'm tripping over myself, I feel awkward." Or, they might have a realization they're not going to be particularly tall or have particularly large of small breasts, long legs, short legs and maybe look different to their peers.
- Andrea: [09:45](#) So, definitely that everyone will feel different about their body shape and their development and some people will cruise through adolescence and puberty and be okay with it and others will feel a lot more concerned about it.
- Anne: [09:59](#) Yeah, and usually I would say in class however someone is feeling about their body they probably don't want you to comment on it in class. They probably don't want you to say, "Gee, your breasts have gotten larger." Or, "Gee your hips are wider." Or anything like that.
- Andrea: [10:16](#) Yeah, I tend to say one word about pimples there because lots of young people have pimples during puberty and if someones walking class you don't sort of walk and go, "Oh wow, you've got a big, red pimple on your cheek."
- Anne: [10:28](#) Yeah, congratulations.
- Andrea: [10:28](#) Yeah, that person knows it's there.

- Anne: [10:32](#) At what age do you start to notice that young people are starting to look like adults?
- Andrea: [10:39](#) Okay, we can often already start seeing some changes in grade two and grade three students. You can start seeing a little bit of that weight gain, that pre-pubescent weight gain. Grade five and grade six it's really, really noticeable, you have adult size bodies in the room and often quite a lot of them, full adult size bodies. Often, there's girls who are heads taller than their peers at this stage as well and then by usually year eight, year nine you have a room full of adult sized people with then just a few people that still look like they've got their child body there and they'll catch up eventually.
- Anne: [11:19](#) Where do you think children get ideas about what adult bodies should look like?
- Andrea: [11:24](#) This is the world we live in, isn't it? So many messages about bodies and what they should look like, bombarded with images and information so if we think about all the technology that we have access to and see, iPads, our phones. Depending on what birth order the person is in their family, if they've got older siblings or they might have access to the information as well. Even though all of the social media sites say, "For 13 years and over." We know that younger kids to have accounts so they might be scrolling through social media accounts and getting a lot of information from there.
- Anne: [12:02](#) Yeah, being exposed to adult bodies and adult ideas as well?
- Andrea: [12:05](#) Yeah. Shopping centers, you know you see digital billboards everywhere, bus stops, when you start paying attention to it, images that show adult bodies and often summertime you might see posters and billboards of people wearing bathers and things like, advertising swimwear. So it's just really ... You know even young kids now they might be making those dance videos on their phones and using the filters if they're taking a photo, you know the cutesy animal ones or the smoothing filters that sort of brush out any lines and creases in faces so a lot of information coming from different places.
- Andrea: [12:47](#) Great idea to reinforce with young people here; the photos or media that we see have been carefully chosen and edited. Speaking to our young people about bodies and people all being diverse and the importance of fueling our body with the right, healthy food, staying active, sleeping, all those things that keep us healthy.

- Anne: [13:08](#) What are some signs that you might see at school that a young person doesn't have great body image?
- Andrea: [13:14](#) Yeah, it can be simply from body language, you can see that in how they're sitting or slouching. And it might be things like they're trying to cover their bodies with overly baggy clothing. Maybe they seem like quite lethargic, not wanting to participate in things, school activities, sports, socializing.
- Anne: [13:36](#) Not wanting to do swimming carnivals because of wearing bathers and things like that?
- Andrea: [13:41](#) Bathers and things, yeah. Refusing to attend things, parties, socializing, sports days and being, you know, grumpy or in a heightened emotional state and changes to eating and sleeping patterns. There's lots of clues and things we can be wary of. It might be worthwhile if you are concerned an email or a phone call to the schoolteacher or the school nurse and rather than it be a one to one consultation with that particular child, often it's a really timely reminder for the school nurse to run sort of personal development, puberty, those kinds of classes, because in the messages going out, because the young person may not be alone in how they're feeling.
- Anne: [14:22](#) Yeah.
- Andrea: [14:23](#) And if you are particularly concerned then definitely a conversation with a teacher or school nurse.
- Anne: [14:30](#) How might adults support their children?
- Andrea: [14:33](#) You know puberty goes on for a few years and it's a learning experience for both the adult and the child so just you are your young persons trusted adult, you'll probably bear the brunt of the attitude, the grumpiness, but that's because you are their safe place so try to remember that to yourself going through that state of development. And then thinking as well that young people growing up now have a lot more information coming out to them with all the different media. When you can just drip feed little bits of positive information, don't kind of sit them down but you know drip feed. And also challenge some of the stereotypes and things that you see, if there is a billboard or if there's a billboard that is challenging the norm take a moment, just discuss it, point it out. But yeah, just that whole message of physical-social-emotional and keeping yourself healthy and that you're always there for them to chat to you.

- Anne: [15:37](#) Yeah, yeah and that's the most important thing, that they're well in themselves.
- Andrea: [15:40](#) Yeah, and your unconditional love, and they know that.
- Anne: [15:44](#) Yeah, definitely. Andrea, thank you so much for talking to me.
- Andrea: [15:48](#) You're very welcome, Anne, thank you for having me.
- Anne: [15:50](#) I will see you later.
- Andrea: [15:52](#) Cool.
- Anne: [15:54](#) Thanks Andrea, and just to summarize some of the things we talked about while we were chatting together. Just some suggested approaches for when you start to talk about body shape change with your young person. Bring it up before changes start to occur, for some children this might be as young as six or seven. Use opportunities when they arise to talk about how men, women or attractiveness are portrayed in the media. Be a positive role model for your children around food, sleep exercise and being comfortable in the body you have. And we assume that body image issues are just for girls but don't forget to check in with boys about how they feel about their body, boys can feel self conscious about their bodies too.
- Anne: [16:39](#) If you're interested in reading more about body image and teens here are some suggestions; Secret Guide to Girls Stuff by Caz Cooke has excellent advice for girls about body image, the Kidshealth.org website has really good information about teens and body image also Kids Helpline has lots of great advice for dealing with developing positive body image. For more information about us you can have a look at our website [FPV.org.au](#), you can also follow us on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, please look out for or subscribe to our next podcast. Thanks for listening.