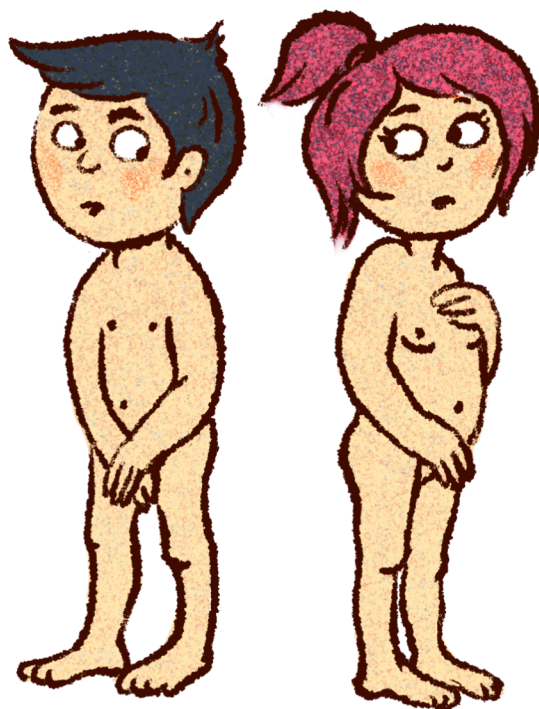


**MY BODY,**

**MY EMOTIONS**

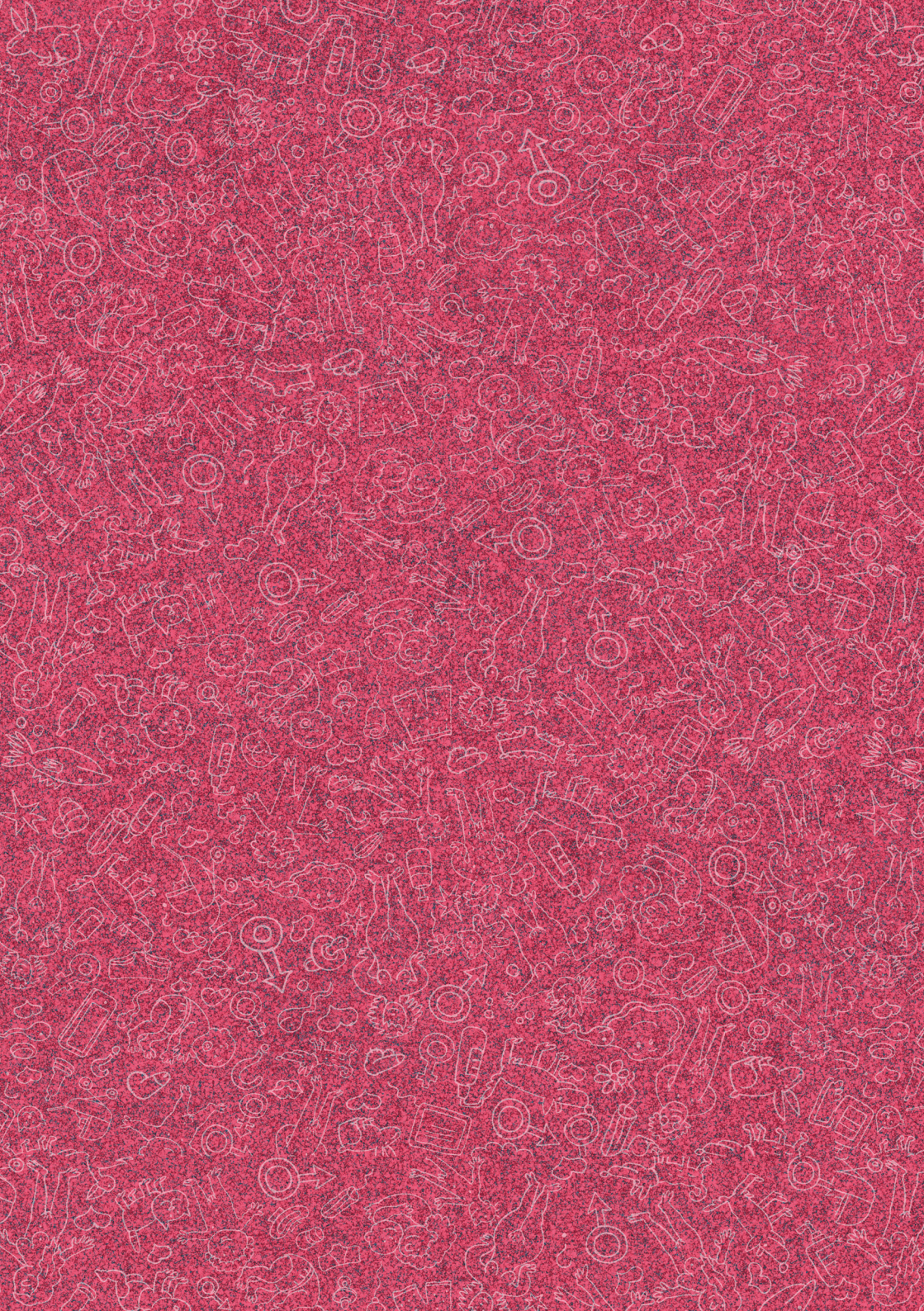


**Sexual education  
made easy!**

Handbook for parents

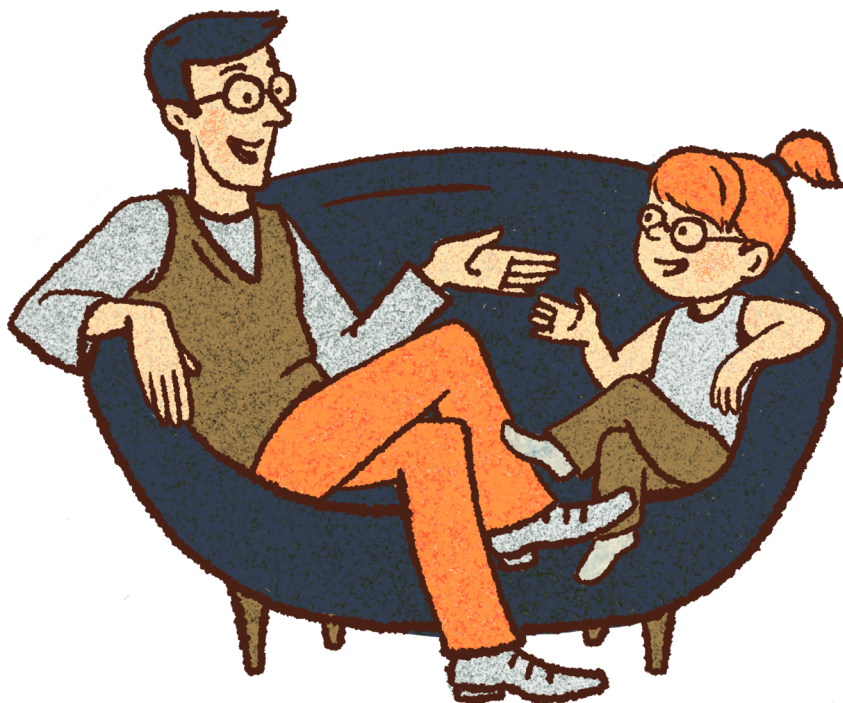
**7-9 YEARS OLD**







# Introduction



Dear parents and guardians, we are pleased that you have discovered our offer. This means that you are one of the adults who would like to accompany children safely and well on their way to adulthood, including in the area of sexual education. We would like to help you with this. Because: very few adults have learned to talk naturally about topics such as the body, love, sexuality and identity. Each person therefore has their own "sex education backpack" - well filled for some, but quite empty for others.

We want to help you fill the "individual compartments" of your backpack - so that you can answer all of the questions your children may have during their childhood and adolescence and are likely to ask you only when they realise that they will also get answers.

As adult family members, you are the first contact person(s) for your children - even if they have dedicated people in kindergarten and/or school who provide age-appropriate and sensitive sex education. You are the one who will name all parts of the body at the changing table or leave some out; who may answer questions about sexuality with "you are too young for that" or "interesting question, I have to think about how to answer it first".

The earlier you start to talk about the body, love, relationships, sexuality and identity as normal everyday topics, the easier it is for you - and also for your children. The older they get, the more embarrassing so-called "sex education talks" become. It is not uncommon for both sides to breathe a sigh of relief after these are over. It is better to guide your kids gently. Children who have learned that they can come to you with their questions and receive serious and accurate answers will also turn to you with their questions for a long time.

Parents want the best for their children. Therefore, it is even more important that you take any negative attitudes towards sexual education (be it through your own upbringing or media influences) seriously. We would like to offer you the opportunity to engage with this.

Sex education is an important part of abuse prevention because it makes things accessible to children by providing them with the words and information they need to express and communicate themselves in case of uncomfortable situations. You do not need to worry about overburdening your children with age-appropriate, loving sex education, or taking away their "innocence": You are taking away their ignorance. That is a big difference.

Children are sexual, because they are sexual beings, from the very beginning, not just from puberty. It is important not to compare children's sexuality with adult sexuality, but it is mainly characterised by playful, childlike curiosity. Observable behaviours include, for example, childlike exploration of the body, desire to look and show, and asking questions. Children are interested in differences between the sexes and how they themselves came to be from an early age.

