

A-Z

guide to puberty and your child

Your bouncing little child has suddenly grown up and morphed into a grumpy, spotty adolescent. It's puberty, and here's how you can help them blossom through the transition...

A is for **attitude**

Puberty is one heck of an emotional rollercoaster ride – for you and your child! The influx of hormones in the body triggers mood swings and irritability. Sometimes a change in attitude in your child can happen well before any physical changes; for girls, between 7 and 14; for boys, between 9 and 15.

B is for **bras**

Somewhere between the ages of 9 and 13, the oestrogen that's pumping through your daughter's body will cause her breasts to grow. It's a good idea to start her off with a training bra to give her the support and protection she needs.

Polka dot bra, R69.95; purple and turquoise heart bra, R69.95; two-pack turquoise and cerise bras, R129.95, all from Edgars.



C is for **comparisons**

Puberty starts at different ages and lasts for different periods of time for everyone. Everybody develops at their own pace – make your child aware of this fact so that they don't obsess about comparing themselves to their friends.

D is for **drama**

Your child's attitude towards you is likely to change, and there's bound to be plenty of conflict. Learn when to pick your battles and when to let things slide. So, don't sweat the small stuff.

E is for **exploring**

As your child matures, they'll naturally become curious about their sexuality and bodies. If you haven't spoken to your child about masturbation, it's a good idea to give them the low down on the subject and let them know that it's perfectly normal – as long as it's done in private.

F is for **fun**

At times it may feel as if an alien has invaded your child's body and you're left wondering who on earth this person living in your house is! It's important to still take the time to connect with your child. Strengthen the bond by offering to do some fun activities together, like going to the movies. Don't talk about anything serious – just have fun.

G is for **growth spurts**

During puberty your child's body is growing, fast! That's because they're in the midst of a growth spurt – something that can last between two and three years. In general, girls will stop growing at around 18, while boys usually stop growing at around 20.

H is for **hair**

Boys generally only need to start shaving their faces from the age of 15, while girls will want to remove any unsightly hair as soon as possible. Since there's no set age for when your daughter should start with hair removal, it's a good idea to try reach a compromise together, based on the average age of girls in her school who've begun doing so, as well as your own family values. Discuss the different methods of hair removal, and the pros and cons of each. Shaving is still the most popular choice, but remember, you'll need to teach your daughter how to shave safely!

I is for **independence**

As your child matures, you'll notice their increasing desire to become more independent – they'll want to make their own decisions and, from time to time, push the boundaries. It's important to allow your child to explore and express their individuality, as long as what they're doing isn't self-destructive. Be there to guide and advise them.

J is for **jokes aside...**

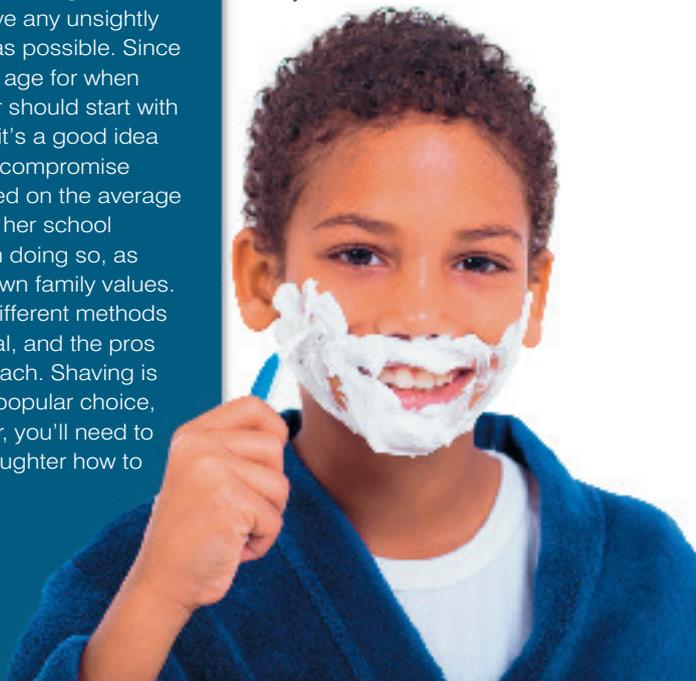
Bear in mind that your child probably feels self-conscious about all the changes they're going through. So, don't poke fun at them or stand back while siblings tease them.

K is for **knowledge**

Sometimes we can underestimate how it feels to go through puberty, so remind yourself by researching what your child is going through. If you're well prepared and know what to expect, you'll cope with the expected changes more easily. And when in doubt, ask! You can always chat to your doctor or pharmacist about any of your concerns.

L is for **love**

They're going to need loads of reassurance from you during this time, so let your child know what they're going through is normal. And, just because they're older, doesn't mean you should hold back on showing your love for them. Now, more than ever, they need this validation.



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M is for **menstruation**

Don't leave it up to the school nurse or her friends. Discuss menstruation with your daughter before it begins, so that you're both prepared when the big day arrives. Menstruation usually starts anywhere between 9 and 16, so provide her with pads and tampons and explain how to use them, and answer all her questions openly.



N is for **nutrition**

Puberty places some heavy demands on your child's body, so proper nutrition is vital! Ensure they eat a balanced diet consisting of all the major food groups for optimum health and growth. A registered dietician can help you create a healthy eating plan for your child. Visit Adsa.org.za to find one in your area.

