

Busy Bodies

A booklet about puberty and adolescence for you and your parents



sexualwellbeing.ie



How to get the Busy Bodies Resources

Busy Bodies Booklets can be downloaded or ordered from:
www.healthpromotion.ie

Teachers can register on the site and order multiple copies.

Busy Bodies Video can be streamed or downloaded from:
www.healthpromotion.ie/health/inner/busy_bodies

The video is the original and does not contain the new booklet material.

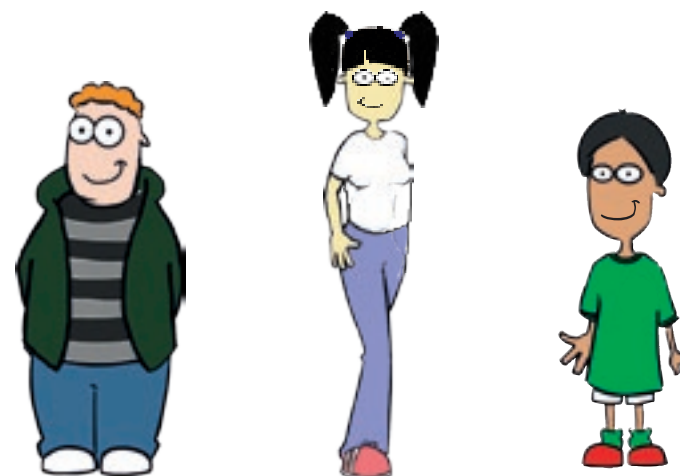
To Parents/Carers and Teachers

Welcome to **Busy Bodies**. This is an updated version of the booklet that was originally published in 2008. It will provide useful and supportive information about the physical and emotional changes that children will experience during puberty, the basics of reproduction, and how young people can look after themselves as they grow up.

Parents and carers can use the booklet alone or in tandem with the accompanying video material, as a support and source of information for themselves and their child during puberty.

Teachers can use the booklet and video clips to support preparation for teaching and learning in Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) as a part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE); an integral part of the primary school curriculum. The **Busy Bodies** booklet and video material do not, in themselves, comprise an RSE programme. They cover a range of pubertal and adolescent issues and can be used, along with other resources, activities and teaching methodologies to meet the students' learning needs during this important developmental stage.

Schools can order multiple copies of the booklet to be sent home for follow-up RSE by parents and carers.



To Young People

Hi!

This book will help you understand and manage some of the changes you will go through during puberty and adolescence. Sometimes the words 'puberty' and 'adolescence' are used as if they are the same thing, but although they are linked, they are not the same.

Puberty describes the physical changes that happen when your body starts to become more like an adult's.

Adolescence describes the stage in your life between being a child and an adult, covering the teenage years.

The booklet will tell you about both. It will also support the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme that you are doing at school. We have tried to make the booklet as easy as possible for you to read and to understand, and we hope you find it helpful.

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Introducing Puberty

Introducing Puberty

This can be a very busy time in your life.

You will soon be changing school. You will be meeting lots of new people, making new friends and learning new things.

You may start to lose interest in some of the games and toys that you used to enjoy.

And you will begin to notice your body changing and that your feelings are changing too.



That's why
we call it a
Busy Body

Your body is (or it soon will be) starting to develop and change in different ways, getting ready to become an adult body.

PUBERTY
"PYOU-ber-tee"

The time in your life when all these changes are happening to your body is called **puberty**.

The time when your body gradually changes from a child's body into the body of an adult.

These changes happen slowly, over a number of years.

You will not suddenly become an adult, but your body is getting ready for life as an adult.

Puberty usually starts in the female body at around the age of 10 to 12, though it can be much earlier (even as young as 8) or a good bit later (14 or older). Puberty usually starts a little later in the male body (9 - 14) but this is not always the case.

Changes can happen any time between the ages of 8 and 18. It is different for everyone.

Our bodies change at their own pace. By the time you are grown up, you will have an adult body, even if while you are young it feels as if it is never going to happen.

Puberty can be a very exciting time, but it can be confusing too.

If you are confused or worried about how your body is changing, (or about how it is not changing yet), it is a good idea to talk to your mum or dad about it.

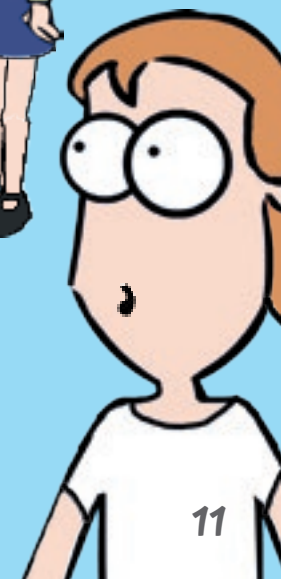
Or you might prefer to talk to another person in your family or to some other adult that you trust.

Your teacher might also be a good person to talk to.



Remember:
all the adults you know
went through puberty too –
that's how they got
to be adults!

Why Does Puberty Happen?

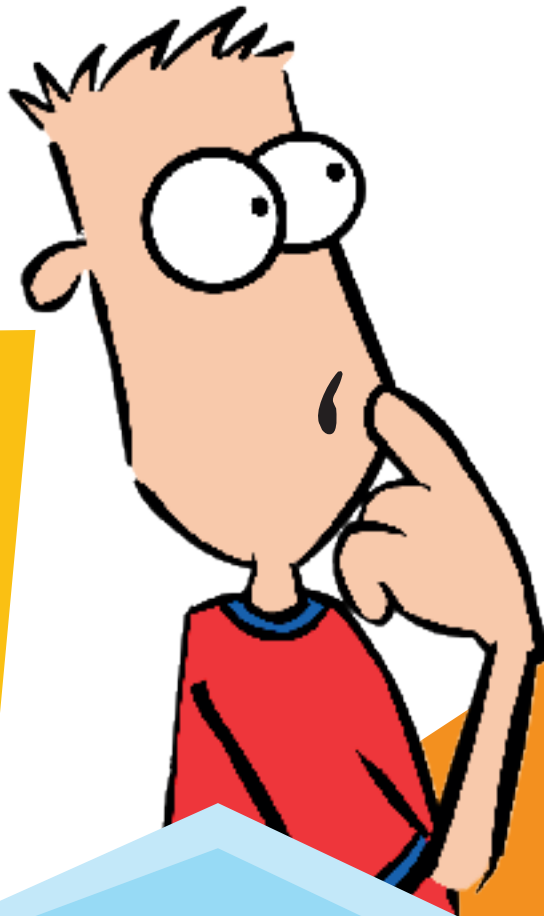


Why Does Puberty Happen?

Puberty is a part of growing up. Puberty happens because your body produces chemicals called **sex hormones**.

Sex hormones

Chemicals that make your body act like an adult male or an adult female body.



When you reach the age of puberty these chemicals start to become active. They give a signal to your body to start changing and developing into an adult.

That is what makes puberty happen. But remember it's different for everybody.

If you are born male, the main sex hormone in your body is called **testosterone**.