Responding to questions sensitively and in an age-appropriate way does not "sexualise" children. It helps them to find a language. In this way, sexual education strengthens their self-confidence and protects them from assaults, as they can classify sexual acts better.



And for children who do not seem to have any questions? Maybe the questions were "overheard" or were considered "too early"... Children have very fine "antennas" and know who they can go to with their questions. If their thirst for knowledge is not satisfied by adult caregivers, they quickly find other ways (older siblings, media...). An educational book or a website is always a good introduction to the topic. It is important that you take your time beforehand and see whether the presentations, pictures, videos and also the language seem appropriate to you.

No adult can avoid "doing" sex education in some form: it begins with naming all the body parts at the changing table. How and if you answer a question later shows the child your attitude and values. Talking about the topics you encounter here is always linked to a value attitude that you pass on to your children. It therefore makes sense to think about these values at an early stage.

Pause for a moment: how, when, and where were you "enlightened" and by whom? Which topics came up? Which ones were left out (why)? How could it have been better? Did you have the education you would like your child to have? No? Then you belong to the vast majority. The good news: You can do better! And that is exactly what we would like to help you with.

This does not mean that you need to be a professional in all these matters. When your child asks you a question and you do not have a child-friendly answer in mind, take the time to think about it. Be authentic by saying, for example, "my parents did not educate me very well, but I want to do better." Get books that are appropriate for the age group and/or take a look at our App.

### **And why so early?**

- ▶ Because children become interested in gender differences at a very early age. This is not just about boys or girls, but about the perception of multiple femininities and masculinities. In this handbook, we use gender-neutral language which also makes people visible who cannot or do not want to fit into the two-gender system.
- ▶ Because children want to know where they "come from".
- ▶ Because they pick up sexualised terms/words in kindergarten and school and do not know how to interpret them.
- ▶ Because they are exposed to sexualised content in the media (from billboards to TV commercials to porn in digital media) at a very early

age and porn in particular should not be the first introduction to the topic.

- ▶ Because knowledge empowers children when they encounter/perceive gender diversity in everyday life. Children can embrace diversity/diverse lifestyles when they know about it and this is important to be able to coexist effectively in our society.
- ▶ Because well-educated children tend to allow themselves much more time with their first time having sex later on as teenagers, because they know roughly what to expect and they will not give in to peer pressure so easily. Children become empowered and are more responsible in dealing with love, sexuality and relationships.
- ▶ Because well-educated children are better protected from sexual assault: they have names for all their body parts (so they can articulate earlier when someone has touched their genitals, for example) and they know where sexuality "belongs" - namely with older adolescents or adults, if that is what both of them want. And that you are not allowed to do that with children.
- ▶ Because sex education is one of the most important building blocks in the prevention of child sexual abuse. The majority of perpetrators come from the child's close social environment; warning against "bad strangers" falls well short of the mark.

It is perfectly fine, by the way, if children are embarrassed about the subject if they are not used to talking about it. It is okay to laugh! And they are also allowed to feel grossed out: Encourage your children to have these feelings by clearly telling them: "As a child, it might be hard to imagine that this might be something nice - but no one is allowed to do that to a child either!" In this way you have - without frightening the child - woven the prevention of child sexual abuse into an educational talk.



## What is the role of psychosexual development in this?

In general, every child will develop at their own pace. Some children are interested in topics earlier, others a little later. Just like with other topics in life. If you listen to your child and pay attention to what they are interested in, you will know when they are ready for what. With books or other children's play materials (for example, dolls with sexual parts or puzzles representing types of families), you can introduce the topics to your child in a casual way.

This manual is divided into three age groups, which are taken from the WHO standards for sex education in Europe: 4-6 years old, 7-9 years old and 10-12 years old. The borders are fluid and not all learning steps fall into the age groups mentioned.

The following table shows which developments and areas of interest are to be expected for each age group and what kind of parental guidance these are associated with. The ages are approximate, no child is a "normal" child.

### 0-4 years old

- ▶ Children should know the specific names of body parts, especially the sexual organs. It is important to use technical terms at an early stage. Examples in English are "penis" and "vulva".
- ▶ Children recognise the differences between the sexes, physically as well as socially.
- ▶ Children are able to perceive and express different feelings and express wishes and needs.
- ▶ They will discover and practise their own personal hygiene.
- ▶ They can develop a positive attitude towards their own bodies and express their own desires and limits, for example in body exploration games.
- ▶ They will develop basic ideas and conceptions about family models and different degrees of kinship.

