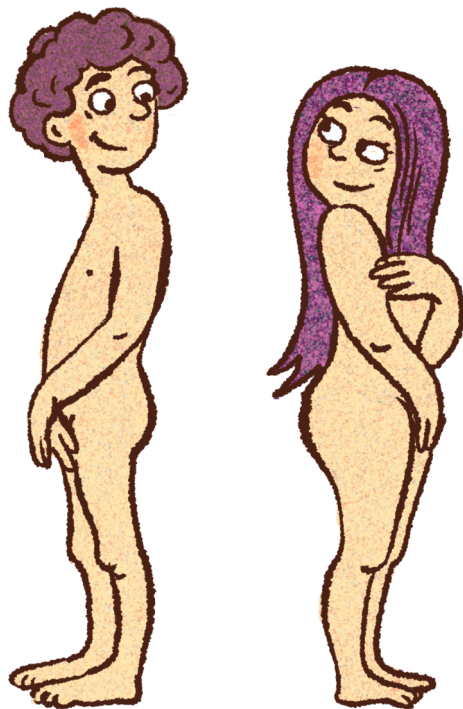


MY BODY,

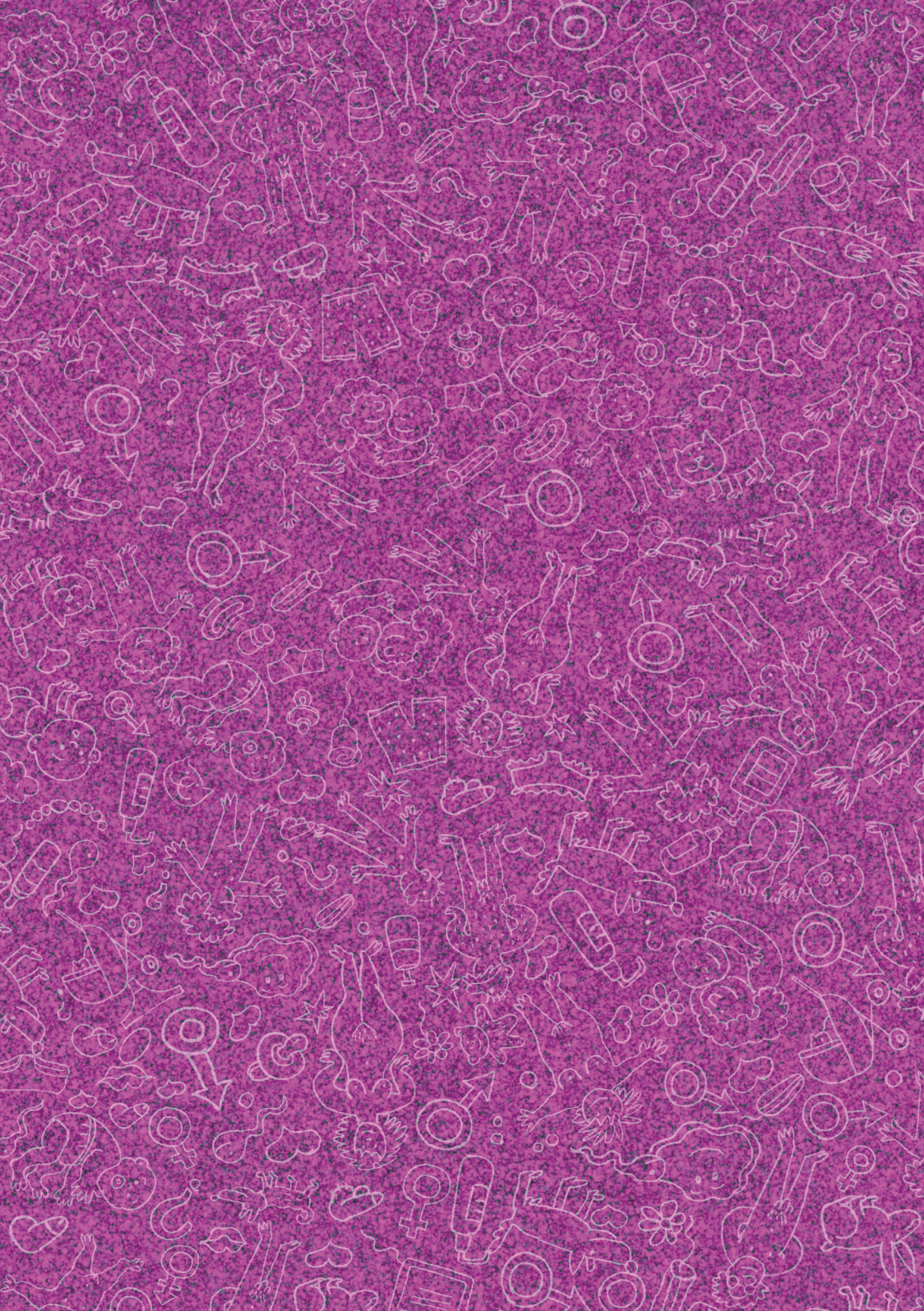
MY EMOTIONS



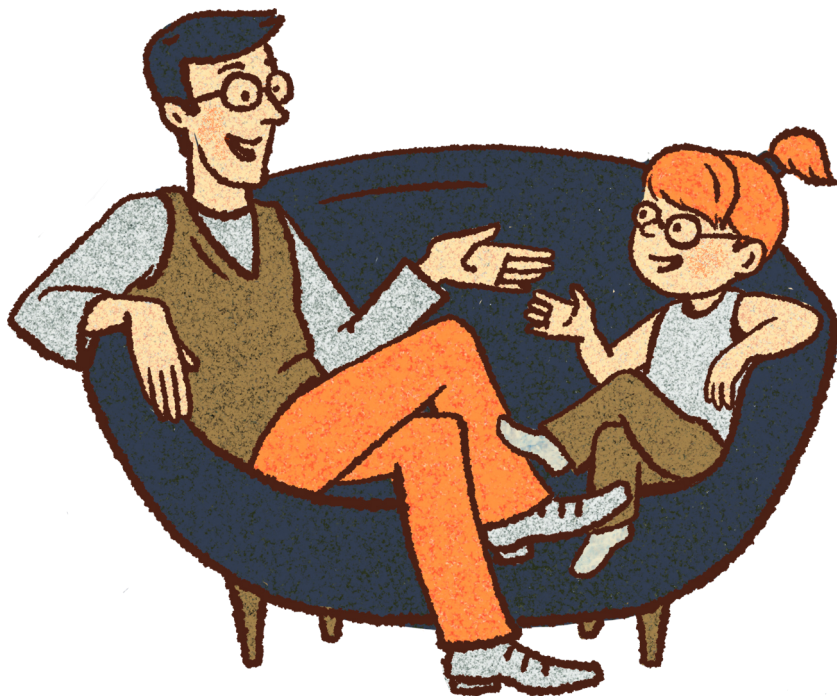
**Sexual education
made easy!**

Handbook for parents

10-12 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

Many children feel increasingly uncomfortable in their bodies at this age, especially when the signs of puberty start. Think about how you felt at that time, what your wishes and fears were, what you did about annoying pimples, where you got your answers to burning questions - and talk openly about it with your child. Such conversations are usually very helpful for children because it is not about them and they learn that parents also felt the same way.

Below is an example of how to start a puberty talk.

"During puberty there are many physical changes. Some changes you notice because they become visible. Others happen invisibly inside your body. This is true, for example, with the onset of puberty. This is when the pituitary gland - a gland at the base of the brain - tells the body to increase the production of certain chemical substances called hormones. The physical changes you notice in yourself are mainly caused by these hormones. All children go through puberty. Some earlier, some later. It's like a party where not everyone comes at the same time, but at some point everyone is there."

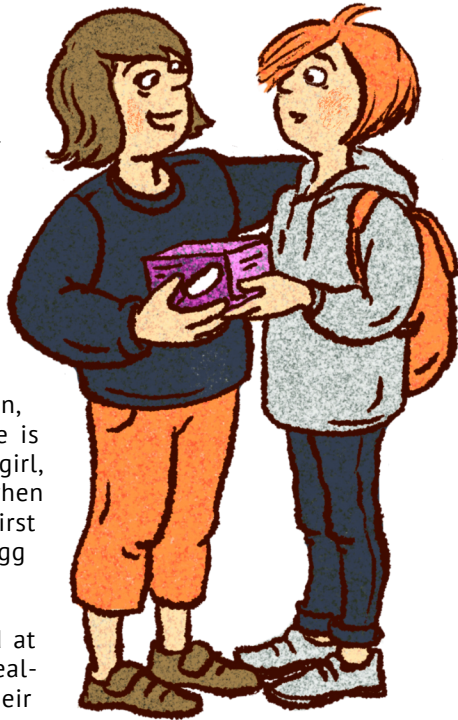
