

Puberty Happens

building a healthy foundation

2024 Edition




maine family planning

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For more information about training opportunities and support in delivering *Puberty Happens*, contact: education@mainefamilyplanning.org

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Puberty Happens

building a healthy foundation

Dear Educator,

Puberty education is the building block for future sexual health education. You, who are champions of this education, are providing your students with an integral piece of the puzzle that begins with understanding the wonder of who we are as human beings. The foundation young people receive through puberty education helps them understand what they are experiencing physically, emotionally, and socially. The contents and format of *Puberty Happens* prepares young people to think critically, ask questions, identify trusted resources, define and communicate personal boundaries, and navigate the world around them. By providing information, exploring attitudes, and building skills, puberty education gives students the necessary tools to make healthy decisions for themselves and to treat others around them with empathy and respect.

We have worked with educators from around Maine, asking them what works, what could be better, and how to provide puberty education that is relevant and supportive of all youth. It is important that we continue to evolve and update educational materials, and how they are delivered, to meet student needs in an ever-changing world. We encourage everyone who uses *Puberty Happens* to adapt the lessons and activities to meet the needs of specific students, learning environments, and community settings.

In this version of *Puberty Happens*, you will find:

- activities that increase knowledge, critical thinking, and skills.
- strategies and suggestions for fostering a supportive and trusting learning environment.
- a format that encourages sequential activities, while recognizing time limitations.
- opportunities for involving parents and guardians.

Puberty Happens includes activities and objectives that align with the [Maine Learning Results for Health Education](#) and the [National Sex Education Standards](#). Puberty education gives young people factual information about the changes they are experiencing and observing in others, builds students' confidence, and promotes healthy friendships and school communities. Every child deserves a supportive environment to discover who they are!

Thank you for all you do for Maine youth. We hope this curriculum provides you and your students with relevant and necessary tools for this journey.

Happy teaching!

the Maine Family Planning Prevention Education Team

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INTRODUCTION

Puberty education is a fundamental part of sexual health and wellness education. Sexual health, broadly defined, involves the whole person throughout their life span. Puberty education provides the cornerstone for understanding a wide range of sexual health topics including growth and development, taking care of oneself, setting and respecting personal boundaries, developing healthy relationships, body awareness, and individual identity. There is no other time that the human body changes more than during puberty, except during the first year of life. During this time, a person's self-image is formed, as well as their attitudes towards and interactions with others.

Puberty education is important because it:

- normalizes and helps youth understand the social, emotional, and physical changes that occur during puberty.
- develops understanding and respect for the uniqueness of others.
- enhances communication and social skills among peers.
- provides information and vocabulary that promotes self-care and awareness.
- encourages communication between children and their parents and caregivers.
- provides a foundation that helps prepare youth for other sexual health topics they will hear and learn about as they grow older.

According to the [National Sex Education Standards](#) studies have repeatedly found that sexual health education programs in schools have a positive effect on overall academic outcomes and provide young people with the information and skills they need to avoid many health risks.

Puberty can be a very exciting topic to teach. At the same time, educators may lack the comfort and knowledge to deliver the material in the classroom. Students are curious, ready, and eager to learn about how their bodies work. They are already beginning to hear both facts and myths about these changes. Many parents are recognizing changes their children are experiencing and are often relieved to receive support with this topic. This curriculum is designed to assist and support educators in providing medically accurate, factual, and affirming information to young people about their health and well-being.

MAINE LAW

The importance of puberty education was confirmed by lawmakers when they included in Maine statute a definition of [comprehensive family life education](#) in 2002:

“Comprehensive family life education” means education in kindergarten to grade 12 regarding human development and sexuality, including education on family planning and sexually transmitted diseases, that is medically accurate and age appropriate; that respects community values and encourages parental communication; that develops skills in communication, decision making and conflict resolution; that contributes to healthy relationships; that promotes responsible sexual behavior with an emphasis on abstinence; that addresses the use of contraception; that promotes individual responsibility and involvement regarding sexuality; and that teaches skills for responsible decision making regarding sexuality. (Sec. 1. 22 MRSA §1902, sub - § 1-A)

In addition, in 2015, Maine passed legislation that requires that all school administrative units in Maine with public pre-K through grade 5 programs have a written policy for [child sexual abuse prevention education](#) and response. In 2018, the Maine Department of Education (DOE) released a Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Education and Response Model Policy and resources to support schools in the implementation of effective child sexual abuse prevention.