#### 4-6 years old

- ▶ Children will learn about physical age differences: Children's bodies look different from adults' (for example, hair, body shapes, breasts).
- ▶ They will acquire concrete knowledge about fertility and reproduction.
- ▶ They will learn about pregnancy, birth and babies and the end of life.
- ▶ They will develop their own gender identity.
- ▶ They can sense and distinguish between emotions (for example, jealousy, anger, fear, disappointment).
- ▶ They will learn that not all people are "nice" to children and when they should/can seek support from a trusted person.
- ▶ Opportunities for privacy and the development of modesty must be created for them.

#### 7-9 years old

- ▶ Awareness of the body becomes more specific: menstruation, ejaculation, individual differences in long-term development. Biological and social differences between men and women, and knowledge about gender diversity.
- ▶ They will receive basic knowledge about sexually transmitted infections and a rough overview of contraception.
- ▶ They will learn about different relationships in terms of love, friendship, etc. They can make social contacts and form friendships, while having respect for others.
- ▶ This is followed by a strengthening of and confrontation with feelings.
- ▶ Embarrassment and privacy will play an increasingly important role.
- ▶ Children need to be familiar with children's rights.



- ▶ Children will explore their knowledge of the body, body images and body modifications (genital mutilation for girls, circumcision for boys, gender-altering measures for intersex children, eating disorders, tattoos/piercing). The perception of one's own body image is influenced by health, self-image and behaviour.
- ▶ They will learn about masturbation.
- ▶ They will broaden their awareness and understanding of their own and other people's feelings, such as jealousy.
- ▶ They will learn about the effects of pregnancy (parenthood, changes in relationships). They will deal with the issue of pregnancy in same-sex relationships and the issue of infertility.
- ▶ They will experience dating/flirting.
- ▶ It is important to have media literacy, which means being familiar with the internet and the possible dangers (for example, learning how to deal with photos/chats must be reinforced and deepened). They will have a basic knowledge of sexuality/internet/body images in the media.
- ▶ The topic of sexually transmitted infections will be discussed in greater detail.

# Thematic section

## Body

### **Detailed knowledge is needed**

Your own body and the bodies of others are exciting! However, exploration and discovery are now done more covertly, as the sense of modesty has set in.

For many children, primary school is a time when they like to acquire a lot of detailed knowledge (about dinosaurs, for example). Therefore - and also because physical maturity can start very early and should not surprise the children - now is a good time to talk in a child-friendly way about the visible and invisible changes that their bodies will undergo in the next few years.

Many children in this age group are interested in physical changes during puberty. This may be because they have older siblings, notice that adults look different from children, or because they are confronted with it in films and advertisements.

In the following we provide you with examples of typical topics in a puberty talk. You will find ideas on how to initiate or conduct a conversation. You are welcome to use the answers written in green when dealing with your children.

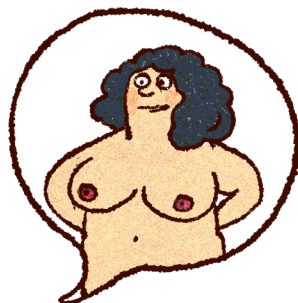
*"When you go from being a girl to a woman or a boy to a man, many things change in and on your body. What do you notice that is different in adult women and men than in children?"*



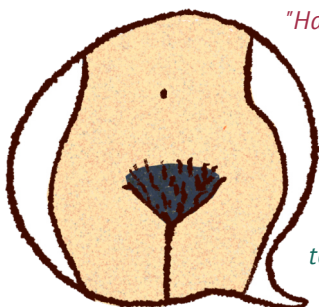
You will probably find that the children notice quite a lot, for example:

*"Women have breasts."*

*"The area around the nipples may start to become more sensitive, the nipples may "itch" occasionally. It may also be that one breast starts to grow earlier than another. This is completely normal. Boys may also experience (temporary) breast growth, this is not unusual."*



*"Hair grows down there."*



*"Leg hair starts to grow as early as childhood. Later, hair also grows in the armpits and on the vulva or around the penis and scrotum. But it does not grow as much as the hair on the head, it stays short, is often curly and wirier than the hair on the head. Some people shave these areas, others do not. It is up to you to decide."*

*"Women have periods."*

*"Beginning then when girls reach puberty, they bleed from the vagina about once a month. This happens because a "nest" is being prepared in the uterus for a baby - that means the uterus is being "padded out" (building up the mucous membrane). Since this nest always has to be fresh, if there is no baby growing inside, it is mixed with some blood and leaves the body through the vagina. Then a new nest is built."*



Especially at the beginning of puberty, menstruation is often irregular and even in adulthood the cycle can vary greatly from person to person.