All children are looking for answers about their bodies. But they also have questions about the body and development of other genders. The following information should be given to all genders. This is important to create mutual understanding. It is exciting for children to acquire knowledge of their own and others' bodies.

For most people, the following happens in and on the body during puberty:

Girls' bodies

In girls, the hormones oestrogen and progesterone, which are produced in the ovaries, are responsible for physical changes during puberty. Armpit and pubic hair begin to grow. The breasts begin to grow, the hips become wider and the girls develop a waist. What is not visible to the girl at first is the maturation of the eggs, which begins in the ovaries. From this point on, a girl can become pregnant, she is now sexually mature. For every girl, this change becomes visible when menstruation occurs for the first time as a result of the first egg maturation.

Girls who have their first period at an early age often feel alone in dealing with the issue, because their friends cannot talk about it yet, their developmental stage is still pending.



Menarche, or the first period, occurs in most girls between the ages of 11 and 15. Before that, a "white discharge" - a milky-white fluid - may come out of the vagina as a "precursor" to the first bleeding. This happens because girls have always had ovaries with thousands of eggs in the abdominal cavity. These eggs are in a kind of "hibernation" until the girl reaches puberty. Then hormones (messenger substances) make sure that the eggs become active. Ovulation is irregular at first, but the period becomes regular on average after 6-24 months.