Included in the resources was the [Children’s Safety Partnership \(CSP\)](#) website that was created to support schools and communities in these efforts. The CSP website is an online toolkit with information for parents, teachers, administrators, schools, and communities for implementing Maine’s law, and responding to and preventing child sexual abuse.

PUBERTY EDUCATION: STATE AND NATIONAL STANDARDS

When planning a puberty education unit, refer to state and national standards to support planning and implementation.

Components of puberty education can be found throughout [Maine’s Learning Results for Health Education](#), as follows:

- 1.2 Students explain the dimensions of health including physical, mental, social, and emotional.
- 1.5 Students describe how their bodies grow, change, and develop physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally through adolescence.
- 5.1 Students demonstrate effective communication skills to enhance personal, family, and community health including written, face-to-face, and safe use of technology.

Puberty Happens addresses the [National Sex Education Standards](#) in key topic areas, including that by the end of the 5th grade, students should be able to:

- Explain the physical, social, and emotional changes that occur during puberty and adolescence and how the onset and progression of puberty can vary.
- Recall the human reproductive systems, including the external and internal body parts and their functions, and that there are natural variations in human bodies.
- Describe the characteristics of healthy versus unhealthy relationships among friends and with family.
- Explain the relationship between consent, personal boundaries, and bodily autonomy.
- Communicate personal boundaries and demonstrate ways to respect other people’s personal boundaries.
- Identify trusted adults, including parents and caregivers, that students can talk to about relationships and ask questions about puberty and adolescent health.
- Identify credible sources of information about puberty and personal hygiene.
- Make a plan for maintaining personal hygiene during puberty.

GOALS & PHILOSOPHY

Puberty Happens educates young people about how they are growing and developing and provides shame-free factual information about their changing bodies, relationships, and emotions. This curriculum includes lessons and activities that provide a supportive and inclusive environment in which students can openly ask questions about their changing bodies, relationships, and self-identity while acquiring the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to become empowered and empathetic individuals.

Puberty Happens is based on Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), which explains that effective learning is based on dynamic cognitive, environmental, and behavioral factors. According to this theory, human behavior results from the interaction between an individual's personality (knowledge, attitudes, values), their social context (social norms, support, access), and their self-efficacy (skills, practice, experience). *Puberty Happens* is designed to facilitate developmentally-appropriate, interactive learning based on this framework.

Student Learning Objectives:

In the lessons and activities ahead, students will:

- Acquire knowledge about the physical, emotional, and social changes that may occur during puberty.
- Identify parts of the reproductive systems and describe their functions.
- Explore products and resources for hygiene, health, and self-expression.
- Understand the importance of universal respect and empathy for others, regardless of different views or identities.
- Begin developing skills for healthy friendships, including practicing communication, consent, and setting personal boundaries.
- Identify key resources including trusted adults, sources of reliable information, and safe spaces.

CURRICULUM CONTENTS AND DELIVERY

The *Puberty Happens* Lessons

There are four lessons in the 2024 edition of *Puberty Happens*. The sequence and timing of the lessons are flexible, although the lesson on Reproductive Systems tends to be best received when following The Changes of Puberty or Healthy Friendships.

Below is a short summary of the four *Puberty Happens* lessons.

- **Changes of Puberty** is an overview of the common physical, emotional, and social changes that can occur during puberty with the message that people experience these changes in different ways, times, and speeds.
- **Reproductive Systems** provides the basic details of reproductive and sexual anatomy with students learning the names and functions of these body parts. Diagrams are included.
- **Taking Care of My Amazing Body** includes information and strategies for young people as they care for their bodies and navigate changes during puberty
- **Healthy Friendships** touches upon the ways friendships can evolve and change during the puberty years. The lesson lays the groundwork for exploring personal boundaries, consent, and the difference between healthy and unhealthy aspects of friendships and relationships.