By primary school at the latest, children are curious about where they came from. For many, it is already a question before that - for example, when a sibling arrives.

*"Where do babies come from?"*

*"Most babies are born like this: when a man and a woman love each other very much, they kiss, they cuddle together, maybe naked, and the closest you can cuddle is when the penis goes into the vagina. Then when they continue to cuddle, a lot of sperm comes out of the penis and when it meets an egg, a baby can be born."*

Discuss older teenagers or adults having sex with each other simply because it makes you feel good - not because you have to make a baby every time.



*"What does gay mean?"*

*"When two men love each other."*

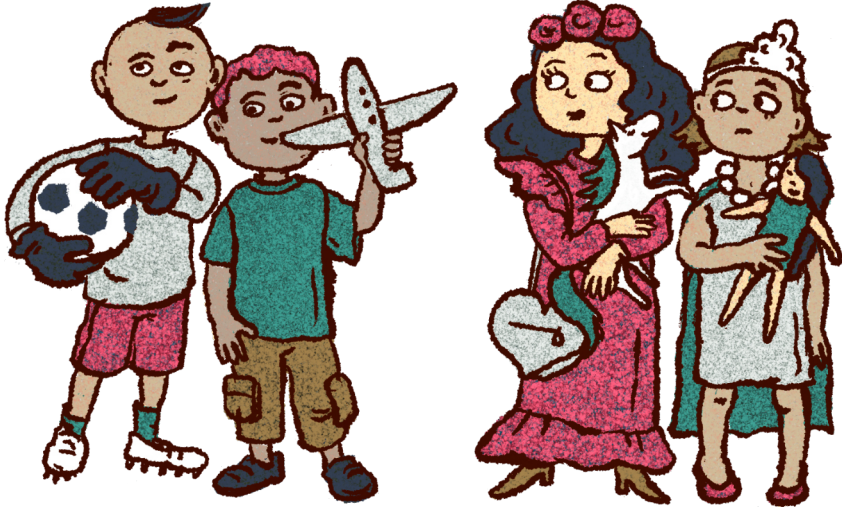


*"What does lesbian mean?"*

*"When two women love each other."*



## Identity



### Children internalise gendered expectations

Imitation and observation play an essential role in children's learning. In early childhood, girls, just like boys, analyse what behaviour is valued positively in one case and sanctioned in another. For example, some parents unconsciously allow their daughters to test their limits less often. Boys, on the other hand, are often expected to climb to the top of the climbing frame. Our shopping behaviour also plays a role that should not be underestimated.

Nowadays, every shop divides its products according to gender. Some products convey very clearly what is expected of girls and boys: Girls should be beautiful and smile, boys should go through life wild, free and brave. This produces stereotypes that ensure that there are seemingly masculine and feminine colours, toys and sports. The generalisation is that all members of one gender like the same thing by default. This gender marketing helps the economy and restricts our children from experiencing diversity and trying things out.



*Try to question why there are boys' and girls' colours and have an open dialogue with your child. Encourage them to try other products and be open to their wishes.*

This socially and economically justified division can also prevent intersex children from being able to find a place for themselves and trans children become aware very early on that they have to slow down their physical development. Trans children often react to this pressure with eating disorders in order to prevent the development of the female body and the onset of the first period. One option that can help your child is the use of puberty blockers. These are prescribed by a doctor and slow down puberty. This allows the child to calmly develop a positive body image.

### **Sexual orientation is diverse**



*The term sexual orientation describes a person's desire with respect to the sex of a desired partner for sexual activity. There are a number of different variations:*

- *Asexual: no sexual attraction, regardless of gender*
- *Bisexual: attracted to both men and women*
- *Heterosexual: attracted exclusively to the opposite sex*
- *Homosexual: attracted only to one's own sex (other terms are also used for this, for example gay or lesbian)*
- *Pansexual: falling in love with people regardless of their gender*

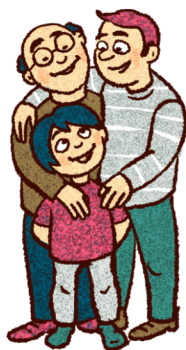
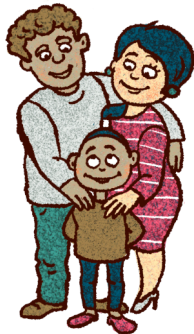
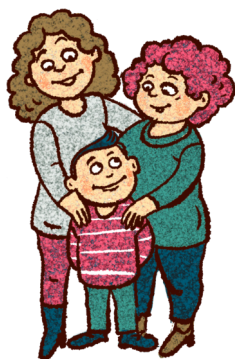
Increasingly, children encounter various alternative family models in our society, e.g. the classic family, patchwork families, single-parent families or rainbow families, i.e. families in which at least one parent is lesbian, gay, trans or intersex. If children have questions at this point, the topic of sexual orientation quickly comes up. Your child will also notice other family structures (e.g. on the street or at home with friends). You can help them to understand that the diversity of families is just as normal as the diversity of partners. The important message is that everyone has the right to make their own decision and trust their own feelings.