Gynaecologist

Menstruation is not an indication to have a check-up, but rather that everything in the body is in order. As soon as you intend to have sexual intercourse, you should have a gynaecological examination and a discussion about contraceptives. The topic of safer sex, i.e. the avoidance of sexually transmitted infections, must also be discussed.

Intimate hygiene

For cleaning the vulva (smegma, a yellowish/white substance made of sebum, can accumulate in the folds of the skin), clean water and, if necessary, a flannel is sufficient. If you wish, you can use a pH-neutral soap. Intimate lotions and sprays are unnecessary and hazardous to health, this can disturb the environment of the vagina and make the vulva and vagina itch.

When you have your period, you can use panty liners or pads to keep the blood out of your underwear, as well as tampons or menstrual cups.

Talking about menstruation early and shopping for intimate hygiene, including packing it in their school bag, saves unpleasant surprises. Panty liners and pads should be freely available. For most girls, the thought of inserting a tampon into their vagina is still relatively unimaginable. That's why most use panty liners at first, and pads when the bleeding is heavier. However, tampons are a topic that you should discuss (size, insertion, correct fit), but do not pressure your child to use them. But also do not discourage them when the time is right for them. Nevertheless, tampons have been in the scientific and media spotlight for some time now because they carry the risk of infection, especially if they remain in the body for too long. Also, most tampons (and also pads) are chlorine bleached and thus hazardous to health. In addition, they absorb not only menstrual blood but also parts of the vaginal mucosa. This combined with the fact that we menstruate around 500 times in a lifetime and thus consume a lot of money and produce a lot of waste are disadvantages that are causing more and more people to turn to alternative menstrual hygiene: for example, washable cloth pads, menstrual briefs and long-lasting menstrual cups.

The myth of the "hymen"

Many girls are afraid that the use of tampons could tear the "hymen". Put your child's fear to rest: there is no hymen that closes the vaginal entrance. There is a ring of mucous membrane (also called vaginal corona), but this bleeds in very few girls during the first penetrative sexual intercourse.

The myth that "it always hurts the first time"

Unfortunately, this sentence is very persistent, which leads to young people assuming that this is simply part of the first penetrative sexual intercourse. In very few exceptional cases, it is indeed possible that the vaginal ring (see above) covers part of the vaginal opening and then tears.

In the vast majority of cases, however, it is the muscles of the vagina that contract rather than relax. This can be because you are not ready, too excited, not wet enough, anxious, etc. An important message here is to simply take more time.

Intersex bodies

Some people are born with intersex genitalia. However, the vast majority of intersex people only discover this later in life - for example during puberty, when hormones cause the body to change in a way that one might not have expected: e.g. onset or absence of voice change, menstruation, breast growth, beard/body hair growth, growth of the erectile tissue. Around 1.7 per cent of the population has intersex sexual characteristics.

Boy's bodies

In boys, the hormone testosterone is produced in the testicles. One visible physical change in boys is the increased growth of body hair. Beard growth begins. Hair begins to sprout on the armpits and scrotum. There is an audible change in the voice. The production of sperm cells takes place invisibly in the body. This happens in the testicles and means that a boy can now father children. This becomes noticeable when ejaculation occurs for the first time.

"Boys get their first ejaculation" - and are usually not prepared for it.

Change this and take the pressure off your child, who may think he has wet the bed again:

"When boys reach puberty, the testicles begin to produce sperm cells. It will continue to do so until the end of their lives. The sperm cells are stored in the epididymis. When these "warehouses" are full, millions of sperm cells come out mixed with a liquid at the penis. The amount is about one tablespoon. For the first time, this usually happens between the ages of eleven and fifteen."

From the first ejaculation, one is sexually mature.

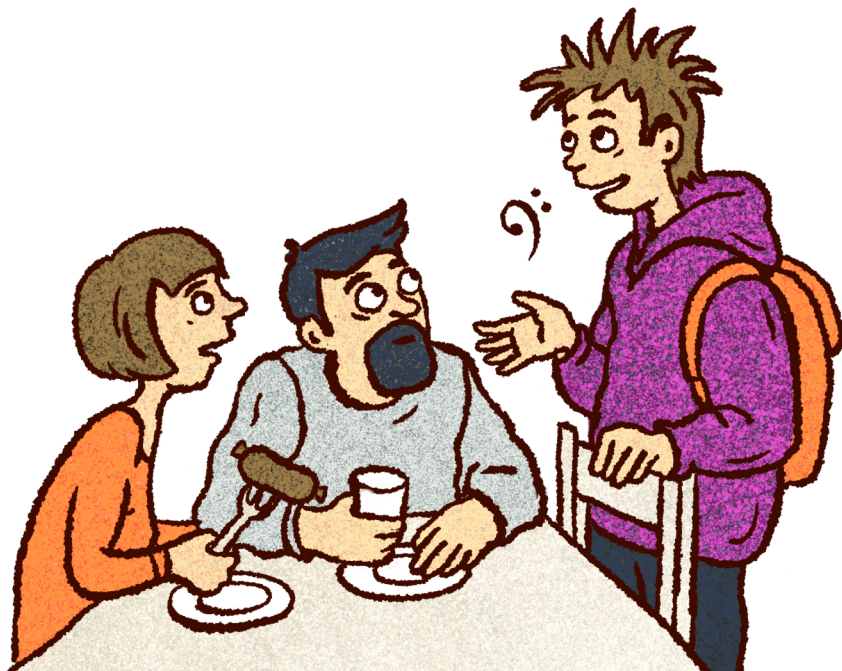
Intimate hygiene

Discuss how to wash their private parts properly to avoid smegma (a yellowish/white substance made of sebum): the foreskin must be retracted and the glans and the lower edge of the glans must be cleaned with the hand and clear water. If retraction is difficult and painful, this may be a

