



Family Planning Victoria podcast transcript

Doing 'IT'

Episode: What is puberty?

With Anne and Bonnie both FPV school educators.

- Anne: [00:01](#) This podcast contains a discussion about adult topics. Use your judgment if there are a little ears around. Welcome to Doing It. This is a podcast made by the Family Planning's Victoria Schools Education team. Doing It, because children often ask us about doing it, meaning sex. Parents and carers often ask us about doing it, meaning having these important conversations with the young people in their lives.
- Anne: [00:28](#) My name is Anne and I'm part of the Family Planning Victoria Schools Education Team. We go to schools and run classes for all year levels on bodies, growing up, puberty, babies, sex, reproduction. This podcast is for parents and carers of school aged children, so we can share what goes on in our relationships and sexuality education class and help support these sorts of conversations at home.
- Anne: [00:51](#) We're going to make a series on puberty. We're going to talk through things we say in class, how we talk to young people about puberty. We're going to provide a refresher on the changes that happen around puberty. I'm going to start with a broad overview of what puberty is and what to expect. It's been a while for us grownups so it's good to have a refresher about what it is and reflect on what's important to us, also, what might be important to our children.
- Anne: [01:18](#) Puberty is something we talk about a lot in Family Planning Victoria classes. It's a topic we kind of know what questions young people will ask and how they'll react. When we talk about bodies and puberty, we do talk in broad generalizations.

Intersex or trans people may find that what we're saying about puberty is not applicable to themselves or their children. Before we continue, it's important to say that this is general information and not true for all people.

- Anne: [01:47](#) Today I'm going to talk to the Family Planning Victoria Education Manager, Bonnie. We're going to talk through some questions that often parents and carers have and how we might talk about puberty during a class to children as well. So Bonnie, thanks for letting me ask you questions.
- Bonnie: [02:05](#) Thanks for having me.
- Anne: [02:07](#) My first question is, can you define puberty?
- Bonnie: [02:12](#) Yeah. Puberty is often described generally as the change or the journey from childhood to adulthood. But that definition accurately more describes adolescence and adolescence is the journey from childhood to adulthood. And puberty is a stage that occurs within adolescence. So a more accurate definition of puberty is the time in a person's life where their sexual and reproductive organs mature. These changes, these physical changes are triggered by hormonal changes within the body from the pituitary gland and they coincide with a whole lot of social and emotional changes.
- Anne: [02:52](#) After puberty, someone's body can make a baby. And before puberty it can't.
- Bonnie: [02:57](#) That's right.
- Anne: [02:58](#) And that's what [inaudible 00:02:58] in class. What age is puberty likely to occur?
- Bonnie: [03:03](#) Puberty can occur at different ages for different bodies. But generally we say that changes begin somewhere between the ages of eight to 16 years old. Somebodies might begin earlier and somebodies might begin later. Girls often will start undergoing puberty a couple of years before boys. And the whole process of those sexual and reproductive organs maturing generally takes about six years from start to finish. Students often ask me if they will start puberty at the same time that they're grownups did at home. And this is, I guess the answer to this is not necessarily. Different bodies are different. So everybody will develop at a rate that is right for them and they will begin at a time that is right for them.

- Anne: [03:50](#) That's a good guide and it's definitely a good thing to talk about with your young person when it happened for you.
- Bonnie: [03:56](#) Definitely. Having those conversations and sharing that sort of information is a really good opener to having further discussions around the changes in regards to puberty.
- Anne: [04:06](#) And if it potentially is starting at eight years old, that's grade four?
- Bonnie: [04:12](#) Yes.
- Anne: [04:13](#) Some students, and you can usually see this in a grade four class, are definitely, their body is starting to change.
- Bonnie: [04:19](#) They have and they will have different levels of understanding around that. Some eight year olds have a really good understanding of puberty. Some are flying completely blind. But no matter what, they're all observing those around them in class. So they're seeing, even if they might not themselves be undergoing these changes. They're observing others in their classroom that are. So they will have questions around that.
- Anne: [04:42](#) Yep. And conversely, you'll see a 15 year old in a grade 10 class who yet to start anything happening in their body.
- Bonnie: [04:51](#) That's right. And again, for them it's normalizing the fact that bodies will be given and finish puberty at a time that is right for them. So it's totally falls within normal ranges to have not seen these changes or not seen many of these changes at 15. totally fine. And it's about normalizing that process for everyone.
- Anne: [05:09](#) Yep. So what are the changes? What would someone expect to happen on their body or in their mind?
- Bonnie: [05:16](#) There are some changes that happen to all bodies and those things are things like brain changes to allow for more complex thinking and feeling. Getting taller. Under arm hair, pubic hair, leg and body here, just here everywhere really.
- Bonnie: [05:32](#) Voice changes, and these happened for both males and females. More predominantly for males, but definitely to females. Body odor and pimples are things that can affect people to varying degrees of sexual thoughts and feelings, and these are triggered by those hormonal changes that are occurring within the body and the maturation of those sexual and reproductive organs.