The main job of testosterone is to make your body male.

Testosterone

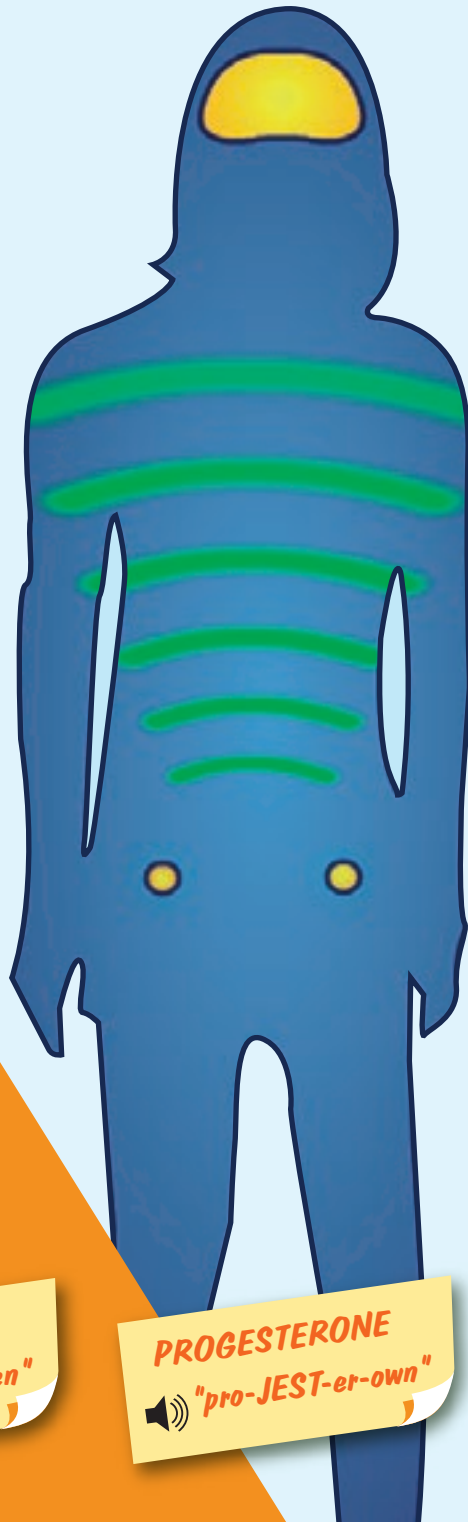
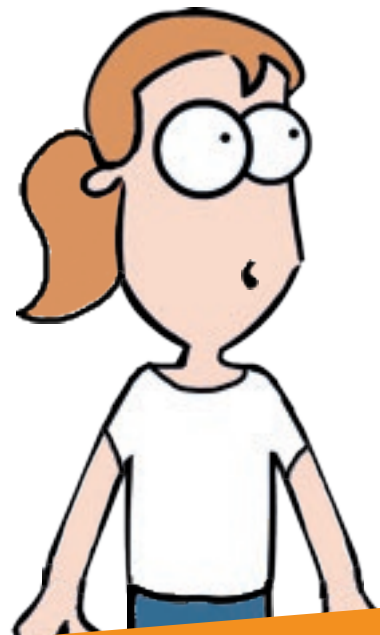
The main male hormone



If you are born female,
you have two main sex
hormones in your body.

These are **oestrogen**
and **progesterone**.

They work together
to make your body female.



Oestrogen and Progesterone

The two main female
sex hormones

OESTROGEN
"EAST-roe-jen"

PROGESTERONE
"pro-JEST-er-own"



What Happens to the Male Body?

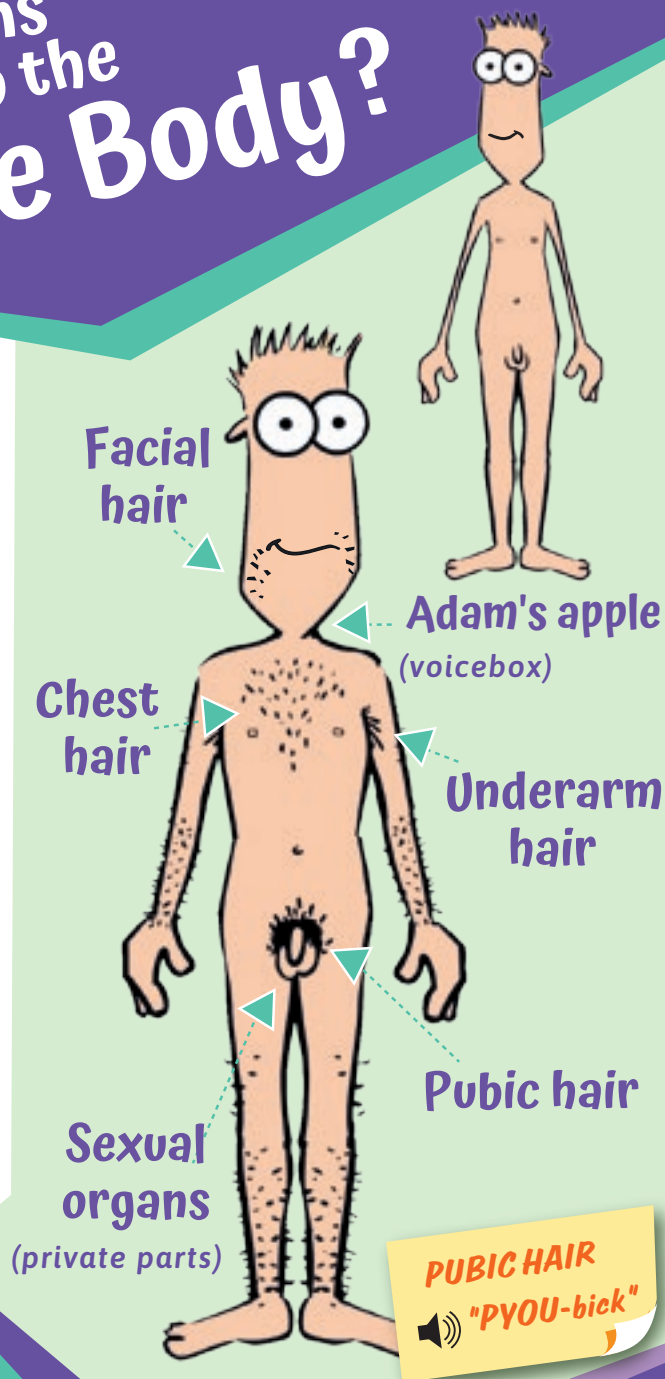
What Happens to the Male Body?

All through your childhood, your body has been growing. But as you reach puberty, your body starts to develop in a different way. Remember though that everyone is different, so change is different for everyone.

You might notice that you suddenly get taller and your chest and shoulders gradually start to fill out and get broader.

As puberty kicks in, you will start to grow hair on your body, particularly above your penis (**pubic hair**) and under your arms.

Body hair grows quite slowly. You may be an adult before it has all grown.



Later you may get some hair on your chest too and on your arms and legs.