sign of foreskin phimosis. This should be clarified by a urologist. In most cases, it is possible to loosen these adhesions with the help of creams. Partial or complete removal of the foreskin is not always necessary and should not be the first choice because there are many sensitive nerve cells in the foreskin that can be important for the feeling of pleasure. However, there may be a medical indication for (partial) circumcision, i.e. male circumcision. If necessary, get a second medical opinion and involve your child in the explanation and decision. Circumcision is not usually necessary until puberty has occurred. In some cultures, circumcision is performed without medical necessity.

Voice change

Boys begin to experience a change of voice. This process will take a while and will be accompanied by croaking and squeaking. Girls' voices also change. However, this is so slight that it is not noticeable. Nevertheless, the voice of girls also becomes somewhat deeper.



All bodies

General personal hygiene

Body hygiene is more important now. Because during puberty, the skin is likely to become oilier, you sweat more, pimples can appear and body odour changes. These are consequences of sebum production, which is stimulated by hormonal changes in the body. Talk to your child about the fact that body odour caused by sweat means that they have to wash more often. In case of severe pimples or acne, consult a dermatologist to avoid scarring.

Sexual arousal

People get sexually aroused by fantasies or visual stimuli (real bodies, pornography). The vagina becomes moist, vulva lips and clitoris swell, nipples become stiff. The erectile tissue of the penis fills with blood and makes it erect. Breathing becomes faster, blood pressure and heart rate increase.

Many boys cannot hide their sexual excitement - an erection is not yet controllable and happens to them in the most embarrassing situations. It does not only have to do with sexual desire, but is also a reaction to physical stimuli (so-called "morning wood").

Masturbation

It is important not to judge or even forbid it as an adult. Masturbation is a way to discover and enjoy one's own body and sexual pleasure. Masturbation is sex with oneself and in no way causes physical or psychological harm - we can finally leave our grandparents' myths behind us!

Sexuality and the media

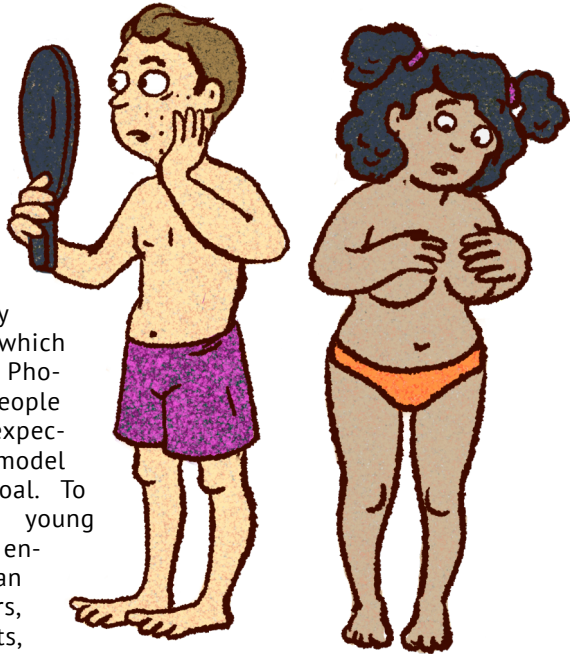
Today, our children are exposed to pornography at a very early age: as soon as they have access to a smartphone, tablet or PC with internet function, they are confronted with it. It does not even need to be their own device. You cannot protect them from it. But you can prepare them for it: by providing a caring foundation for discussing sexual topics at an early stage; by answering all their questions and also addressing the topic yourself if no questions come up. Children think they are watching a documentary when they see porn: "So this is how sex works". Talk to your child about the fact that sex is something that people do who love each other, if that is what both of them want and it is nice for both of them. What you

see in the video has little to do with that, it caters to people's fantasies.

You will probably try to put protection or filters on the devices or put a family PC in the living room: these are important precautions. Nevertheless, it will not stop contact - perhaps through other children - with pornography. Stay in touch with your child, take an interest in what they are watching. At this point at the latest, it will pay off if you have been able to make the subject of sexuality an easy topic to talk about - because then your child will come to you with questions about this for a long time.

Body images

As a result of living in a world of media, which children are exposed to from an early age, they adopt certain ideals: what should boys look like, what should girls look like? These already unattainable ideals, which are often produced by Photoshop, expose young people to high pressure and expectations: looking like a model is considered the goal. To achieve this, many young people are willing to endure a lot: diets that can lead to eating disorders, dietary supplements, excessive visits to fitness clubs



and often, already in adolescence, the desire to surgically adapt the body to an ideal.

