Home–School Links Sheet 29

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Over the next few weeks, as part of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Curriculum we will be dealing with the topic of 'Myself' under the title of 'Taking care of my body'.

We want your child to identify and discuss the physical and other changes that occur in boys and girls with the onset of puberty and understand that these take place at different rates for everyone.

In the special unit on **Puberty**, the focus is on the changes that occur during puberty and understand that these changes take place at different rates for everyone.

Note:
This is a suggestion for how to teach children about puberty. The comfort level of the parent/guardian will have an important impact on the discussion. Your child should feel secure and safe to discuss this topic.

- ✓ Begin by asking your child how they feel when they think about puberty. Your child could come up with responses including nervous, embarrassed, uncomfortable, scared, excited, curious, interested, etc. Acknowledge how your child is feeling and try your best to put him/her at ease. (The more open you are, the more comfortable your child will feel.)
- ✓ Puberty is a normal stage of life which everyone must go through. It is a time of great change. Special hormones are running through the body, changing it from the body of a child to the body of a young adult. Most of these changes happen very slowly.
- ✓ Puberty begins at any age between eight and 15 years old. Puberty often starts earlier in girls than in boys. The changes that occur during puberty are normal and will happen to everyone at some stage – every adult you know has gone through puberty!
- ✓ The physical changes will differ from one boy to another, and from one girl to another. Bodies come in all different shapes and sizes, but every body shape is perfectly normal.

Ask your child to list the changes that occur in boys during puberty:

(If incorrect terminology is used by your child, gently and without judgement, explain the correct anatomical terms.)

Taller, broader chest, facial hair, larger Adam's apple, chest hair, arm hair, armpit hair, leg hair, pubic hair, larger penis, larger testicles, voice deepens, spots, mood swings, erections, wet dreams (nocturnal emissions).

Ask your child to list the changes that occur in girls during puberty:

Taller and stronger, breasts grow/develop, hips widen, armpit hair, leg hair, pubic hair, spots, mood swings, periods/menstruation.

If you would like to go into further detail on the topic of puberty, there are excellent e-booklets and video clips available at: *www.healthpromotion.ie/health/inner/busy_bodies*.

Home–School Links Sheet 30

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Over the next few weeks, as part of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Curriculum we will be dealing with the topic of 'Myself' under the titles of 'Taking care of my body' and 'Growing and changing'.

We want your child to understand the reproductive system of both male and female adults and to understand sexual intercourse, conception and birth within the context of a committed, loving relationship.

In the special unit on **Reproduction**, the focus is on the reproductive system in humans. Lead a conversation on the reproductive system by asking the following:

- What does 'reproduction' mean? (*Human reproduction is when a male and a female join to make a baby – another human being.*)
- What would happen if everyone decided not to have any children? (*The human race would become extinct.*)
- Would you like to have children some day?
- When, do you think, is a good time to have children? (***Note:*** *This is a sensitive question. We are trying to highlight that it is more desirable to become a parent when a person is emotionally ready and self-reliant.*)

When people reach puberty, they become young adults. It becomes possible for them to make a baby. However, while young adults become physically mature enough to have a baby, they are not emotionally ready. The best time for a couple to have a baby is when they are both emotionally and financially stable – this occurs in adulthood. Also, while puberty brings about the body's ability to reproduce, it is illegal to have sexual intercourse before the age of 17.

Lead the conversation on the reproductive system by asking the following:

- Where does a baby grow and develop? *(mother's womb)*
- For how long does a baby develop inside the womb?
- Where do babies get their food from? • How do you think babies exit the womb?

(1) Every month, a woman's body releases a tiny egg called an 'ovum'. When a man and a woman have sexual intercourse, the man's erect penis enters the woman's vagina. The man releases a whitish liquid called 'semen' inside the woman's vagina. The semen contains little seeds called 'sperm'. The sperm travels or swims up to the woman's fallopian tubes. A baby is made (or conceived) when a sperm and an ovum meet. The egg is now said to be 'fertilised'.

(2) The fertilised egg sits in a cosy area of the woman's body called the womb or uterus. It will stay there for nine months, growing from a tiny egg into a baby.

(3) The baby is very safe inside its mother's womb. The baby gets all the food and water it needs from its mother through a tube called the 'umbilical cord'. Your navel or belly button marks the spot where you had an umbilical cord when you were growing inside your mother's womb.

(4) The baby grows quickly.

(5) While a woman is pregnant, she needs lots of rest and good food to help her and her baby to stay healthy and strong.

(6) At the end of nine months or 40 weeks, the baby is born. The cervix opens and the muscles of the womb help to push the baby down towards the vagina. The vagina is stretchy and it expands to let the baby out into the world. The umbilical cord is cut (this does not hurt the baby), and the baby will breathe for the first time on his/her own.