You will also start to grow hair on your face, though this might not be for a long time yet. This is called **facial hair**.

At your age, facial hair grows slowly and you will probably not be able to grow an actual beard until you are a good bit older.

When you start to get facial hair, you can begin to shave it off if you like, though you won't need to do this very often until you are older.

You could ask a trusted adult for advice about shaving. It might be particularly useful to ask an older male relative.

It's quite tricky to get it right in the beginning, so it's good to have a bit of help.



Some adults do not start to shave regularly until they are in their twenties.



And of course there are adults who don't shave because they like to grow their beards.

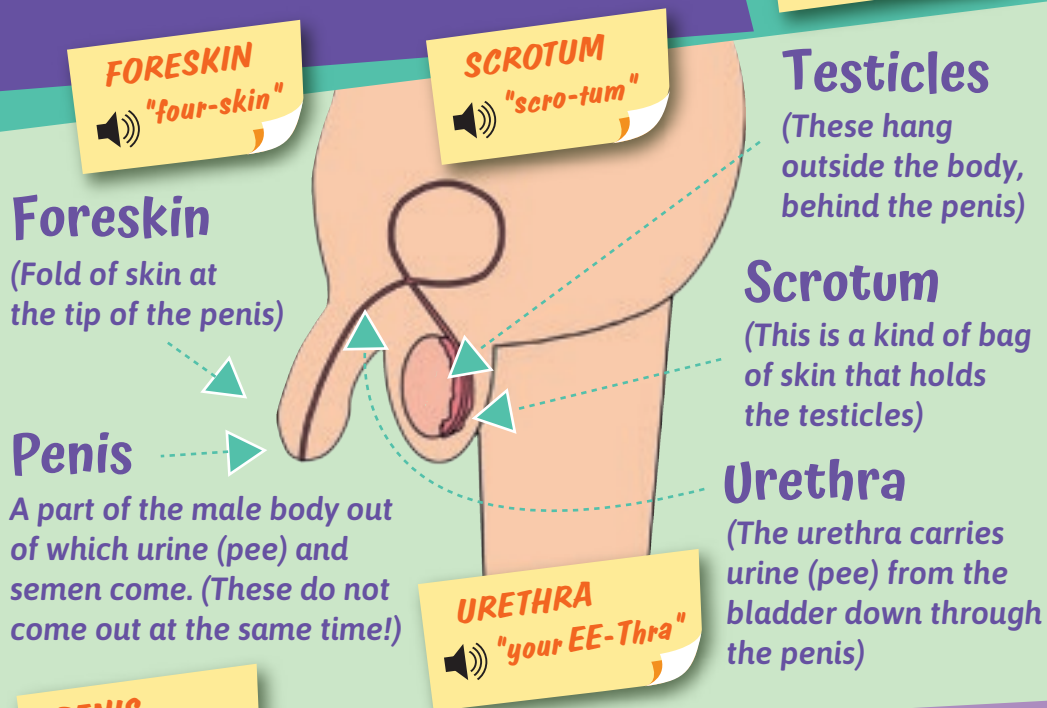
One of the most noticeable things that happens to you at puberty is that your voice changes or 'breaks'.

This means that the sound of your voice deepens.

It does not change all at once and, for some time, your voice can be at an in-between stage. Sometimes it can be quite deep and then suddenly it might be squeaky.

This can sound funny but after a while it will settle down.

You may have heard other words for these body parts, but on this diagram you can see the correct ones.



PENIS
"PEE-niss"

BLADDER
"blah-der"

Bladder
A part of the body that stores urine

Your sexual organs, sometimes called your 'private parts', will also grow and develop during puberty.

Your **penis** will get a bit longer and thicker and it may get darker in colour.

Circumcision

Some families have their male children circumcised, usually when they are babies. This means that the fold of skin at the tip of the penis (foreskin) is cut away. This is sometimes done for medical, religious or cultural reasons.

CIRCUMCISION
"sir-come-SIZZH-un"



Some boys worry about the size of their penis, and that is quite normal. But penises come in all shapes and sizes and that's perfectly normal too.

SEMEN
"SEE-min"

It is important to make sure that your penis stays clean. If you are circumcised (your foreskin is removed) your penis will automatically be washed with the rest of your body when you are in the bath or shower. If you have a foreskin, gently pull it back a little and wash underneath with warm water. Never pull your foreskin back any further than it will easily go as this may cause injury. Use a mild or non-perfumed soap to avoid making your skin sore.

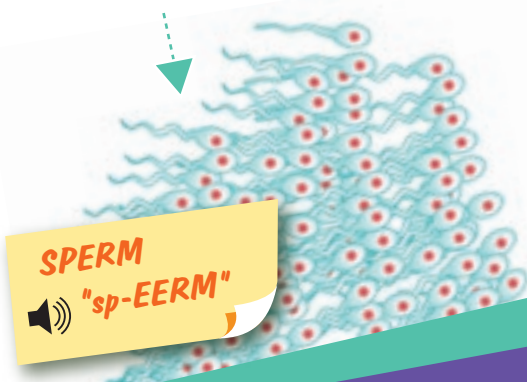
Your **testicles** will also grow during puberty. It's normal for each testicle to be a little different in size.

Testicles make testosterone, and once puberty begins, they will also start to make **sperm**.

Semen is a whitish fluid which carries millions and millions of tiny sperm cells.

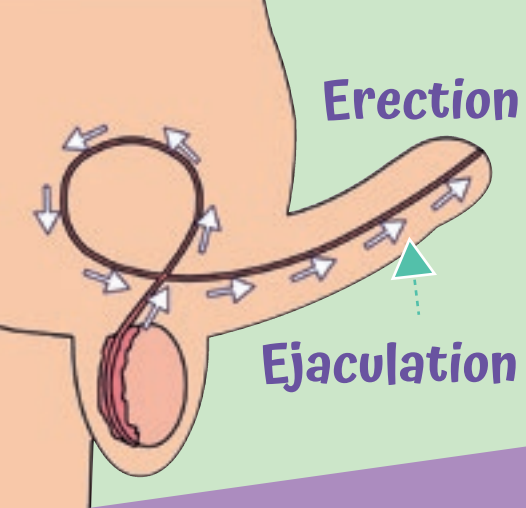
Semen
(Fluid that carries sperm)

Sperm
(Tiny tadpole-shaped cells)



SPERM
"sp-EERM"

A sperm cell from a male body is needed to fertilise an egg (ovum) from a female body to make a baby.



Erection

Ejaculation

As you can see on the diagram, semen comes out of your body from the same place as urine (pee) – but not, of course, at the same time.

ERECTION

Speaker icon "ee-WRECK-shun"

EJACULATION

Speaker icon "ee-jack-you-LAY-shun"

It's important during puberty to get to know your body and how it feels, looks and works. Changes at this time are normal, but it is important to talk to a trusted adult if you have questions or are worried about anything.

As you get older you will probably get more **erections**.

An erection is when extra blood rushes into your penis, making it hard for a while. Sometimes semen may spurt out from the tip. Your penis will then shrink back to its normal size.