The earlier children learn to perceive their body as something special, to feel good in it, to do something good for it, to like many (if not all) parts, to accept others, the easier this will be for them during puberty. After all, puberty is a time when you do not know what your body will look like "afterwards": everything grows, sprouts in different directions. This can be unsettling. Encourage your child that he or she is unique - that all bodies are unique. Watch videos together that show how much people can be changed on screen and that this does not correspond to reality.

Sexual activities, contraception & safer sex

Talk to your child about contraception even at this age. Not because they will need it in the near future (according to the Durex Report 2015, the average age across Europe is 18.5 years), but - on the contrary - because they are still so far away from it.

For girls, the following statement is important and relieving:

"You decide when the time is right for your first time. Rely on your feelings and don't let anyone push you! It is normal to feel a little anxious and insecure. If these feelings are very strong, you may not be ready for sex. Maybe you should wait a little longer. However, the first time can also be exciting and thrilling. It helps if you and your partner have enough time together and are undisturbed. Talk to each other about what you want and how you feel."

Of course, boys should not let themselves be pushed into anything either, not by friends or by the media.

"If a man and a woman want to have sex without the woman getting pregnant, they must use contraception. For example, the woman can take the pill, the man can use a condom."

Safer sex

Homosexual as well as heterosexual adolescents who want to become sexually active need information on sexually transmitted infections and how they can protect themselves from them. They should also know what to do in case they get itchy or smelling discharge. Condom use should be promoted more among young people. Used condoms are often found in playgrounds and car parks, and children are familiar with condoms from the supermarket or the public toilet. It is the only contraceptive that protects against diseases during heterosexual as well as homosexual sexual intercourse. Dental dams fulfil this function during vaginal oral intercourse. If you have the opportunity to visit a counselling centre that offers sexual education workshops,



take advantage of the offer. Young people often find it easier to talk about these topics with an outsider. A visit to a counselling centre or gynaecological consultation should be made if a couple is planning to become sexually active with each other. Here, the young people are introduced to the contraceptives in question with their advantages and disadvantages and, if necessary, a prescription for hormonal contraception is issued. The topic of safer sex should also be discussed.

Identity

A "different" sexual orientation or gender identity is not a disease

Why and when a person determines who he/she loves is a personal matter and a product of emotions. The preconditions that determine a person's sexual orientation are very diverse. However, one thing that can be said in any case is that it is not the result of socialisation or parental upbringing, nor is it the result of seduction. The idea that a woman becomes a lesbian because she sees lesbian couples or a man becomes gay because they talk about gays in class has been disproven scientifically. You as a parent also have no influence on the sexual orientation or gender identity of your child. It was and still is discussed throughout the world that homosexuality is a disease that can be cured by certain therapies. This is also not true. In 1992, the WHO (World Health Organisation) removed homosexuality from the worldwide health catalogue (ICD 10). Therefore, medically and legally, it is not considered a disease. Trans is also not a disease, but merely the feeling that one's biologically assigned gender does not correspond to one's own feelings. This is addressed in the new WHO health catalogue (ICD 11), which takes effect in 2022, and speaks of gender incongruence, i.e. the lack of correspondence between the body and the feeling of gender.



Coming out: It is an American expression from the phrase "to come out of the closet". The figurative meaning is 'to no longer hide, but to be open about one's sexual identity'. Coming out is often divided into two phases: On the one hand, the inner coming-out, i.e. becoming aware of it and accepting it, and on the other hand, the outer coming-out, i.e. telling your peers about it. Coming out also refers to people who are a-, bi-, pansexual and trans.

The inner coming-out of a child can start very early. From the age of 10, the child may have a feeling of being "different". It is not uncommon for children to then lack terms and try to suppress their true feelings for a longer period of time or do research on their own on the internet. In doing so, they may also receive disturbing information. To prevent this, you can provide your child with information about sexual orientations and gender identities at an early stage and thus support them in understanding them. These kinds of conversations should not be held only if something seems to be "different" - an open approach to these topics in your family leads to acceptance of gender and sexual diversity, strengthens your child and helps to build an open and discrimination-free society.



Young people need family support and protection from discrimination

The central theme of (pre-)puberty is finding one's identity. The concept of self that your son/daughter developed in early childhood is reviewed and possibly changed. Children form their own personal distinctive gender and sexual identity. Associated with this is the feeling of being free, of being comfortable in one's own body and of being recognised as an independent person. In this complex process, children can benefit from an open confrontation with society and its values and norms. In this process, they need support from you and other family members.



Talk to your children about their feelings and help them form their own opinions. Give them support and honest feedback. This will help them develop their own value system. Engage with your child and respect their values and priorities, even if you do not necessarily approve of them, e.g. if they want to dress in a gender-atypical way, express hobby/career aspirations and do not want to conform to stereotypes.

All children need support and assistance during this time. However, queer children and young people face particularly great challenges. Only those who deviate from the social norm must, in the view of the majority, admit it, i.e. come out. What people often forget is that heterosexual people come out as a matter of course, without being judged: heterosexual couples walk hand in hand in public and kiss in the street, the teacher talks about his wife or the girl dances with the boy in the club.



