

Preparing for puberty

There is no way of knowing when puberty will begin, however, it is important to talk to your young person about these changes before they happen as most autistic young people need more time to adjust to these changes in their lives and bodies, than others.

You know your child best so you can decide how much preparation time you think they'll need.

Puberty happens to everyone, so it's important to make a plan for preparing your child for this, to make this time of change as smooth as possible.

As a rough guide the NHS states that the average age for girls to begin puberty is 11, while for boys the average age is 12. However, it's completely normal for puberty to begin at any point from the ages of eight to 14.

We have put together some top tips to help you plan and prepare you for this time:

- **Speak to your child / young person's school:**

Some schools will hold lessons on puberty. Find out when they are going to be taking place and what they will be covering. By working with the school, you will help to ensure consistency between yours and the school's explanations.

- **Remember you know your child / young person best:**

You don't always have to follow chronological expectations and suggestions if they don't fit in with your child. If you think your child is ready to begin learning about puberty earlier than others, that's fine.

- **Speak to your GP about them having the conversation with your child/young person:**

Your child may respond better to having this conversation with a healthcare professional as they may only be satisfied with an accurate and scientific explanation.

- **Be equipped:**

Have sanitary products ready in the house and ensure they are always kept in the same place, so they know where they are.

- **Prepare visuals:**

Use visual schedules or prompts, take photographs and make step-by-step guides. You may find using a body outline with labelled body parts, to help talk about which body parts will change and where and when to expect body fluid. Concerning menstruation: you may find using a calendar to help understand when their period is due, will also help to decrease anxiety.

- **Demonstrate:**

If you can, demonstrate how to use sanitary products or find videos online.

- **Prepare your child/young person:**

Once puberty begins, naturally an individual will need to wash more, shave and use hygiene products. To help prepare for this use social stories.

- **Adapt their routine:**

Implement any new hygiene routines into already established routines

- **Start early:**

Puberty can be a difficult thing to teach and there will be lots of things that come with it so starting early gives you - and them - enough time to process the information and prepare.

- **Educate yourself:**

It is likely that your young person will have a lot of questions around puberty, and you need to be clear and correct in the answers you are giving them.

