

Dallin Elementary School
5th Grade Parent/Guardian Forum on “Growing Up” Lessons
October 2019

Summary of Discussion

Classroom Norms are defined early to help students feel safe and comfortable. We do many games and activities, beginning with “I notice/I wonder” to help students identify questions and be in a curious mindset. There is a 26-min video, which is available online; see FAQs below for a link. The two lessons from Great Body Shop are called: 1) Hormones & Your Body, 2) Growing Up Male & Female. I divide the lessons into three days to provide more time to discuss consent, values, peer pressure, and discrimination. The classes are co-ed. We spend time discussing gender identity and expression, and I define the terms LGBTQIA but do not discuss human sexual reproduction. Recommended books and FAQs are below.

Book List

- Robie Harris’ books: *Who Has What?* (all ages), *It’s Not the Stork* (ages 4+), *It’s So Amazing* (7+), *It’s Perfectly Normal* (10+)
- American Girl series: *The Care & Keeping of You 1* (ages 8+) & *2* (10+), *Celebrate Your Body & Its Changes Too!* (8+), *Guy Stuff: The Body Book for Boys* (9+), *The Feelings Book* (9+)
- Other body books: *The Fantastic Body* by Dr. Howard Bennett, *Human Body Theater* by Maris Wicks

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we do this unit now?

- Students at Dallin study Great Body Shop lessons each year. “Growing Up,” our unit that studies human growth & development, helps students understand what physical changes happen in puberty, and it is appropriate for students ages nine and up.
- Many people struggle with body positivity, not just our students; thus, puberty can be a challenging topic. Students who go through puberty early may feel uncomfortable about being the first to have noticeable changes in their bodies, and likewise students who have not yet started puberty may feel uncomfortable about their bodies not changing in outward appearance. For some students, these changes can be confusing or unwanted. I will pay particular attention to the language I use. For example, I will say “changes experienced by most girls” or “most boys” to acknowledge that not everyone has the same experience of growing up.
- Young people often have some misconceptions about what changes will happen, when they will take place, and how those changes will affect them. This unit allows students to explore how puberty can be both exciting and concerning for many young people. It’s important for their social & emotional learning to know that physical and emotional changes are a typical part of adolescence and that it’s ok to have feelings about this.

What are you teaching them?

- The primary messages I want our fifth grade students to take from these lessons are:
 - Our bodies are amazing!
 - Parents are the primary health educators at home

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- If students have questions that aren't answered at home or don't know how to find answers, I'm available for confidential questions any time and have books they can borrow

Are you talking about sex?

- Sexual reproduction is not discussed in 5th grade classes in Arlington Public Schools. Our three lessons will focus on:
 - The definition of puberty & the role of hormones in starting puberty
 - Biological sex & gender, gender identity & expression, and LGBTQIA
 - Values, norms, stereotypes, prejudice, consent, and decision making
- Throughout the discussions we'll observe gendered and sexualized media and ponder the questions, “Who's included, who's not, and why?”

Is there a video?

- Yes, in fact, there is! Parents are welcome to preview the 26-minute video (by Proctor & Gamble, called “Always Changing and Growing Up Co-Ed”) on their own or with their children; it's [available online](#)
- We watch a 2nd video on Day 3 called “Consent for Kids!,” which is also [online](#)

When will this happen?

- The first lesson will take place beginning before Thanksgiving break. You will receive an email with a “Home Link” (not homework!) that I hope will facilitate discussion at home.

What kinds of questions do students ask? Do you tell them about sexual reproduction if they ask you point-blank?

- After every lesson, I invite anonymous questions via a Question Box. All students write something on an index card (a question, feedback on the lesson, what they ate for breakfast, etc.), and I answer their questions when I return for another lesson.
- Inevitably, someone will ask, “So how is a baby made, anyway?” My answer is that babies come into this world in many different amazing ways, and every family has a unique story. I invite them to ask parents their own conception story. I refer students with questions we don't have time for and specific questions about sexual activity to their parents/caregivers or other trusted adults, and I share other resources for more facts and information on puberty. Come find me in my office to see some great books!

Why aren't you separating boys and girls?

- [Best practice](#) dictates students benefit from learning information about what happens to all bodies and from an atmosphere where sharing this information is normalized and not taboo. Co-ed teaching also promotes an inclusive environment for transgender and non-binary students. Students are able to ask anonymous questions (see “question box” above) if they are not comfortable sharing in a larger group.

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I've never talked about this subject with my child before. How do I start a conversation at home?

- You could preview the video together before we watch it in class.
- I highly recommend the book, *It's Perfectly Normal*. It is divided into short chapters, and your child can either start it on their own and come to you with questions, or you can read it together.
- Try talking in the car. When you're not facing each other, it can take some of the pressure off.
- What were your own stories of how you learned about puberty? Could you share them with your kids? Giving examples from your own childhood can start the ball rolling, e.g., “I noticed when I was your age that suddenly there were big differences in height and people started getting really smelly. Have you noticed any of that? Has it made you wonder why?” Perhaps they'll even tell you about how I visited their classes last year to preview this content with them. We discussed how hormones are responsible for body changes like underarm odor.
- Share how you are feeling! Kids notice when you're uncomfortable, and it's ok to say so. Sometimes I'll say in class, “Wow, this is making me blush! I think it might be because I said X when I meant to say Y.” Letting them laugh with you can help make the conversation feel more fun.

Reach out for more information at any time. Thanks for your interest!

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