The term queer is used for people who identify with a sexual orientation or gender identity that does not correspond to the social norm. It also refers to people whose appearance and/or behaviour does not correspond to the usual role models.

Queer youths are rarely seen in this context. Neither are they seen in public, nor can they be found in school textbooks, work materials, prime time films, etc. Their coming out therefore seems to be something they have to think about carefully, because it is not such an easy thing to do. Because "being different" from the social norm still means having to deal with experiences of discrimination and violence.

The European Union has surveyed 140,000 queer people in 30 countries in recent years and published a Europe-wide study on 14 May 2020. It found, for example, that 62% of respondents keep their sexual orientation or gender identity a secret at school. But there were also positive findings: every second person surveyed said that there are fellow students or teachers at school who support gender and sexual diversity.



There are many forms of discrimination, in the context of gender issues these are:

Sexism: Discrimination based on the idea that one gender is inherently superior to the other. In most cases, it affects people with a female body and people who identify as girls because they are portrayed as weaker or less intelligent than men.

Interphobia: Discrimination against intersex ways of life and expression as well as bodily-gender diversity.

Transphobia: Discrimination against trans people and a strong dislike of transsexuality and people who openly express their trans gender identity.

Biphobia, homophobia: Discrimination based on sexual orientation

Discrimination is one of many reasons why children and young people do not come out and hide their feelings. Other reasons are the fear of losing friends or being bullied. Children who have a positive image of their body and are convinced that they are valuable have an easier time in this situation. It encourages children who have to face such situations to know that they are not alone and that you value them for who they are. Furthermore, it seems to be helpful, especially for young people, to know that there are many people who are open about their queer existence.



Search together for prominent queer role models in film, art, sports and politics. Some examples are the artist Frida Kahlo, the multi-talented Leonardo da Vinci, the painter and poet Michelangelo, the tennis player Martina Navratilova, the entrepreneur Tim Cook, the writer Virginia Woolf, the composer Peter Tchaikovsky, the rock star David Bowie or the actress Kristen Stewart. In the book "Queer heroes" by Arabelle Sicardi and Sarah Tanat-Jones, 53 queer heroines are presented in German or English in a way that is suitable for young people. Encourage your child to "be allowed to be me".

Feelings

This is the age when puberty begins, which is a crucial developmental phase and not just physically. Puberty brings with it very drastic changes that can be emotional for children and parents alike. On the one hand, parents and children have to detach from each other, which also involves pain, arguments and sorrow. On the other hand, children continue to need parents during puberty who lovingly support them in the transition to adulthood.

You may notice that your child increasingly questions family rules at home. They also demand their own freedom to make decisions and distance themselves from being treated like a "child". Children retreat more often to their room or to a private place. These developments can create more tension between you and the child. At this point, the task is to adjust to the child's situation and not the other way around. Many children do not understand what is going on with themselves and later regret making defiant statements without being able to admit it. During puberty, the connections between individual neural pathways in the brain are reorganised and built up, which can trigger and intensify familiar emotional and behavioural reactions. When children get upset, there is no ill will behind it. Nerves are literally on edge and mood swings are common. Nevertheless, during this time, children especially need guidance and rules as well as clearly comprehensible behaviour on the part of their caregivers. It is often helpful not to redefine rules over and over again. Instead, communicate transparently so that the reasons behind the rules are conveyed.

Relationships change

Due to the hormonal changes mentioned above, children become sexually mature and experience falling in love and related erotic fantasies in a different way than before. Sexual impulses become more urgent and masturbation gains in importance. First encounters and love relationships between adolescents take place. Adolescents go out together, hold hands and give each other kisses. Most of the time, adolescents are not as active as adults expect them to be. Nevertheless, adolescents usually do not want to be approached on these topics. They will often react to this in a dismissive or shameful way. Respect their boundaries and be happy about the new experiences your child is having.

Bullying and discrimination must be taken seriously

Young people are always exploring during this time. This also affects friendships from childhood, which sometimes break up temporarily or even permanently. New relationships are formed among young people. Many adolescents, with their insecurities, do not want to stand out and try to be mainstream. Bullying can occur during this time. Bullying is a form of violence that is often, deliberately perpetrated against people who appear more defenceless than others. There is a clear pattern of those involved. On one side is the bully and their supporters (who reinforce or assist) and on the other side is the victim and possibly a defender. Then there are outsiders who look on and are glad that they have not become a victim. If your child, in whatever role, speaks out about bullying in a group, it is important that you intervene.

Some children and adolescents do not conform to the supposed social norm. They often experience discrimination and violence.

Bullying occurs over a long period of time and can manifest itself in different ways: physically, with words or psychologically. Physical bullying is expressed through hitting, pushing, spitting and the like. Insulting, abusing or treating someone contemptuously usually takes place verbally or on the internet. Psychological bullying, on the other hand, takes the form of ridiculing, threatening, intimidating or spreading rumours about someone.