Each lesson begins with a summary page that explains the purpose, student learning objectives, approximate instructional time, advanced preparation, and materials needed. The time needed will depend on facilitation style and pace, the number of students in the group, their comfort level in engaging and participating in the lesson activities, and the number of questions they may have.

When to Teach *Puberty Happens*

Puberty education is often delivered to students in the older elementary grades and *Puberty Happens* was developed with a 5th grade age group in mind. The content and methodologies included in the curriculum are most appropriate for young people between 4th through 6th grades. Many young people this age are either experiencing the changes of puberty themselves, or seeing these changes happen among their friends and peers. It is important for all students to have the information earlier, rather than later, so they can understand, and be prepared for, these changes. Each lesson includes activities that provide students with relevant information, skill-building, reflection, and guidance as they navigate their puberty years.

Though puberty education can be taught any time, many schools choose to teach *Puberty Happens* in the spring. This promotes a safer learning environment as the educator is more familiar with their students and their learning needs and the students are more comfortable with each other.

If you are looking for a curriculum for middle school students, Maine Family Planning's [Middle School Sexual Health Scope and Sequence](#) is designed for youth in grades 6-8. This resource provides age and grade appropriate lessons, resources, and videos organized by grade level within seven topic areas: Puberty and Adolescent Sexual Development, Gender Identity and Expression, Sexual Orientation and Identity, Healthy Relationships, Interpersonal Violence, Consent and Communication, and Sexual Health.

INVOLVING RELEVANT SCHOOL STAFF

Help your school administrators become a program ally. Share the curriculum materials with them and let them know who will be involved in teaching *Puberty Happens* and when. Ask if there are procedures for implementing the curriculum and if they have any questions or concerns. Share talking points about the benefits of puberty education and make a plan for how you will respond to parent questions or inquiries about the lessons. *Puberty Happens* aligns with both the [Maine Learning Results for Health Education](#) as well as the [National Sex Education Standards](#) – this is a good starting point for advocating for puberty education. Find out about related policies and procedures within your school, such as how to handle controversial issues, the process for informing parents, possible opt-out policies and plans for students who opt out of the education, policies around supporting transgender students, and protocols for mandated reporting.

In creating a positive learning environment, it is important to collaborate with relevant school staff – including school nurses, counselors, and social workers. If issues arise for students during the puberty lessons, staff can be better prepared to assist them. During the activities, students will brainstorm and identify trusted adults they can go to for support. Introduce school staff who can be helpful resources for your students, if they are not already familiar faces. Have a plan in place for where students can go if they need support or if parents or guardians have requested that they be opted-out of the lessons. Consider co-teaching all or some of the lessons with classroom teachers, school nurses, counselors, or other staff.

INVOLVING PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

Parents and guardians are the primary educators of their children and are critical partners in puberty education. As you plan to deliver puberty education in school, it is especially important to let parents know that you see this education as a partnership between home and school. Your students come from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. They may live with other family members, such as grandparents or an aunt/uncle, or with foster families, or they may be unhoused. It is important to be sensitive and aware of your students' home and living situations.

Your school policies may require, or you may wish to send home, a parent and guardian letter stating when you will be starting puberty education. The letter may include the content you will be covering, the objectives of the units, and your contact information if they have questions or would like to review the materials you will be using.

Along with the *Puberty Happens* curriculum, there is a companion [Puberty Resources Google folder - bit.ly/3XrEXuz](#) that includes a variety of resources you can use when providing puberty education, including the following.

- A sample letter for parents and guardians that can be customized to fit your circumstances.
- Puberty Resources for Parents and Guardians that you can send home, post on your parent portal, or have available at an open house.
- Family Matters, which is another parent resource with tips for starting conversations and being an askable adult.
- Puberty Resources for Educators and others delivering the *Puberty Happens* curriculum.