When semen comes out of your penis, this is called **ejaculation**. You don't always ejaculate when you have an erection.

An erection usually happens when you become sexually excited, but during puberty, erections can happen for no particular reason.

They are really a sign that your body is developing and getting ready for adulthood.

Sometimes you can ejaculate in your sleep. This is called having a 'wet dream' and it is very common during puberty.



Remember:

Everybody is different and everyone grows in different ways and at different rates. This is normal.

What Happens to the Female Body?

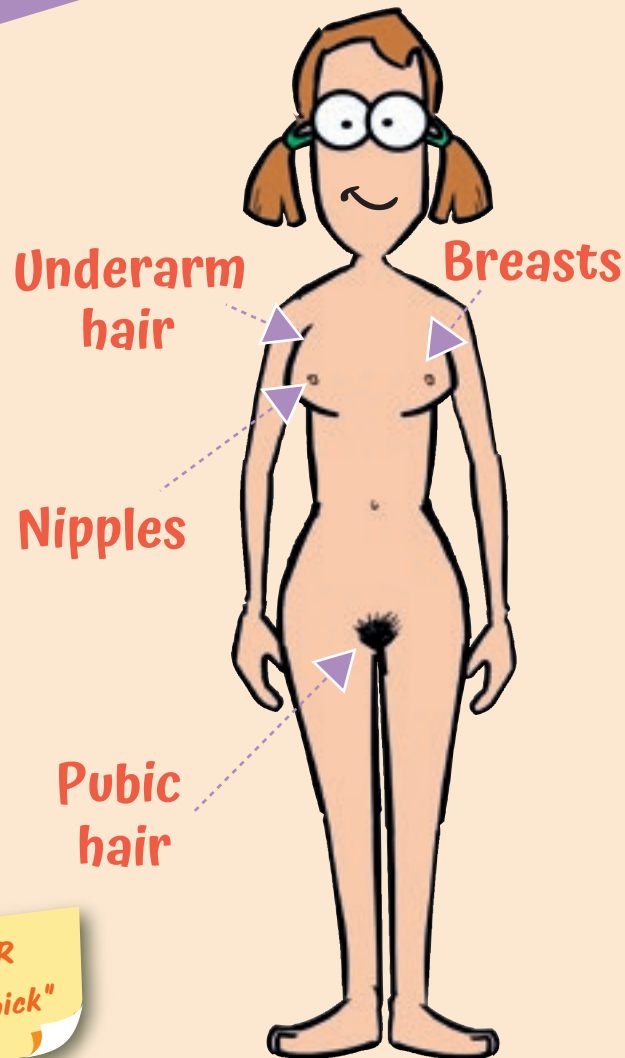


What Happens to the Female Body?

All through your childhood, your body has been growing, but as you reach puberty, your body starts to develop in a different way.

As you come to the age of puberty, you might notice that you get a bit taller and your shape slowly starts to change.

Over time, your hips will start to get a little curvier and your **breasts** will start to develop. Your overall body shape usually changes as you grow. This is all perfectly normal.



PUBIC HAIR
"PYOU-bick"



You will start to get hair under your arms and maybe some on your legs too.

You could ask a trusted adult for advice on hair removal. It might be particularly useful to ask an older female relative.

You may also get hair at the base of your tummy, and between your legs. This is called **pubic hair**.



Some girls worry about the size of their breasts, and that is quite normal. But breasts come in all shapes and sizes. Your breasts can also be different from each other. This is perfectly normal too!

There is no health reason to get rid of body hair, but some people do and some don't. It's a personal choice. It's up to you.



Urethra

Where urine (pee) comes out of your body.

Clitoris

A fleshy bump near the urethra.

Uterus/Womb

This is a place where a baby can grow. Another word for the uterus is the 'womb' (woom).

Ovary

(like the word 'over' with a y on the end). You have two ovaries, each of which contains lots of tiny ova (eggs).

Vulva

All of the female's outside sexual organs – (what you can see outside)

URETHRA

"your-EE-thra"

CLITORIS

"CLIT-or-iss"

VULVA

"vul-va"

LABIA

"LAY-bee-ya"

VAGINA

"vaj-EYE-na"

UTERUS

"YOU-ter-us"

CERVIX

"SIR-vix"

FALLOPIAN

"fah-LOPE-e-yan"

Labia

Folds of skin covering the urethra and the entrance to the vagina.

Vagina

A passage leading from the womb to the vulva.

Cervix

Narrow opening of the womb.

Fallopian Tube

Connects the ovaries to the uterus (womb).

From puberty on, you may notice a yellow or white stain in your underwear at times. This is a normal fluid or discharge that helps clean and moisten your **vagina**.

You will usually get your period about 6 – 12 months after you first see this fluid from your vagina.

It's good to wash the **vulva** area every day. This can be done just with warm water, or you can use a mild or non-perfumed soap to avoid skin irritation. Never wash inside your vagina. It is not necessary and can cause it to become sore or itchy.

Babies are born through the vagina.

Menstruation (Periods)

One of the big changes that happens to your body when you reach puberty is that you will start to have **periods**.

This means that, for a few days every month, blood comes slowly from your uterus and goes out of the body through the vagina.

In order to understand why you have periods, you first need to understand what goes on inside the female body.

Every month, the female body goes through a whole set of changes.

It begins with a process you usually don't even feel, called **ovulation**.

When you were born, your body already had a whole lot of eggs inside.

These eggs are tiny cells, so small that it would be hard to see one even if it was outside your body.

MENSTRUATION

🔊 "mens-true-AY-shun"

The correct word
for having periods is
menstruation

OVULATION

🔊 "of-you-LAY-shun"

The correct word
for these eggs
is **ova**.
(just like the
word 'oval'
– egg-shaped!)

Your body's eggs are in your ovaries, and once a month-or so, (after you reach puberty), one of the eggs ripens.

This ripening of the egg is called ovulation.

At ovulation, the egg moves out of its ovary and travels along the fallopian tube towards the uterus.

If the egg joins with a sperm while it is in the fallopian tube, it might grow into a baby when it gets to the uterus.

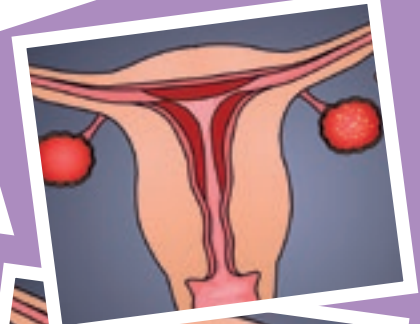
Even though most eggs do not grow into a baby, your body prepares for a possible pregnancy each time.

The lining of the uterus gets thick and soft, like a nest, getting ready for the baby that might grow there.

After a while, if there is no baby starting to grow, your body needs to get rid of the egg and the lining of the uterus.

This comes out, in a slow flow of blood, through your vagina. Menstrual blood is thicker and darker than the blood you would see if you cut your finger because it comes from the uterus and contains tissue as well as blood.