For most people, sexual orientation is a central aspect of their personality. It not only describes who one is attracted to, but also includes individual experiences and personal feelings. Moreover, sexual orientation also has meaning for people on the outside: assumptions and hopes, values and

possibly even prejudices come with it. Encourage your daughters and sons in this age group to accept others as they are and not to judge them hastily.



*Read books together with your child that address the topic of sexual orientation. A reading tip would be: "Sex is a funny word: a book about bodies, feelings, and YOU" by Cory Silverberg/Fiona Smyth (2015). The 162-page book deals with "sexuality" with the help of comic drawings. The author and the illustrator sensitively address various physical and psychological aspects and facets that people associate with this topic and depict the versatility of the subject. The book offers itself as a medium in the everyday life of children and adolescents, as it provides new ideas again and again to get into conversation about the topic of sexuality, body and love (ISBN: 978-1609806064).*





## Feelings

From the ages of 7 to 9, children start to become more and more independent. Nevertheless, parents are still very important attachment figures in the child's life. This is reflected in the fact that children become more independent on the one hand and seek out the familiar caregiver for cuddling on the other. When cuddling, children also like to immerse themselves in stories and fantasy worlds. There is often a smooth transition between fantasy and reality. The content of their fantasies can be friendship, love and falling in love with someone else. This is also the case with 5-6 year-olds.

At preschool age, children also begin to learn about emotions such as shame, guilt, envy and pride. These social emotions are self-referential. To form these emotions, it requires previous mental developmental steps and an understanding of various simple emotions. By experiencing and learning their own emotions, triggered in certain situations, they also develop an understanding of emotions towards others.

The development of the sense of shame is especially noticeable. Children feel increasingly uncomfortable when they are seen naked by people other than those they are familiar with. In addition to shame, privacy increases and children will make it clear what information they want to give to which people. This privacy can also be expressed to familiar caregivers. Here, the caregiver should remain understanding and respect the child's decision.



## **The childlike curiosity will remain intact**

Children will still have lots of questions about procreation and sexuality. These questions will become increasingly concrete, also influenced by contact with other children and contact with the media. Often the questions give the impression that the child already has knowledge about the question asked. However, the motive is often the search for attention from parents or caregivers and the thirst for knowledge. Children increasingly notice that adults no longer answer concrete questions as openly as they used to. In their search for answers, they seek out peers and increasingly turn to the internet for information.

## **Secrets as a component of one's autonomy**

As the age of seven to nine years progresses, secrets remain an important component in the development of one's autonomy. At this age, some children add more secrets that arise from their everyday lives. These may include experiences from school or adventures with other children. It is important to show openness and trust and to offer opportunities to share ideas. Secrets should not be judged, because this could convey an evaluation of the feelings and the person. This could lead to the child looking for other people to share a secret with next time. If there are no other confidants in the immediate vicinity, the child will not have the opportunity to share. The child can withdraw as a result.



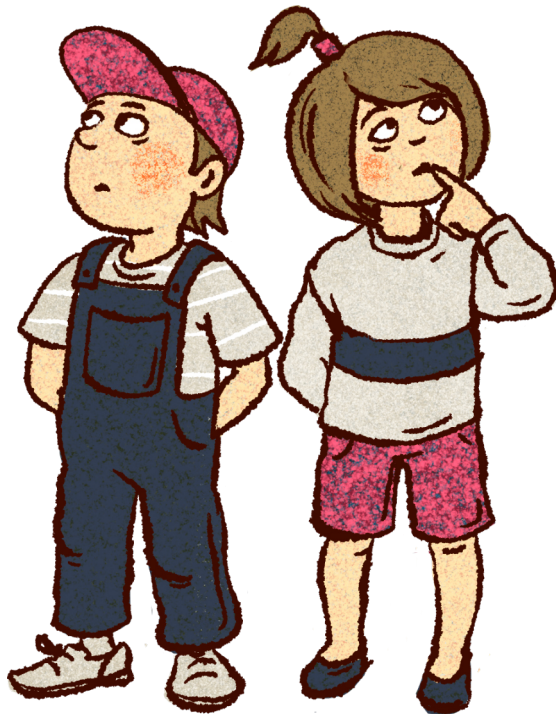
## **Relationships change**

At this age, children have strong feelings of friendship or even express that they are in love with someone. This affection can be for the teacher, the educator, the pet or another child. The feelings can be very strong, even resulting in missing someone. Parents should take every feeling of the child seriously, value it and support it lovingly. During this phase, children should learn to distinguish between different types of relationships such as friendship, love relationships and lust.



