

TALKING TO YOUR STUDENTS ABOUT PUBERTY

Students begin to go through puberty in the late elementary school or early middle school grades. Each student will begin and end puberty at a different time. They will also experience different physical and emotional changes through the process. While puberty is an expected stage for all students, it can be an awkward time for all your students.

How will puberty affect my students?

While puberty is normal, students may feel uncomfortable during this stage of life. Their bodies and voices are going to change. They may also experience changes in their emotional states. Students may have mood swings during classroom time. Reassuring students that changes are normal and creating a safe space for discussion will help students feel more at ease as they go through puberty.

Can puberty affect school work?

As students' bodies change, they will begin to notice themselves and each other more. Students can fall off track or become unfocused in the classroom. Emotional mood swings can disrupt the student, and potentially other students, during the school day. As a teacher, you can be aware of these potential scenarios and work with your students to promote success in the classroom.

How can I help my students in the classroom?

- **Create an open space for conversation in your classroom.** Normalize the changes and talk to your students about the changes they are going to go through. Use proper terminology, like the word puberty, to normalize the experience and assure them that everyone goes through these changes.
- **Encourage students to ask questions.** Written exercises may allow students to ask questions without being embarrassed. It will also give you a better sense of what they are thinking and feeling before a one-on-one or group discussion about puberty.
- **Refer students** who may be having a hard time with puberty to the counselor or the nurse. Each student will react differently to puberty and sometimes it may be too sensitive to handle as a teacher.
- **Help them understand that bodies come in all shape and sizes.** As students get older, they may start to feel more self-conscious about their bodies. You can help by normalizing different body types.
- **Plan certain lessons about puberty.** If your schedule or school policy allows, you can incorporate puberty into classroom lessons. If you are a science teacher, you can teach about the human body and the changes it goes through during a lifetime. If you are an ELA teacher, bring in texts, written from the perspective of a child, that explain what it's like to go through puberty.