After a few days, the flow of blood stops. The next month, it starts all over again with another egg. This is called the **menstrual cycle**.



What to Do When You Get Your Period

Having periods takes a bit of getting used to. To protect your underwear during a period you can use a **sanitary pad** or a **tampon**.

When you first get periods it is probably better to use pads rather than tampons because pads are easier to use.

A sanitary pad is made of soft, absorbent material.

It has a sticky strip on the back. The strip is protected by a piece of plastic which you pull away and you can then stick the pad to the inside of your underwear.

It can seem as if there is a lot of blood, but actually, if you gathered all the blood you lose during a period, it would only be a few spoonfuls.

You will need to use sanitary pads or tampons during your period to keep your clothes clean.



You need to change this pad every few hours especially on the first few days of each period because that is when the flow of blood is at its heaviest.

Wrap the used pad in toilet paper, and put it in a bin. Don't flush it down the loo, or it might block the system!

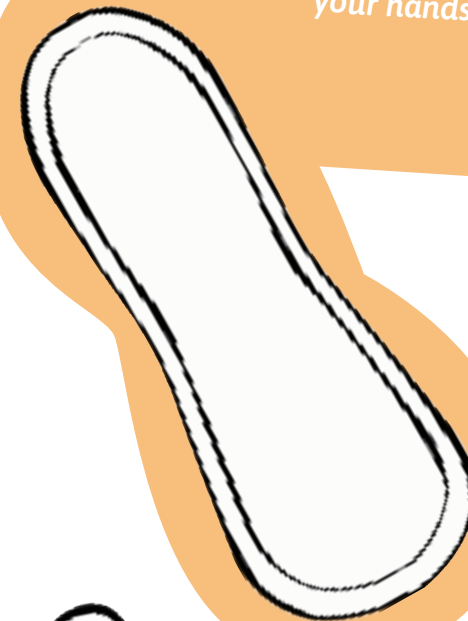
You should put on a fresh pad (or maybe even use two, or a larger sized one) before you go to bed.

After a while, when you are used to dealing with periods, you could change to tampons if you like.

A **tampon** is a tightly packed tube of cotton wool which goes into your vagina.

Tampons come in a range of sizes. Small ones are best for young girls. Some women find tampons more comfortable to use during their period, especially if they are active or involved in sport.

A sanitary pad is sometimes called a **sanitary towel**. But it is not like the kind of towel you dry your hands on!



Tampon

What to Do When You Get Your Period

When you are putting the tampon into your vagina make sure the loop of thread hangs outside your body.

Once the tampon is in place, you can't feel it.

It is particularly important to change your tampon every few hours as it is not good for your body to leave one in for too long.

You tug gently on the loop of thread that hangs outside your body and the tampon will slide out.

Once you start to have periods or, if you think your body is nearly ready, you could keep a sanitary pad handy in your schoolbag. If your period starts while you are in school, don't worry, there will be staff there to help you. It's a good idea to make a note of when each period starts so that you will know roughly when the next one is due and be ready for it.

If you have a smartphone or other similar device, there are many free apps that you can download to help you to track your menstrual cycle.

It is important to wash your hands before and after changing a pad or tampon.

Some tampons are supposed to be flushable, but it is better to wrap up a used tampon and put it in a bin.



Remember not to leave a tampon inside your body at night or at the end of your period.

When you first start to get periods they will probably not come regularly every month.

In time, most bodies settle into a rhythm and you will find it easier to know when a period is due.

You may feel a bit grumpy and tired a few days before each period begins.

Usually this feeling of being in a bad mood goes away once your period actually starts.

You may get a pain or a kind of dragging feeling down in the lower part of your tummy just before or during your period.

A pain like this is usually at its worst on the first day of your period, and it should ease off after that.

Some people don't get period pains, but most have some pain or discomfort with their periods from time to time.

If you have a bad pain, you could talk to your mum or dad, an older sister, or someone you know well (maybe your teacher or an older friend you trust) to give you advice.

There are also eco-friendly sanitary protection methods available, you might like to check them out once you're used to having periods.

Having a shower every day, or at least a good wash, is important during your period, and it will help you to feel better.



The word 'cramp' is sometimes used to describe period pain.

What to Do When You Get Your Period

You could take a painkiller but having a good soak in a warm bath can also be very comforting. So can a hot water bottle on your tummy, especially at night time.

Gentle exercise can also help. If the pain is very bad, your family doctor will be able to give help and advice.

Having your period may make you feel out of sorts. But it should not usually stop you from doing the things you enjoy, such as playing sports or running around.



If you want to swim during your period, you will need to use a tampon instead of a pad. It might be a good idea not to swim at this time of the month until you feel confident about using tampons

Remember:

Everyone is different and everyone's body develops at its own pace and in its own way.



Conception and Birth



Conception and Birth

Now that you know a little about how bodies change during puberty to make it possible for adults to have babies, it is a good idea to know a little bit about how that happens.

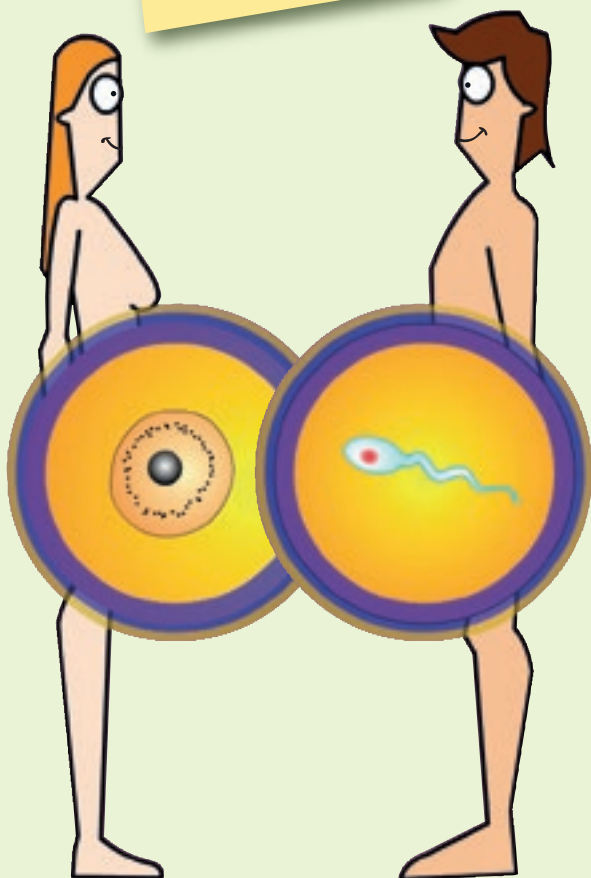
Conception happens when a sperm and an ova (egg) come together. This is how a baby is made (**conceived**).

The sperm and the egg can come together to make a baby in a few different ways. Most babies are made when a man and a woman have **sexual intercourse**.

Sexual intercourse is sometimes called 'having sex' or 'sleeping with' someone.

Some people need medical help to have a baby. There are a number of reasons for this and a number of ways doctors can help.