- Anne: [05:51](#) And that doesn't mean that sex starts happening during puberty.
- Bonnie: [05:54](#) No.
- Anne: [05:55](#) But the idea is that, yeah, maybe I'm attracted to that sort of person or this is something in my adulthood.
- Bonnie: [06:02](#) Absolutely, absolutely. In line with the thinking and feeling changes, young people will want increased independence. They'll want increased autonomy and they will need some privacy around those body changes. And for some people, they may even start exploring things like masturbation.
- Bonnie: [06:21](#) Female specific changes include all of the sexual and reproductive organs maturing. So that involves the uterus, vagina, fallopian tubes and ovaries. The hips will widen to support a future pregnancy if that female chooses to in the future. Breast will grow and develop and they start with budding. And one often might start earlier than the other and one might be bigger than the other and that's all fine and perfectly okay as well.
- Bonnie: [06:47](#) The vagina will start to make some discharge. And that will be a clear to whitish small amount of fluid that might start appearing on the bottom of the females' undies. And this is totally normal because the vagina is a self-cleaning organ. So totally normal process. Ovulation will begin, which is the release of eggs from the ovaries and that will trigger the menstrual cycle to start. So periods will begin for females as well.
- Bonnie: [07:14](#) For males, again, their genitals will grow in line with that sexual and reproductive maturation. So their testicles and penis will grow bigger. And usually that process of penis and testicles growing to their full adult size takes somewhere between three to five years. Their shoulders will begin to broaden, which enables them to carry more muscle mass. Facial and chest hair may start to develop. They're more likely to have erections and sperm production will be beginning to take place during puberty as well. And that sperm production can lead to wet dreams and ejaculation.
- Anne: [07:50](#) If you're looking at a grade five class, some of the cues that you might suspect that some of the students have started puberty are height.
- Bonnie: [07:59](#) Height, definitely.

- Anne: [08:01](#) And you see often at the end of primary school, generally the girls are taller because they often have their growth spur a bit earlier and boys shorter than them.
- Bonnie: [08:12](#) Yes, they are. They are. And teaching in secondary schools for so many years, I would always find that over the Summer holidays between year seven and eight, the boys would come back in year eight with much deeper voices and some would be sprouting a little bit of stubble here and there. And smelly changes as well. The smell really kicked in between that year seven and eight period.
- Anne: [08:36](#) That's something teachers often want us to talk a lot about is body odor. So when should parents and carers start talking at home about puberty?
- Bonnie: [08:46](#) It's really important that if it hasn't been an ongoing part of discussion from birth, these discussions I should say start happening before the changes are being seen within that young person. And for some young people, puberty begins at eight years old. So discussions really should take place before they begin happening to the body. One activity that I often use with parents and carers involves me giving them a jigsaw puzzle to complete and I don't give them any instructions. I don't give them any end picture. I just get them to go away and muddle their way through figuring out this puzzle.
- Bonnie: [09:24](#) At the end of that activity, I ask them to share with me their reflections on how they felt during that activity and often they say that they felt really confused, they were really unsure and they were really frustrated.
- Bonnie: [09:36](#) What I do is I then liken those experiences to a young person going through puberty without an end goal in mind, without having all of the pieces of that puzzle. It absolutely can be really confusing, anxiety driving and really frustrating process if a young person doesn't have a clear idea of what's happening, why it's happening, and what the end goal is.
- Anne: [10:00](#) And if they're looking to their friends for those cues about what's usual, puberty is so different on everyone's bodies, so they're not going to get it from their friends.
- Bonnie: [10:08](#) No.
- Anne: [10:09](#) What do young people want to know about puberty?

Bonnie: [10:12](#) We get asked so many great questions. But if I had to sort of pull out the main ones, we often get asked things like does puberty hurt? They're often going in really fear full.

Anne: [10:23](#) Yeah, painful. Yeah, we often get that. And most grownups, when you ask them that, they'll talk about emotions.

Bonnie: [10:30](#) Yes.

Anne: [10:30](#) Being emotionally painful. But kids are worried about-

Bonnie: [10:33](#) Physical.

Anne: [10:34](#) Is it going to hurt in my body?

Bonnie: [10:35](#) And Yeah, particularly females around periods, there's a whole lot of stigma out there around periods are painful and you have to suffer through that. So really reiterating that for lots of women, they aren't. And if they are extremely painful, it's something that you really, you should be talking to a healthcare provider around.

Bonnie: [10:54](#) Another question is they want to know when will they know that puberty has started for them. So what should they be looking out for? And again, this is a really tricky one to answer because it's different for each body. Girls really want to know when are they going to get their first period. So reassuring-

Anne: [11:13](#) To the day. What day will [crosstalk 00:11:11].