*You can view this period with all the unpleasant and specific questions as an opportunity. Use the questions to give your child good answers and specific correct information. Children are very curious and seek information and answers no matter where they are. If you provide child-friendly answers or refer to children's books, it will help protect children from bad information from the internet or other sources.*

Through their experience of friendships, children acquire social skills in which there is no power imbalance and no relationship of dependency. At this age, children increasingly relate to their own gender, it is about a constant balancing between independence and adaptation. But it is also about jealousy, separation and building new friendly relationships. By trying out and experiencing these relationships, the child will be able to live positive and healthy relationships and partnerships as they grow older.



## Love

The start of school marks the beginning of a time when children want to explore and understand the world around them in new ways. As parents, you have to expect questions about sexuality, sex, pregnancy and birth. Children are increasingly exposed through the media to the fact that sexuality is often the subject of advertising posters, on television or on the internet.

Even before children enter puberty, it is a good idea to start a conversation with them. Children are curious, ask questions and are willing to listen. As parents, you are a source of information and a contact person - this can change when the children reach pre-adolescence. On the one hand, you become more important as a conversation partner and provider of knowledge, on the other hand, children usually tend to hide their activities and withdraw. This withdrawal is an important step towards independence. Part of this retreat involves feeling that one's own body and sexuality are a private matter. As parents, be sure to respect your children's boundaries. Find out when restraint is appropriate and in which situations support or conversations are needed.

Remember that as parents you are role models. How you behave towards your partner or your own body will be perceived by your children. Be authentic in what you say and do. You do not have to be a perfect role model, it can have the greatest learning effect when children see how to deal with problems and the gap between desire and reality.

### **Intimacy and feelings of shame**

Intimacy within the family is something the child experiences throughout its life. As a baby, it was stroked and cared for. As a child, it sleeps in its parents' bed or accompanies its parents in the bathroom. Despite this lack of self-consciousness, as the child grows older, doubts creep in as to if the intimacy between parents and child is too much. No line should be crossed or privacy violated. Respect the child's feelings of shame here. These feelings of shame are not something prudish or uptight. They determine which body-related actions (such as going to the toilet or taking a shower) belong in public and which do not. In this way, they create an intimate sphere and offer the child protection. On the one hand, they are able to separate themselves from others, and on the other hand, they can adapt to the social norms within society.





*For many children, the following situations are embarrassing:*

- *Dressing and undressing*
- *Personal hygiene*
- *Bathing or showering*
- *Exploration games and self-stimulation*
- *Cleaning up after going to the toilet*



Setting limits and showing boundaries increase in children as they grow older. This is how they build their privacy. Children learn that every person has a right to privacy and that it is okay to set boundaries.

## Education about fertility, reproduction and contraception

Six- or seven-year-old children can usually explain the physical difference between women and men. They know that women have a vulva and men a penis. They usually begin to understand the connection between procreation and pregnancy a little later. Children assume that adults only have sex when they want a child. The connection between sexuality and desire is usually not explained to them because it is usually easier for parents to educate them about reproduction. Education about fertility, reproduction and contraception should take place before the onset of puberty.

Menstruation can start at the age of nine or ten for some girls. For many girls, their first period does not cause any discomfort, it arrives suddenly. Explain to your child what is going on in their body, what they can expect from now on and how they should deal with menstruation.

## The role of the media

Children come into contact with media more and more: they watch TV more often, read magazines and books or surf the internet. Unable to prevent this, children come into contact with a wide variety of images and information about sexuality. Children do not understand most of the sexual innuendos in films or on advertising posters, they mainly notice that the depiction has something to do with sex. This leads to questions or irritation. As parents, you should be attentive to children's media consumption. A negative phenomenon is that children's first contact with pornographic material can happen at an earlier age. Films are not infrequently shared via mobile phone and watched together in the schoolyard or on the school bus. This cannot be prevented. Age-appropriate and complete education of children is very important.