WHERE TO GET SUPPORT

Maine Family Planning provides a variety of training opportunities that support educators and other school staff and community members – both experienced and new – in delivering the *Puberty Happens* curriculum. Upcoming professional development opportunities can be found on the Maine Family Planning Website - mainefamilyplanning.org/for-educators/training-workshops/.

You can also email us at education@mainefamilyplanning.org to learn more about the one-on-one technical assistance we offer and to schedule a training for your school or district.

The [Puberty Resources for Educators](http://bit.ly/3XrEXuz) – bit.ly/3XrEXuz includes a variety of websites, online professional development, and strategies for meeting the diverse needs of young people for educators and others who are delivering puberty education.

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE AND SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Being Gender Inclusive

The *Puberty Happens* lessons are intended to be taught with all students together. There are many benefits to all-gender puberty classes. Keeping students together can:

- Reduce misinformation outside of the classroom.
- Help students experience each other’s curiosity in a safe setting.
- Promote respect for each other’s varied and shared changes and timeline.
- Allow students to hear the same positive messages in response to common questions.
- Allow students to start practicing having conversations with each other, which can help with making safer choices in the future.
- Be more inclusive for transgender, non-binary, and intersex students.

Puberty can be a particularly confusing time for transgender, non-binary, and intersex students. For more information about how to support trans and intersex students, check out the [Puberty Resources for Educators](http://bit.ly/3XrEXuz) – bit.ly/3XrEXuz.

To be inclusive of transgender, non-binary, and intersex students try to use gender neutral language when describing anatomy and puberty products. The curriculum is written using inclusive language, and here are some examples for how you might be inclusive when you talk with students and answer questions.

- “People with testicles can make sperm...” instead of, “Boys make sperm...”
- “There are many period products to choose from...” instead of, “There are many feminine hygiene products to choose from...”
- “Everyone has a pituitary gland...” instead of, “Boys and girls both have a pituitary gland...”

Including Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

It is important that all students receive puberty information, including students with intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD). Teaching strategies may need to be adjusted to meet students' cognitive needs; however, it is still crucial they receive puberty information to meet their changing physical, social, and emotional needs.

Check out the [Puberty Resources for Educators](#) – bit.ly/3XrEXuz for more information on supporting students with disabilities and their parents.

If you need additional videos, curricula, or information, email us at education@mainefamilyplanning.org.

Supporting Cultural Diversity

There are different beliefs around modesty and coming-of-age traditions across communities. It is important to recognize and accommodate the needs of students from various religious and cultural backgrounds.

Common preparations you may want to consider before starting the *Puberty Happens* lessons.

- Coordinate with ESOL (English for Speakers of other Languages) staff early in the year to access interpreters and other support services. This may be especially important for the Reproductive Systems lesson where terminology may be unfamiliar and more difficult to translate/interpret.
- Offer informational sessions (with translated materials and interpreters) for parents and families about the puberty unit and address any questions or concerns that may arise.
- Respect that some families for religious or cultural reasons may not feel comfortable with their child receiving certain information in the classroom. Through discussion, pinpoint and address the family's concerns, see what lessons or content they are comfortable with, and make a plan for where students will go and what they will do during activities if families have opted them out.

Practicing Consent and Tips for Trauma Informed Teaching

Boundaries, consent, and healthy relationships are important concepts included in *Puberty Happens*. There are many opportunities to model these concepts with your students and families.

- Inform parents and guardians in advance of delivering the lessons and ask if they have concerns or information about their child that would be helpful for you to know. Inform them when you cover materials that may be difficult for their child.
- Engage in open dialogue with families that hold concerns about the curriculum and allow them to opt-out of activities that do not align with their cultural or religious beliefs.
- Allow students to “pass” on certain activities if they are too uncomfortable to participate.
- Inform relevant school staff of the content you will cover and identify a staff member and space where students may go for support - before, during or after the lessons are delivered.
- Inform students of upcoming lessons and activities you will be doing. A student may decide to remain out of the class during this time. Help students become their own advocate in their sexual health care and education.

