

Sexual Development



KEY TAKEAWAY

The way you touch, care for and talk about your toddler's body sends important messages.

Think about your own values and beliefs and what you want to communicate to your child about sexuality. Consider:

- ✓ using medical or scientific terms for all body parts, from nose to vagina
- ✓ remembering that curiosity about the body is normal
- ✓ thinking ahead about how you'll answer your toddler's questions, so you're less anxious when they come up
- ✓ talking about the difference between what's okay in public and what's meant for private



TRY THIS

Let your child decide who he wants to hug and kiss. This teaches him that he has control over his body.

Sexual Development by Age

From birth to 24 months, your toddler may:

- enjoy being naked
- like to touch parts of their body, including genitals
- get erections or vaginal lubrication as a natural reflex

From 24 to 36 months, your toddler may:

- touch their genitals or masturbate
- notice differences between boys and girls
- explore bodies ("play doctor") with a same-age playmate
- be interested in body functions



DANGER

Although there can be many reasons for changes in your child's behaviour, some changes may signal abuse. Talk with your health care provider if your child:

- develops a strong, constant focus on their own and others' genitals
- doesn't follow your rules around respecting and not touching others' private areas
- has discharge, swelling or bruising in the genital area

Masturbating and Exploring With Other Children



DID YOU KNOW

It's as normal for your toddler to touch their genitals as it is to explore their toes or fingers.

Toddlers are naturally curious about their bodies. And once they begin to explore, they quickly learn that touching their genitals feels good.

If your toddler is touching themselves in public, remind them that genitals are personal areas, best explored in private spaces like their own bedroom. Offer a toy or other distraction.

If they're exploring genitals with another child of similar age, calmly tell them their genitals are private and shouldn't be touched or looked at by other people unless they have given them permission. Re-direct them to another activity, and ask them if they have questions.

If they're exploring genitals with an older child, calmly talk with your child about what happened. Tell your child they haven't done anything wrong but remind them that no one should touch or look at your child's genitals without their permission. Talk with your health care provider if you have concerns.