Bonnie: [11:13](#) To the minute. They don't want it happening while they're at school either. So just talking to them about on average it happens somewhere for most females between the ages of 11 to 13. but it can be a lot earlier or a lot later. So there's really no hard and fast rules that we can give for this.

Bonnie: [11:31](#) Females really want to know how to use pads and tampons so that they don't have to figure this out on the go. They've got a plan in place and know how to use it. Males want to know that if they masturbate too much, will they use up all of their sperm? And then there are a whole range of questions about sex. How does it work? How does it happen? Do you have to do it? At what age? Not questions around them wanting to have sex, but just wanting to know what the rules are, what's going on [crosstalk 00:11:59].

- Anne: [11:59](#) Because at the end of grade six they're starting to work out that sex isn't only for making a baby, that it might be part of a relationship. So why would you?
- Bonnie: [12:09](#) Yeah.
- Anne: [12:09](#) It's gross if you're in grade six.
- Bonnie: [12:11](#) And it's really natural for them to ask questions around these two because puberty takes place so that reproduction can happen in the future if that person wants to. And sex goes hand in hand with that. So one doesn't really make sense without the other. So it's a very natural thought progression for them to be asking questions around that. And we often get asked questions around how do I actually talk to my parents about these things.
- Anne: [12:36](#) What would prevent a parent or a carer talking about this? What would they be worried about?
- Bonnie: [12:40](#) Yeah. Often parents, when we work with parents ask us how do they actually have the talk? How do they begin this? How did they start it? And our advice is always that having the one off talk really isn't what you want to be aiming for. So having an ongoing conversation around these topics is what we ultimately want everyone to be able to do. We encourage discussions to begin early and they continue on throughout the duration of your young person's body changes and thinking and feeling changes, which can last a lot longer than those body changes. It's really something that you begin early and continue for the rest of their development.
- Bonnie: [13:22](#) Once we've made this recommendation though to start these conversations early and to keep them going, some parents often come back with a lot of anxiety around, well, I haven't begun these conversations yet, so what do I do now? We always say that it's never too early to start. Please initiate whenever you feel that you can. And the other bit of advice is don't wait for the young person to ask you. Often young people are really reluctant or don't have the confidence to come up and begin these conversations with their grownups. So it really falls on us as parents and carers to initiate these discussions with our young people.
- Anne: [14:01](#) A really big question that grownups have is what are some strategies to manage the teen mood swings that are happening in my house?

- Bonnie: [14:11](#) The dreaded mood swings. If I had a magic wand and could solve all of those, I think I'd be a very rich woman. But patience is the key here and I know that's an easy thing to say and another thing to enact, but it's really important to try and understand I guess where the emotion is coming from because that can be really helpful in resolving whatever might be going on for that young person as well. So trying to figure out is it due to a lack of information, like if we go back to say that puzzle activity I was explaining it. Do they have all of the pieces of the puzzle or can you supplement them with more information to help them along their way?
- Bonnie: [14:46](#) And this is something that you can work on together. If you don't have all of the information, you can research it and find it out together. Or is the emotion or behavior coming from a place of the young person trying to establish maybe their identity, a sense of autonomy, maybe a sense of independence or maybe an increased need for privacy, which are all really natural and normal changes and developments that do occur during puberty.
- Bonnie: [15:13](#) Keeping communication open is important and then maybe the need to re-establish some boundaries and some expectations in relationships as well.
- Anne: [15:24](#) Bonnie, thank you for talking to me.
- Bonnie: [15:28](#) You're welcome. Thank you for having me.
- Anne: [15:29](#) Awesome. Thanks so much. The end.
- Bonnie: [15:31](#) Thanks.
- Anne: [15:34](#) Our suggestions, suggested approaches for how to talk about puberty with the young people. Bring it up before the changes start to occur. For some children, this might be as young as seven or eight. Have some books, references that your child can access. Have a think back to your own experience of puberty and the information you did get or didn't get but needed. Be patient with the young person as they start to become more independent. If you want an extra resources to help you have these sorts of conversations with your young person, I'll just list a few now.
- Anne: [16:10](#) Books are really great to have as an offline resource. There are lots of great information online as well for adults and young people. It's a really good idea to search together so adults can

assess if this site is reputable. Putting health in the search is a good idea. Avoid searching for specific puberty changes such as pubic hair or breast development. Grownups know what's going to come up when you search those things. Children might not.

Anne:

[16:38](#)

Books about puberty, Puberty Boy or Puberty Girl by Geoff Price. Secret Boys, Secret Girls Business are really fantastic as well. Really simple information for young people. Kidshealth.org has puberty information. Raising Children also has information and so does Better Health. If you want more information about Family Planning Victoria programs, please go to our website, fpv.org.au. You can find out more information about us there. Also follow us on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter. Please look out for or subscribe to our next podcast.