O is for **oily skin**

Raging hormones make the skin overproduce a type of oil called sebum, which tends to block pores, leading to pimples. So, introduce your child to a daily skincare regime. Try **Young Solutions skincare range, R15.99-R60.99, from leading retailers and selected pharmacies.**



P is for **perspiration**

Thanks to the effects of oestrogen and testosterone on your child's sweat glands, they're going to need a deodorant. Explain that since they're going through puberty, they'll need to be vigilant about showering and keeping themselves stink free! Try **Dove Original Spray Anti-Perspirant, R20, or Dove Deodorant Aerosol Clean Comfort for Men, R20.99.**



Q is for **questions**

Puberty can be a confusing time for your child. Don't wait for them to come to you with questions – that day may never arrive. Make sure your child knows they can come to you for advice instead of allowing their peers to potentially mislead them.

R is for **respect**

It's a tough one for most parents, but you'll need to learn to respect your child's desire for privacy. You shouldn't expect them to want to share all their thoughts and activities with you, all of the time! However, if you start to notice any warning signs, it's time to step in.

T is for **take time to think back**

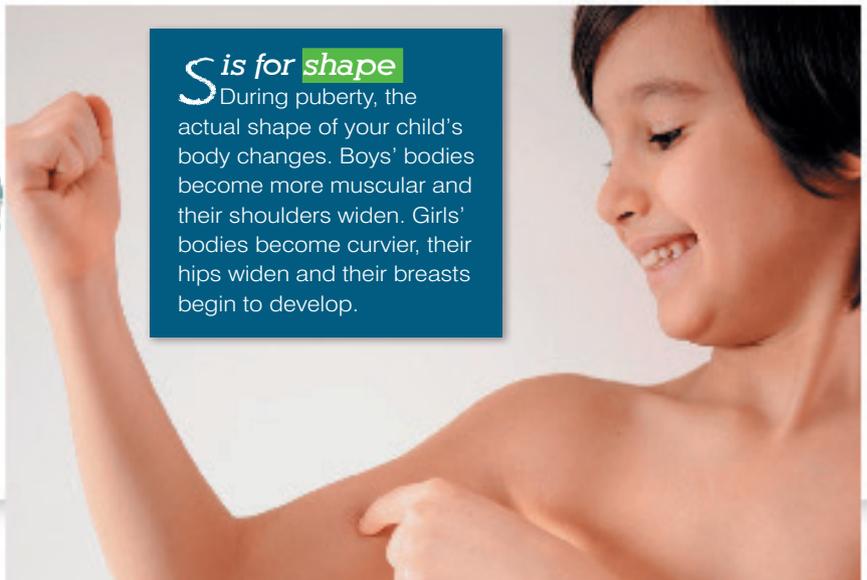
When times get tough (think mood swings and conflicts), think back on your own journey through puberty. Remember your struggles and embarrassments and take a deep breath. This too shall pass!

U is for **underlying emotions**

It's not unheard of for some children to experience emotional issues, such as depression and anxiety during puberty. Eating disorders and substance abuse are also common. If you suspect your child is experiencing these hardships, seek professional help with a psychologist or counsellor.

S is for **shape**

During puberty, the actual shape of your child's body changes. Boys' bodies become more muscular and their shoulders widen. Girls' bodies become curvier, their hips widen and their breasts begin to develop.



V is for **vocal changes**

Did you know that vocal changes during puberty occur in both boys and girls? However, it's only really noticeable in boys between the ages of 10 to 14. As his larynx grows and his vocal chords lengthen and thicken, his voice begins to deepen. All this growth causes his voice to 'break' from time to time.

W is for **weight**

Most kids (both boys and girls) gain weight during puberty, as their bodies begin to fill in and fill out. Dieting is not advised for growing children, as their bodies need all the nutrition they can get. If you're worried about your child's weight, consult your doctor.

X

is for **X-rated thoughts**

Most South African children have sex for the first time from as early as 14 years old. So while you may already have had 'the talk', consider revisiting the subject with your child. Sooner or later they're going to think about having sex, so make sure they're educated enough on the topic to make informed decisions.



Y is for **yikes, what's that?**

From unexpected erections, wet dreams and masturbation, puberty can sometimes catch even the most prepared parents off guard. No matter how embarrassing or awkward the situation, don't make a big deal out of it. If you're unsure of how to deal with a particular situation or how to answer a hair-raising question, tell them! There's no shame in not knowing the answer to everything.

Z is for **zzz...**

Most children need nine or more hours of sleep a night – but few actually get it. Puberty has an impact on your child's body clock, which affects their sleeping patterns. Keep an eye on their habits, as a lack of sleep will affect their ability to concentrate at school and will worsen their mood swings.

Books worth reading

- Sex, Puberty and All That Stuff: A Guide to Growing Up by Jacqui Bailey and Jan McCafferty, R161, Exclus1ves.co.za
- The A-Z of Growing Up, Puberty and Sex by Lesley De Meza and Stephen De Silva, R337, Exclus1ves.co.za
- Tell Me About the Changes in My Body – Adolescence and Puberty by Saranne Meyersfeld, R82, Exclus1ves.co.za

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