CONCEPTION
"con-SEP-shun"



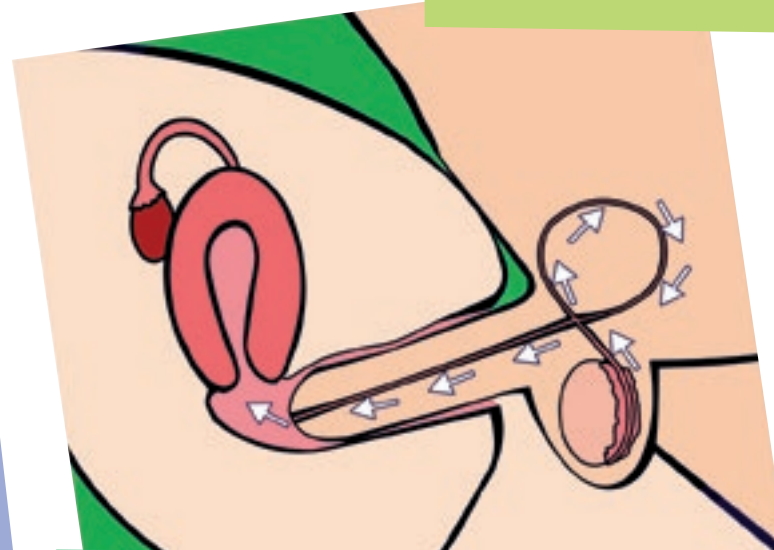
CONCEIVED
"con-SEE-vd"

Before a man and woman have sexual intercourse the male and female bodies become excited. This means that the man's penis becomes hard and erect and the woman's vagina becomes wet (this is normal – it's not pee!). Sexual intercourse between a man and a woman happens when a man's erect penis enters into the woman's vagina.

After a while, the man ejaculates inside the woman's body, which means that semen comes out of his penis into her vagina.

When you reach puberty, your body is getting ready for making babies. But it will be a long time yet before you are ready to decide if you want to have sex or make babies. You still have a lot of changing and growing to do and lots of new things to learn before then.

In fact, the law in Ireland protects you from feeling any pressure about having sex too soon by making it illegal for anyone to have sex with a young person under 17.



Penis in the vagina

The semen carries millions of tiny sperm, which immediately start to swim up the vagina, towards the woman's womb (uterus), through the cervix.

If the woman has ovulated recently, there will be an egg inside her body that is ready to be fertilised.

When one of the millions of sperm reaches the egg, it may join with it and **fertilise** it.

This can be the beginning of the egg's development into a baby.

The fertilised egg settles into the womb, which has a nice thick lining in place, ready for the growing baby.

While the baby is growing and developing inside the womb, the woman is **pregnant**.

Go back to pages 26-27 if you need to remind yourself about ovulation.

The woman doesn't feel this part, and she can't see it either. It is all happening on the inside of her body.

It only takes a single sperm to do this. The first sperm to enter the egg is the one that fertilises it.

If the woman has not ovulated recently, there will be no egg ready for the sperm. There will be no chance of pregnancy this time.



And after about nine months, the baby is ready to be born.

The muscles of the uterus start to work hard to push the baby out of the uterus, down the vagina and out into the world. Sometimes the woman needs an operation to help the baby to be born. This is called having a **caesarean section**.

CAESAREAN
"se-ZAIR-e-an"

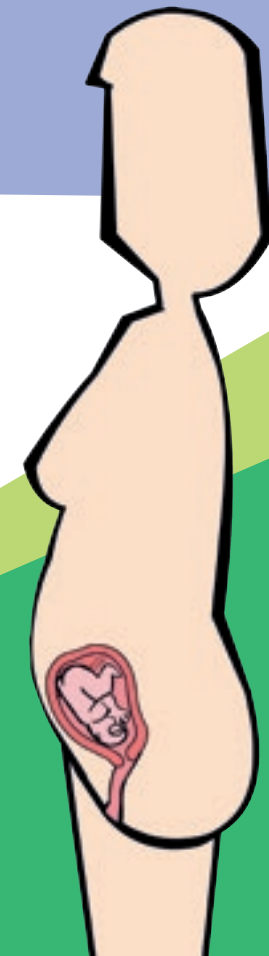
Sexual intercourse does not always result in a pregnancy. There are ways that the sperm and the egg can be prevented from joining together and making a baby. The word for this is **contraception**. There are different types of contraception and you will learn more about this in post-primary school

CONTRACEPTION
"con-tra-SEP-shun"

Ovulation and periods stop during pregnancy.

A missed period is often how someone first notices they are pregnant.

It is important for a woman who is, or who may become, pregnant to take a vitamin called folic acid to help keep her baby healthy.



When a woman has a baby, her breasts naturally make milk to feed the baby.

The woman holds her baby close to her body, and the baby sucks the milk from her breasts.

This is called **breastfeeding**.

Breastfeeding is best for babies. It provides food, strengthens their immune system, helps the brain to develop and reduces the chance of them becoming overweight. However, if a woman is unable to or decides not to breastfeed, she may feed her baby from a bottle with milk that comes from her breasts or she might use a shop-bought baby formula.



Introducing Adolescence



Introducing Adolescence

As your body changes during puberty, you will begin to notice other changes in the way you feel, think and behave. This is because you have begun your journey to becoming an adult.

This stage between being a child and being an adult is called 'adolescence' and people in this stage are often called 'adolescents'.

Your feelings and interests will change. You will have more of your own opinions. You will be able to make more decisions for yourself, and your parents and teachers may give you more responsibility and freedom.

This will all help you to grow up to become an independent adult.



Gender Identity

We all have a **gender identity**.

Gender Identity is how we think of ourselves as a boy, a girl, neither or both.

This feeling of who we are starts when we are little and becomes more obvious as we go through adolescence.

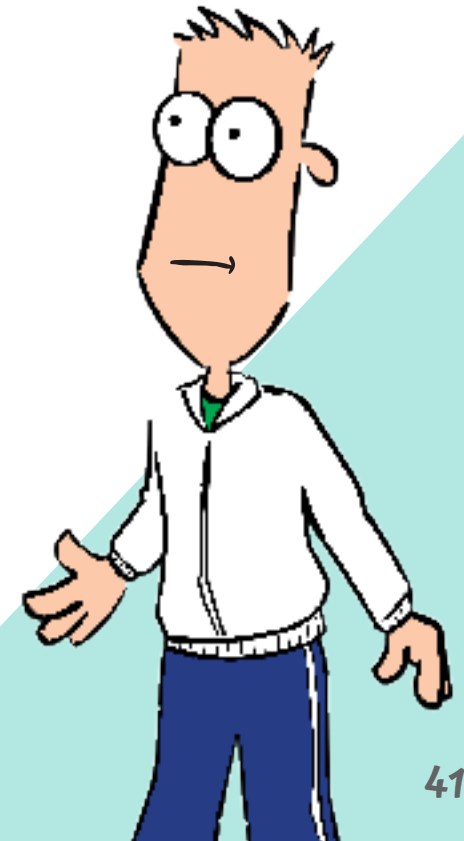
Traditionally, our society has put everyone into two gender categories – boys (men) and girls (women).