It is impossible to know the experiences of every student who comes into your classroom. Assume there are students who may have experienced sexual abuse. Students may have cultural or religious backgrounds or norms that make them unable to engage in discussion and images of reproductive anatomy. It is important to know that trauma through sexual violence can illicit feelings of judgment or shame and may result in classroom behavior that is outside of a student's usual demeanor in class. Create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment by providing consistency, checking in with students that appear to be having difficulty with the content, and by creating and revisiting classroom agreements (see below). The [Puberty Resources for Educators](#) – bit.ly/3XrEXuz includes additional information on trauma informed practices.

Setting Group Agreements

The Changes of Puberty lesson begins by creating a set of classroom agreements with your students. It is an opportunity to create a supportive and positive classroom environment by setting some guidelines and honoring students' ideas about what will help them be focused, engaged, and responsible as they learn together.

Regardless of which *Puberty Happens* lesson you begin with, naming these shared agreements is an important first step for setting a positive tone in your classroom. These agreements provide structure while outlining a set of guiding principles for open, respectful discussion and participation.

It is important for students to revisit the Classroom Agreements they co-created on a regular basis to keep them in the forefront of everyone's mind. Reviewing and refreshing them on a routine basis will let students know that you valued their voice in creating them and that you are committed to a maintaining a caring and respectful learning environment.

It may be helpful to begin each class with students reading the agreements. This will help set the tone for the lesson and remind everyone of classroom expectations.

Responding to Student Questions

Providing a safe space for students to ask questions is a critical part of puberty education. The Changes of Puberty lesson introduces the anonymous question box. Regardless of the order in which you deliver the four lessons of *Puberty Happens*, it is important to introduce the anonymous question box at the beginning. Using the anonymous question box enables all students to have the opportunity to gain more information and knowledge, without having to ask a question out loud, or feeling uncomfortable or exposed in front of their peers.

Refer to the [Educator Tip Sheet for Responding to Student Questions](#) for helpful tips and strategies. Though some of the examples and websites in this tip sheet are geared towards older students, the strategies can be used with students of all ages. Be sure to visit the [Puberty Resources for Educators](#) – bit.ly/3XrEXuz to find trusted resources and websites specific to puberty education.

If you have questions or need any support, reach out to education@mainefamilyplanning.org.

Family Matters

Dear Families

At school, your child is learning about puberty and the changes that come with it. Puberty is a time when bodies grow faster than at any other time in a person's life, except during infancy.

You are the primary educator for your child and we see this as a joint venture in helping youth navigate this exciting and sometimes confusing phase of their growth and development.

In addition to the noticeable physical changes they may experience, children are also changing socially, emotionally, and cognitively. This can be a roller coaster ride for your child and for you! This flyer includes tips and resources for how you can support your child during this time of their life.



The Many Changes of Puberty

Here are some changes your child may experience, if they haven't already!

- Growing taller and gaining weight.
- Body odor and the need to wash more often.
- Pimples and body hair growth.
- Each child growing at their own pace.
- Friendship changes and crushes.
- Resistance to parents and rules.
- Desire for more privacy.
- Wanting to spend more time with their peers.

Be Askable

During puberty, your child may start to ask questions about the changes they and their peers are experiencing. We encourage them to talk with you. Here are some suggestions to help you along the way.

- Use everyday moments - when watching TV or listening to music - to talk about your family values.
- Have many small talks with your child, instead of one marathon session.
- Listen to your child's thoughts and opinions before sharing your own.
- Provide honest and factual information. If you don't know, find out the answer together!
- Let your child know they can talk, text, or write you notes if they have questions.
- You may not always be there when they need help. Identify other adults you and your child trust to go to with questions or for support.
- Get more information about puberty using the resources below.



Parent Resources

Check out these trusted resources for information on how to support your child and answer their questions.

NEMOURS
KidsHealth

amaze.org
#MOREINFOLESSWEIRD

 **common
sense
media**

Answering their Questions

Here are some tips to try for answering questions.

- Listen to the question and make sure you understand what they are asking.
- Start out with simple, short answers, then ask if they want more information.
- Silence can be good—give them time to think and ask questions.
- If you're not sure how to answer, let them know you're glad they asked. Tell them you'll get back to them with an answer (and then be sure you do).