Suspected bullying - If you suspect your child is facing bullying or experiencing physical or psychological violence, visit a local counselling centre for children and adolescents, sometimes there is also social counselling at the school. This could be a suitable place to get help. Support your child and seek help together.

Cyberbullying is on the rise as a result of activity on the internet. There, young people are deliberately insulted, threatened, exposed or harassed by known or unknown persons. This can take place through different communication media like smartphones.

Emotions and moods of young people can change quickly and for outsiders usually without any apparent reason. Even small things can trigger impulsive reactions. Due to the restructuring of the brain, it is increasingly difficult to classify one's own feelings. It is important that you continue to maintain contact with your child during this special time. This will determine how your relationship with the child will develop in the long term. This also means clearly saying "no" to the child in certain situations,

but at the same time you should signal that this does not affect your relationship. Always refer to the respective behaviour of the child and not to the whole person.

For example, by saying:

"I don't think this behaviour of yours is appropriate because you have disregarded our agreements."

This clearly indicates your attitude towards your child's behaviour. Together with a justification, the reaction becomes transparent for the child.

If an argument occurs, the reasons, rules and resulting decisions should be communicated in a transparent way. This is the only way that the young person will be able to understand the decision. The question "How can we find a solution together?" is often the most important question. Caregivers should engage in negotiations about rules and compromises during this difficult time. How far you go is up to individual discretion. Parents should be willing to listen and understand the child's feelings rather than reprimand. Giving advice, making comments or finding immediate solutions to a problem is also not advisable.

Make sure you accept apologies from your child and do not hold grudges. This can be very hurtful for the child. For every child in (pre-)puberty, two things are especially important: that they feel heard and understood. Being authentic and approachable towards your child is a good way of coping with this time together.

Love

Particularly during puberty, feelings are intense and can confuse or overwhelm children. Longing for their first kiss, their first time having sex or a steady partner are quite normal. Their interest in love and sex is growing. Adolescents want to have more and more control over themselves, their love life and their sexuality. The more you as parents interfere and issue prohibitions, the less your child will tell you. Try to accept your child's independent choice of partner, even if you don't like it. It only makes sense to interfere in the partnership and privacy when you are sure that your child will be harmed by the relationship.

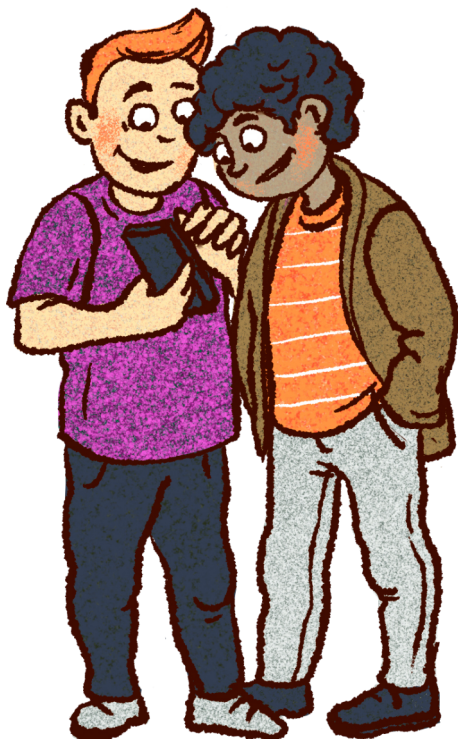
The first time

Even if your child has yet to have their first sexual experience or intercourse, education about sex, contraception, pregnancy, relationships and love need to start. Many children worry about what the first time will be like, whether it will hurt, whether they have found the right partner or what the right time will be. Your child should know: Never do something you do not like. Accept a no from the other person. Only go as far as you want and do not allow yourself to be pressured. Make sure to tell your child that pregnancy is also possible during their first sexual intercourse. Therefore, it is important that your child is educated about contraception. You should also gently educate your child about STIs - especially on how they can protect themselves.

Your own experiences, attitudes and values will play a major role in the education of your own children. Often your values and ideas are transferred to your children unconsciously and without thinking. As parents, you can think about when your first time was and how you felt at that time. What experiences did you have? What do you want to pass on to your child about sexuality and relationships? Are friends allowed to stay overnight with your child? How and by whom were you educated? What did you miss, what helped you?

Puberty is a particularly stressful time for gay, lesbian or bisexual children. During late childhood, having a same-sex orientation may have been a rather vague feeling, but with puberty it gradually becomes a certainty. These children need support and above all acceptance from their parents. As parents, take time to get used to the new situation. Ask your child questions and listen in order to familiarise yourself with a possibly foreign world.

Masturbation plays an important role in the sexual development of children. Their own body can be explored, felt and discovered. This area of life is extremely intimate for children. There may be differences in masturbation behaviour between girls and boys, girls in particular may have fewer sexual experiences with masturbation. Boys often masturbate during or after consuming pornography.



Pornographic material and sexting

Exposure to pornography or sexually explicit material is taking place earlier and earlier and through a variety of channels. Consumption usually takes place via smartphones, mobile phones, laptops or computers. Especially in social media, children can also have unintentional contact with sexual depictions. Surveys have made it clear that children quite often receive or forward erotic pictures or videos.