When a baby is born the new baby is initially identified as a boy if it has a penis and as a girl if it has a vulva. This is what's called the **biological sex** of the baby.

Most people born with a penis feel and know that they are a boy and most people born with a vulva feel and know that they are a girl. These feelings, interests and beliefs all make up what is called your gender.

When people have strong ideas about how boys and girls should behave based on their gender, this is called **gender stereotyping**. This can upset people and can prevent them from behaving in the way they want to.

For example, many children like to dress and behave in non-traditional ways but still see themselves as being a boy or a girl – the gender they were given at birth.



Gender Identity

However, a small number of people may not feel that what they are called at birth (boy or girl) really fits them and may want to explore their gender identity to find out what is right for them.

If a person has a deep sense that their gender identity is different from the gender they were given at birth, they may describe themselves as **transgender**.

Some people who are transgender may want to live their lives as boys, some as girls, some somewhere in between and some as no gender at all.

If you have questions about your gender identity, puberty can be a particularly confusing time. Your body may be changing in ways that don't match your sense of yourself.

Remember, it's great that you're starting to understand your own body and your own feelings. Take your time; there's no need for you to be under any pressure to make decisions about this.

If you're questioning your gender identity, talk to a trusted adult in your life, including your parents, wider family and teachers. They will be able to find you the right information and support and give you all the reassurance and love you need.

Looking After Yourself

Feelings

Your hormones are very active at this time and hormones can really affect your moods and feelings.

You may find that you lose your temper more easily and you can sometimes have rows with your family or friends for no real reason.

It's all normal, but it can feel hard at the time. And you might feel like you're the only one going through this. But actually, it's all part of growing up and many others feel like this too.

If you feel low, it's good to talk to someone: your parents, other trusted adults, your brother or sister or your friends.

They might not be able to cheer you up, but just talking helps.



Staying Fit and Healthy

Another way to cope with all the confusing feelings is to concentrate on looking after your body.

Eating well is one way you can have more energy. It also makes your muscles and bones strong and healthy and gives you healthy-looking hair and nails. And you'll feel your best too.

You can build strong bones at your age by eating foods rich in calcium, for example, milk, yogurt and cheese.

Remember, taking regular meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner) gives your body the energy you need to grow, work and play.

Try to choose healthy snacks between meals and save sweets, chocolate and crisps for occasional treats.



And remember to drink enough water. Your body needs about eight to ten cups of fluid each day.

At least 60 mins of physical activity a day will help you stay fit and healthy and it doesn't have to be done all in the one go!

Physical activity can be fun. Find a friend who likes the same kinds of exercise as you do – running, cycling, dancing – or take up a sport – there are lots to choose from.

If you do something you really enjoy you'll want to do even more of it.



Hygiene

In adolescence your body sweats more, especially when you exercise.

Having a shower or a good wash every day, especially after you have been playing games or running around, will help you to keep fresh. You will feel better and your friends will appreciate it too!

You can use a deodorant under your arms after you have washed – but do wash first!

And remember to change your socks and underwear every day.



Looking after your skin

Your skin makes oil all the time to keep it soft.

During adolescence it can tend to make a bit more oil than it needs. The oil clogs up your pores, and you can get spots on your face and body.

Wash thoroughly with a mild soap and don't pick your spots – it only makes them worse.

As you get older your skin will generally settle down and the spots will go away.

If you have a lot of spots and it worries you, talk to your doctor.



They may be able to prescribe a special wash or cream that will help.

Healthy Relationships

During adolescence your relationships with family, friends and others will slowly begin to change. Bit by bit, you will make more choices and decisions for yourself.

This includes choices and decisions about how you treat others and how you expect them to treat you, so that your relationships are healthy and respectful.

In all healthy relationships, people make decisions about what they feel ok about doing, and other people respect this and don't push them to do things that they don't want to do.

Asking people if they want to do things is called **'looking for consent'**. People may say 'yes' or 'no' and their choice has to be respected

When do you need to ask for consent?

We need to ask for consent when we are doing most things with other people. Some examples of this might include:

- *borrowing something*
- *deciding on activities*
- *touching another person (kissing, hugging, etc.).*

Remember, consent is not only about saying what you want and don't want to do; it also means listening to and respecting the other person and their choices, even if the answer is 'No'.

While this might be disappointing, it is important to understand that no one should be pressurised into doing something that is not right or comfortable for them.

Here are some ways of saying 'No':



Remember, just because someone has agreed to something before, it doesn't mean that they have to keep on doing it. People have the right to change their minds at any time and say 'No'.

Consent of different kinds is something that you will learn more about as you grow up.

Consent about the body, who touches it and in what way, is always important.

As you go through adolescence and maybe start 'going out' with someone there will be even more times when it will be important for you to give and get consent.

When do you need to ask for consent?

Because some decisions are big and can have long-lasting results, the law says that there are limits to what a child or young person is legally allowed to agree or consent to.

For example, you have to be 16 or older to be able to consent to medical treatment and you have to be 17 or older to consent to sexual activity with someone.

To protect a young person from pressure to have sex, the law says it is a crime for anyone to have sex with a young person under 17.

This means that you are not legally old enough to agree to (or consent to) having sex until you are 17.

Many people wait until they are 17 or older, and in a relationship that is important to them, before they have sex for the first time.

17 is the age of sexual consent in Ireland.

This is really important for you to know and understand.

If anyone wants to touch you sexually or have you touch them, you should tell a trusted adult immediately.

You might be asked to keep it a secret. The person might say that what's happening is your fault or that it's because they love you but that's not true.

A trusted adult such as a parent, relative, teacher, youth worker, etc. will help you.

Attraction and Sexual Orientation



During your teenage years, you may find that you become extremely interested in and attracted to a particular person. You may feel that you are in love with that person as you think about them so much.

You might be attracted to someone of the same gender, someone of a different gender, both or neither. This is called your '**sexual orientation**' and it may change over time or stay the same.

It is important to know that all of these feelings are ok. It's also ok not to have any of these feelings at all.

It can feel great if the person you are attracted to feels the same about you,

but it can feel hard if they don't like you as much as you like them.

During adolescence, some young people start 'going out' together but many don't. People want different things at different times in their lives and this is completely normal. Try not to feel under pressure to 'go out' with someone just because your friends might be.

Sometimes it can seem that you are not like other people your age and that can be hard. The truth is most people feel like this. If you are confused about any of your feelings as you go through adolescence, it can really help to talk to somebody.

Taking care of yourself online



During adolescence you might start using social media more. This can be a great way to chat with your friends, to share interests, to get help with schoolwork and lots more.

On the downside, social media can also be used to hurt people, or to bully them. This is called **cyberbullying**. Cyberbullying is usually when something mean or nasty is posted about someone, or to someone, online or by text or emoji. It can be

sent directly to the person, or it can sometimes be shared with other people through social media. Just like any bullying, this can be used to cause real hurt to people.

