

Talking with your child about consent, relationships and body changes

Talking with your child about relationships, their body, and how to keep themselves safe, works best as an ongoing conversation. Within the Primary school, RSE (relationships and sex education) is often woven in with our day-to-day learning and Patana values. Your child may have questions at any time, so it's helpful to consider your own views and values before responding.

Most children are curious about relationships and sex and would like to know more. They quickly realise that some questions are more welcome than others, and that natural curiosity about sex and sexuality is not always rewarded with good answers.

Your child needs accurate information about their body, how to keep themselves safe, and how to build healthy and positive relationships at many different points in their life. This requires ongoing conversations at home and at school, interspersed with many questions and answers. Children need to learn how bodies change over time and how to manage changing feelings. Consent can and should be part of these conversations, so that our youngest students understand the importance of asking for and giving permission for physical touch.

An on-going conversation will support your child as they grow and change, and it's worth thinking about what you want to share as a family. What's important to your family, your culture, your beliefs? What values do you wish to share with your child?

Asking and answering questions helps children develop understanding. If you aren't sure how much they already know, or think they know, feel free to ask them some questions back. If they ask a question in the wrong place, delay answering but promise to talk about it at home. If you avoid answering questions, your child will quickly learn to look elsewhere for answers.

Ages and Stages

Interests and requirements change with age - and you may recognise some of these behaviours.

- Your child only wants to play with friends of the same gender.
- Games often include relationship role-play
- They are anxious about body changes
- They keep asking how babies are made
- They want to learn more about gender identity
- They would be very embarrassed to be seen naked
- They would be more than embarrassed to see you naked
- They want to spend less time with you and more time with peer group
- Hugs have now been replaced with grunts

Below is a very rough guide to the ages at which children show interest in their body, develop a sense of privacy and experience physical changes as they move through Primary and into Secondary.

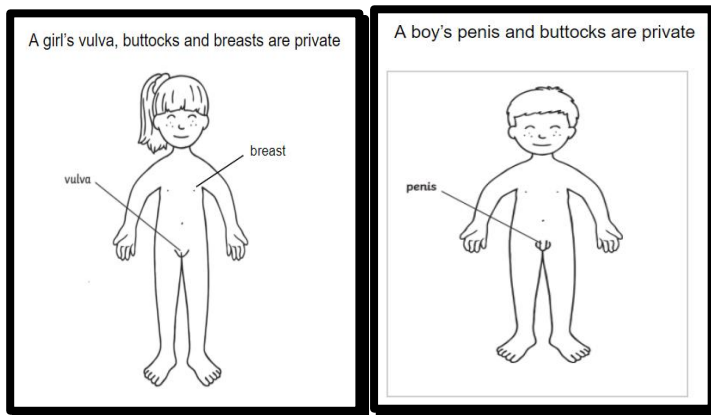
Naming body parts

Your child needs to know the right words for all parts of the body, including genitalia, and we teach these words at school. As a family, you may also have other names for these body parts and that's fine. By naming all visible body parts, including vulva, testicles, bottom/buttocks, nipples and penis, children develop the sense of ownership that comes with knowledge.

If parts of the body are left unnamed, it sends a very strange message to a child. How can they ask a question about a body part if it's been left unnamed?

Infancy: Up to two years

Toddlers are learning names for all visible parts of the body including their genitalia. They may start to identify obvious differences between genders.



Two to five years old

Children are taught that their body belongs to them.

They can start to learn about and understand consent.

They have a right to say no when they don't want to be touched, hugged and kissed.

They can decide to stop when a game gets too physical, and they don't like it anymore.



They have a right to privacy when going to the toilet. They are taught that we do not share the parts of our body covered by underwear or swimsuits, and that nobody has the right to touch their private parts. They need to know what to do and who to tell if they ever feel unsafe or unsure about a touch.



Five to eight years old

Children recognise that we all change and grow in different ways. They develop their understanding of consent, privacy and respect for others. They are interested in the different ways in which babies are made and born. They are interested to learn that some families look like theirs and some look different.



Nine to 12 years old

Some children will begin puberty before age 10, and all children need to know about puberty before these changes occur. A child who knows what to expect is less likely to be anxious. Everyone experiences change during puberty and it should not be a mystery.

