

# 12-Part Sexuality Series for Parents with Children with an Intellectual Disability

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## *Part 4 of 12: More Facts Please*

Children between the years of 5-8 continue to explore and want information related to sexuality, but may be more discreet in their behaviour than when they were younger. This may pose a challenge for parents who are torn between wanting to provide information and a sense of relief that questions are not being asked. So just what kind of information is appropriate to provide to kids of this age?

It is common for children during these years want to know how babies are made and basic facts about reproduction. They may also be aware of the connection between reproduction and sexual pleasure. Influence of peers and media may result in misleading information and it is key that parents provide accurate information dispelling any misconceptions.

Now is also the time to start providing basic and age appropriate information on the topic of physical and emotional changes associated with puberty. In fact, the first signs of puberty may begin to show in girls during these years. The goal as parents is to be a step ahead in providing information. Take a trip to the library or bookstore or conduct a web search. You will be sure to find a resource that you are comfortable sharing with your child. Be aware of teachable moments and be sure to answer any question your child may ask.

Children at this age may continue to engage in sex play but efforts will be taken to conceal these games from adults. These activities are typically based on curiosity and exploration and may involve either children of the same or different gender. These behaviours do not indicate sexual orientation and are only a cause for concern should

they involve adult sex acts or when the age difference between the children is greater than 1 -2 years.

Gender role socialization is an important development during these middle childhood years. Children are developing an awareness of their own gender identity and have definite ideas about male and female roles. Boys typically play with boys and boy toys and girls typically play with girls and girl toys during this stage. Awareness of issues sexual orientation occurs during this stage.

At this age children may engage in masturbation, with the focus being on soothing or relaxing rather than on arousal or sexual pleasure. It is also important to note that a minority of children at this age may masturbate for pleasure. This behaviour is not of concern unless the behaviour is excessive or compulsive in nature or is being done in public places.

Parents of children with or without disability have the challenge of providing accurate information that answers the questions that are on the minds of their children. Take your child's lead, but don't be afraid to initiate the conversations!!!

### **References**

Sexual Health through Education (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://www.serc.mb.ca/sexual-health>

Sexual Health (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://sexualityandu.ca/>

Teaching Sexual Health (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://www.teachingsexualhealth.ca/>

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**Part 5:** Stage 5 of Sexual Development (May 2015)