The problem with cyberbullying is that things can be spread really quickly. Lots of people, even strangers, can post comments, emojis or likes. Once something is posted on social media it's very difficult or impossible to remove it.

Think about how you might feel if this happened to you. Being a 'bystander' – staying quiet about a mean comment or 'liking' it – is also contributing to cyberbullying.

As you get older and are using the internet more, you might be asked to send pictures of yourself to someone, or they might ask you to do something that you know is not good for you.

If someone asks you to do something that makes you feel uncomfortable, or if someone posts a cruel comment:

- **Don't reply**
- **Take a screen shot**
- **Block the sender**
- **Tell your parents or another adult you trust**

Remember that in Ireland it is against the law for anyone to send or receive sexual pictures of someone under 18. Sexual pictures usually show people's genitals or sexual activity.

If you have sent or received pictures like this (whether or not you asked for them), it is really important to tell a trusted adult so that they can help you.

Tips to help you be safe online:

- *Think before you post – once something goes online you have no control over it*
- *Don't share your password.*
- *Make sure not to post personal things like your name, school name or home address online*
- *Don't friend someone unless you know them*
- *Don't use your real name on profiles*
- *Don't post, like or share anything that can cause hurt to someone else*
- *Don't ask anyone for naked or semi-naked pictures of themselves*
- *Don't share naked or semi-naked pictures of yourself or other people*



Taking care of yourself online

Sometimes you might see something online that's not appropriate for your age. It can happen by accident or you might just be curious and search online for words or phrases that you have heard. This can often happen if you search for information on sex or sexual health.

If you decide to do this, depending on the site that you use, you might see sexual pictures or videos.

This content is not suitable for children and young people and some of it may even be illegal for adults to watch.

As a first step, turn off, close or turn over the device.

It is important for you to know that:

- *These websites are not suitable for you*
- *These websites do not teach you about respect or how to communicate with someone about sex*
- *Online sexual activity is usually only a performance. It is nothing like enjoyable, healthy sexual relationships between consenting adults in real-life*

It is normal to be curious, but the internet can sometimes give you wrong messages.

Remember:

If you see something online that upsets you or if you share or receive something that makes you feel uncomfortable, talk to someone you trust.

This might be a parent, an adult relative, a teacher, a youth worker, etc.

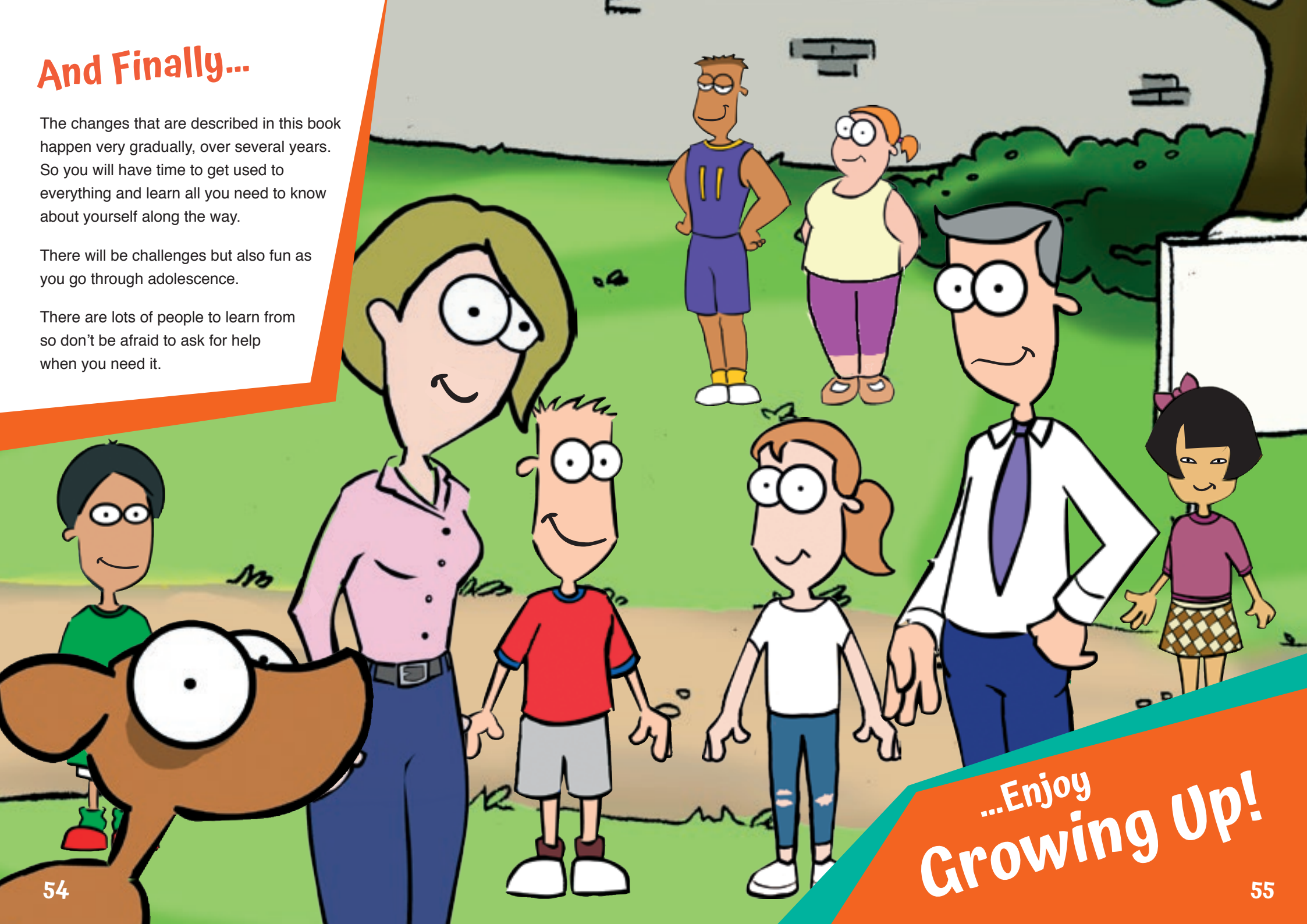


And Finally...

The changes that are described in this book happen very gradually, over several years. So you will have time to get used to everything and learn all you need to know about yourself along the way.

There will be challenges but also fun as you go through adolescence.

There are lots of people to learn from so don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it.



Busy Bodies

This edition of the Busy Bodies booklet was developed by:

HSE, Health Promotion and Improvement, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare
HSE, Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme

With thanks to the advisory group with representatives from:

- BeLonGTO Youth Service
- Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate
- HSE, Health Promotion and Improvement, Community Healthcare Organisation 1
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
- National Parents' Council – Primary
- Professional Development Service for Teachers
- Sexual Health Centre, Cork

With additional thanks to the PDST Health and Wellbeing Advisors

Design: Zest Creative Solutions

Original illustrations: Geronimo Productions / Additional illustrations: Treehouse Republic

Published by the HSE, Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme 2020