Inform girls about boys' changes, and boys about girls' changes.

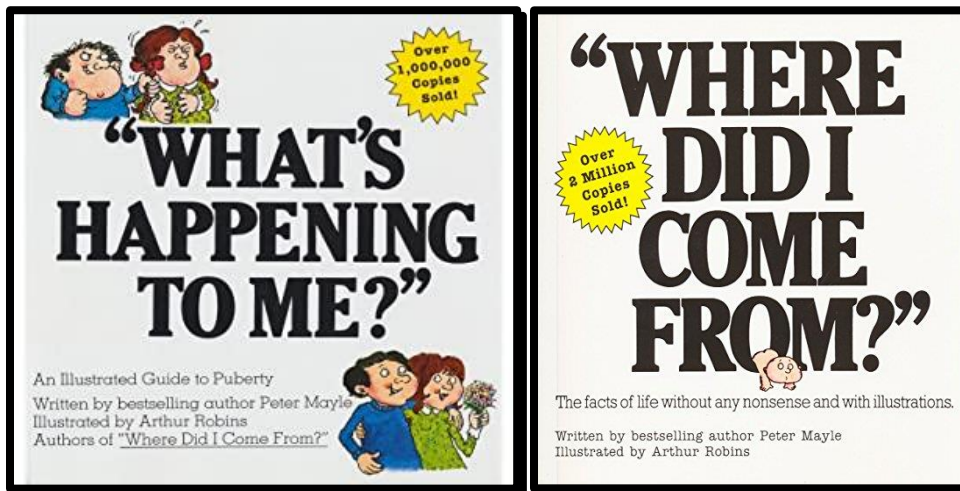
Boys need to know about involuntary erections and wet dreams, so that they know what to expect. Girls need to know about periods and to have access to sanitary products. Children continue to develop their understanding of what makes a relationship healthy and positive, including consent, safety and respect.

They may start to challenge the status quo in their relationships with adults. They might experience significant and complex upsets within their friendship group.

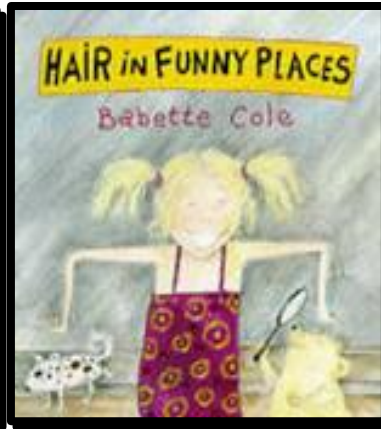
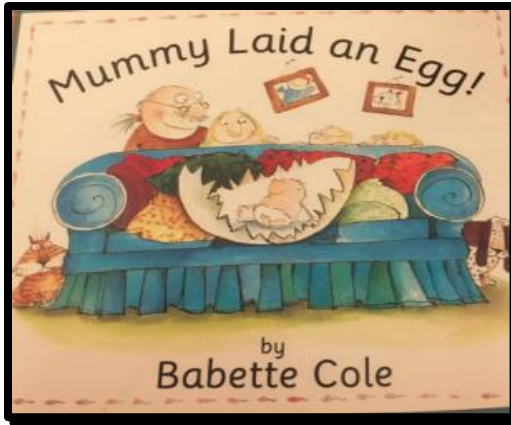
They should be helped to find trusted information about sex and sexuality. Children and young people can and do access pornography online. Be realistic about the possibility that your own child will, at some point, view content not designed for children, even if it's just a quick clip on someone's phone.

Helpful books

Not every child wants to talk about puberty, sex and relationships, and books are still a great way to share information and answer questions. There is a huge choice online if you search for Children's Sexuality, and we have some excellent resources in our libraries. These two funny books by Peter Mayle, 'Where did I come from?' and 'What's happening to me?' have been used in thousands of schools and homes.



'Mummy Laid an Egg!', and 'Hair in Funny Places,' will appeal to many children – and their parents. Many of our children will be familiar with Babette Cole's picture books.



'Making a baby', by Rachel Greener and Clare Owen reflects a more inclusive view of how every family begins and is highly recommended. It is never too early to start talking with your child about issues of consent and 'Miles is the Boss of his Body' helps frame conversations around personal body boundaries.