*Read magazines or books together, watch TV programmes or surf the internet together. Some advice can help them:*

*Agree on firm rules for watching TV and surfing the internet. What can be watched? Which pages are taboo? When should the TV or computer be switched on and off again?*

*Pay attention to the age rating of films, TV programmes or computer games.*

*Guide your child during their first use of the internet. Explain possible dangers such as pornography sites or advertisements, fee-based services and how to handle confidential data. You can install filter pro-*

*grammes and together with your child find internet sites and search engines that are suitable for children.*

*Discuss the media consumption of your child with family members and friends. What rules should be followed, what limits should be observed?*

## **Sexual violence**

Parents need to be aware of the issue of sexual violence against children. It is important to take preventive action without panicking. Children should learn to know their limits, to say no and to get help and support in an emergency. Sexual assaults are sexual acts that massively and/or deliberately violate the child's personal boundaries. This starts with subtle touching, glances or remarks and goes up to deliberate touching of children's breasts, buttocks or genital area. Forcing children to touch adults or adolescents intimately or to watch them watching pornography or pleasuring themselves also counts as sexual assault. Particularly serious forms are attempted or performed oral, vaginal or anal rape. Be aware that child sexual abuse is usually not random but carefully planned. The perpetrator builds a relationship with the child and often with the parents, usually over a long period of time. Sexual assaults often take place within the family and their social circle, which is why confidants outside these circles are of particular importance for the children in order to be able to get help in case of need. It usually starts with minor assaults and threats to see if the child keeps quiet. As parents, it is often difficult to talk about sexual violence. The child should be protected without being frightened.



*Teach your child to trust their feelings. Children can distinguish pleasant and unpleasant touches and perceive their boundaries. If these boundaries are violated, the child must have the skills to defend themselves, to shout "No!" loudly and to seek help and support.*

*Talk to your child about the fact that there are young people and adults who want to take advantage of children. It is not the child's fault, the responsibility always lies with the adult, never with the child.*

*Explain to your child the difference between good and bad secrets. Some secrets cause tummy aches because you are not supposed to talk about them. The child may tell these secrets to people they really trust.*

The behaviour of children who have experienced sexual violence varies greatly depending on their age and personality. Only a few children will say outright when they have experienced sexual violence, they tend to give hints because they lack the right words for what has happened. This is precisely why the hints are often not understood correctly. Be aware that children do not invent sexual abuse on their own.



*If you suspect that your child has experienced abuse, you should take this feeling seriously and follow it up.*

*Find a trusted person that you can talk to.*

*Show your child that they can talk to you.*

*Say that you are worried because you have noticed changes.*

*Stay calm and give your child permission to talk about good and bad secrets. Communicate that getting help is not tattling or a betrayal. Make your child feel that you believe him or her.*

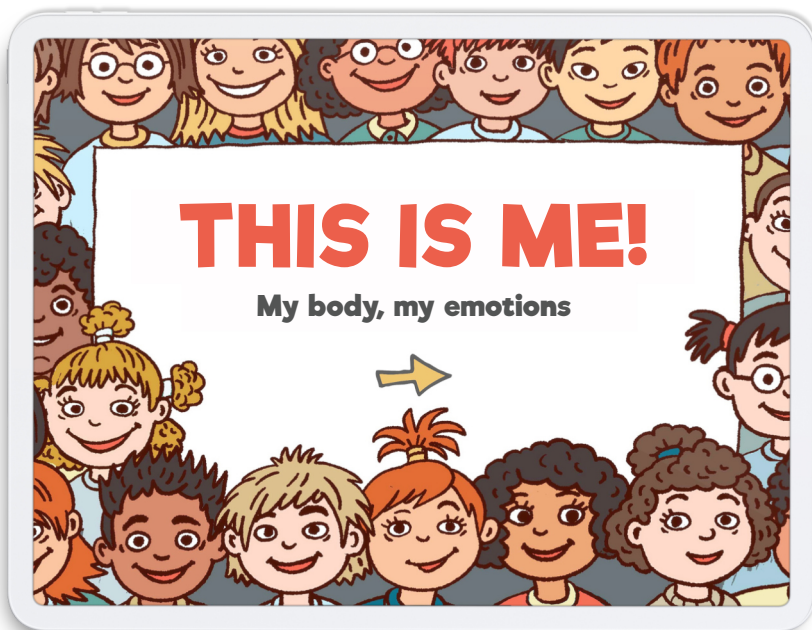
*Do not pressure your child.*

*Let them know that you know about stressful situations and that you are resilient.*

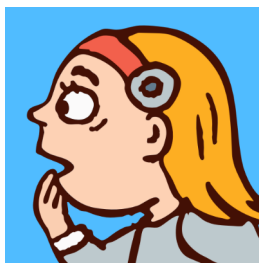
*Never confront the possible perpetrator.*



## App for children



With our app, children can discover important issues around the body, emotions and respect in a fun, playful and age-appropriate way.



**Download the app  
for free and try it  
out now!**

# About the project

## Partner organisations



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