Sexting is the private exchange of self-produced erotic photos. Erotic pictures are usually taken with a smartphone and sent to the target person or a certain group of people. The pictures can be sent in different ways, via WhatsApp, as MMS or in apps such as Snapchat, Facebook or Instagram. The intention of sexting is to present oneself in an erotic and stimulating way and to share this with another person. The term sexting is not widely used among young people, they rather call these messages "sexy shots/ selfies/ pics/ posing pics or nudes".

Educate your child at an early stage before they are exposed to pornography. Then they will be better able to categorise what they see. It is not possible to protect children from pornography. Even if you do not buy your child a smartphone or do not have a PC at home, he or she will still have contact with other children. Maintain good communication with your child about what they have seen. Talk to your child about the fact that pornography does not depict "real sex", but sexual fantasies and also violence. It has little to do with reality.

Sexting is a complex phenomenon that mostly takes place within a relationship. However, the material can sometimes be forwarded without the person's consent. Children should be aware of the dangers of sexting and practise critical thinking regarding social and ethical aspects, respect and empathy. Sexting can also be a part of sexual experimentation in adolescence. In selfies, the body is staged and can be a point of reference in the development of adolescents' sexual identity. Here, beauty norms or one's own attractiveness can be tested. Children should know that they may not be photographed or filmed without consent. Also, photos or films must not be forwarded or shown around without consent.

Sexual violence



Sexual violence is any sexual act performed on or in front of children against their will, to which they cannot knowingly consent. The perpetrator uses a position of power to satisfy their own needs at the expense of the child. The acts are varied; they include verbal harassment, voyeuristic behaviour, touching their genital area or breasts, and even serious assaults such as rape.

It is important to educate and prevent sexualised violence even before the teenage years. Sexual transgressions mainly occur against girls, but other genders can also be affected. Victims are often pressured by the perpetrators that something bad will happen if they break their silence and confide in others. As a parent, you should listen carefully and believe your child when they give you hints about sexual violence. Be aware that

sexual violence often takes place within the family or among acquaintances. Stay calm and decide together with your child what to do. Get help and support from professionals and organisations.

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 make hints because they lack the right words for what has happened. This is precisely why the hints are often not understood correctly. If you have the feeling that your child has experienced abuse, you should take this feeling seriously, follow it up and definitely seek help and support from counselling centres.



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.

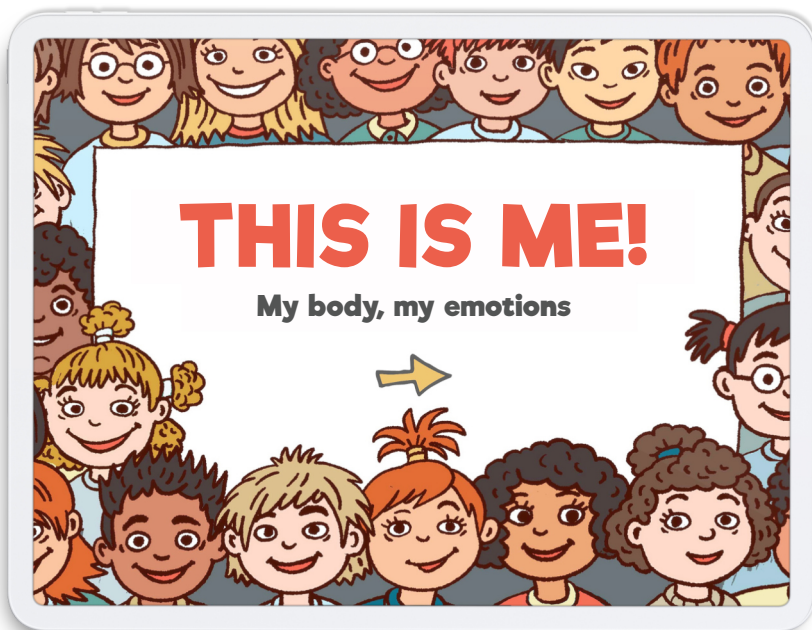
Stay calm and give your child permission to talk about good and bad secrets. Communicate that getting help is not tattling or a betrayal. Make your child feel that you believe him or her.

Do not pressure your child.

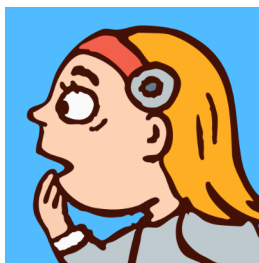
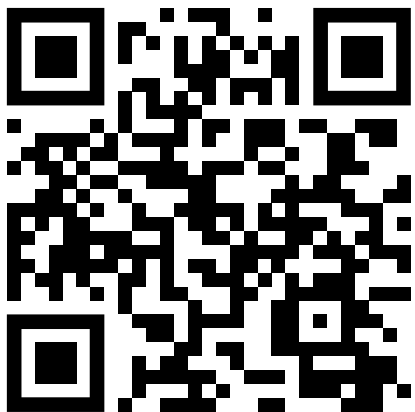
Let them know that you know about stressful situations and that you are resilient.

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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