



# Student Wellbeing Hub

Focus on puberty

Module **3**  
Years 5-6

Teaching resource for  
students with autism

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## Introduction

This resource is designed to support teachers of students with autism. It aims to help you as a teacher to understand some of the strengths and challenges that this diverse cohort of students brings to the topic. The core audience is teachers who work in mainstream schools rather than special schools.

The resource includes background information, links to resources designed for teacher use and resources that can be used with students.

Note that some of the content in this resource includes references to sexual feelings and/or masturbation, as well as the physical developments associated with puberty. These topics can be sensitive in schools and school communities. Please consider the following prior to using this resource with students:

- relevant school policies
- the age-appropriateness and relevance to your particular cohort of students.

## Australian curriculum

### [Achievement standard links](#)

- By the end of Year 6, students investigate developmental changes and transitions.
- They recognise the influence of emotions on behaviours and discuss factors that influence how people interact.
- They describe their own and others' contributions to health, physical activity, safety and wellbeing.

## Puberty and my body

Students with autism can require more explicit teaching than other students around puberty and how it will impact on their bodies. In particular, students with autism may become confused about what can be shared privately with a safe adult or good friend versus what is ok to share in public. In addition to learning about what is appropriate to communicate to whom face-to-face, high levels of social media usage mean that it is vital for students to develop an understanding of public online versus private online interactions.

Three areas, in particular, that need to be addressed to support students to manage puberty are:

- public versus private body parts
- erections and wet dreams
- menstruation (periods).



Approximately one per cent of children are born intersex. That is, with characteristics of both male and female reproductive systems. Each of these children will develop slightly differently. If you have a student who is intersex, it is recommended you meet with their family prior to introducing activities around pubertal change. Find out how they would like this topic to be presented meaningfully for their child, or if they would like there to be an additional task that they complete with regards to their own body.

### Teaching about this topic: Some considerations

#### Resources

There are large numbers of resources on puberty, though very few are detailed and explicit enough for many students with autism to learn from effectively.



[Busy bodies](http://www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/education-puberty-10-14yrs-old-busy-bodies-adolescent-development-programme/)<sup>1</sup> is a good resource that focuses on puberty and associated impacts on young people. Produced by Health Promotion Ireland, it includes a teacher guide, video resources and a parent guide. The cartoon format is accessible though be mindful that the lack of a mouth on the animated characters may be extremely


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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/education-puberty-10-14yrs-old-busy-bodies-adolescent-development-programme/>

disturbing or distracting for some students with autism. It is also worth noting that some students with auditory or receptive language issues may struggle to understand the Irish accent.

To complete this module, it is important students learn the correct names for body parts, especially those that are subject to change during puberty. It is recommended you share this information with families who may use their own names for body parts. Students who use augmentative and alternative communication should have access to the same vocabulary, which may need to be added to their PODD or other communication book or device. Once students have been introduced to the correct names for body parts, then they can learn about how their bodies change during puberty and how to manage some of these changes.

### **Resources based on symbols and images**

 [PODD<sup>2</sup>](#) (Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display) is usually a book or device that contains symbols and words to support communication between people with complex communication needs and their communication partners, whether that's carers, family, friends or teachers.

 The [Student Wellbeing Hub<sup>3</sup>](#) hosts videos and resources designed for use with the [SECCA app<sup>4</sup>](#). This is a web-based resource that you can use to support understandings of relationships and sexuality. Requires free registration.

There are some resources available to support this module for Years 5–6 which are specific to students with autism or disability more broadly. For example, the SECCA app covers topics around body awareness, sexuality and relationships for both children and adults. The foundation part of this app will be suitable to use with your Year 5–6 students. It has a number of interactive activities developing understandings of public activities versus private activities, as well as resources about periods and masturbation.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://novitatech.com.au/equipment/podd-communication-books/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/educators/respectful-relationships-education/relationships-education-using-visual-aids/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://app.secca.org.au/>

## Working with parents



[Puberty: A guide for teenagers with an autism spectrum disorder and their parents](http://livingwellwithautism.com/assets/docs/autism-spectrum-disorder.184122715.pdf)<sup>5</sup>

is a resource you might like your students' parents to have. It was developed by the Faculty of Health at Latrobe University as a result of interviews with parents that identified that parents had difficulty discussing puberty with their child, particularly the associated physical changes, in a way that was meaningful to teenagers with autism. Parents also highlighted concerns regarding a focus on negative or problematic issues relating to puberty and teenagers with autism. The resource focuses on the physical, social and emotional impact of puberty.

## Gender diversity

Understandings of gender diversity may surface when exploring the topic of puberty. Each education department/jurisdiction will provide guidelines about working with students who have intersex variations or who are gender diverse. When teaching lessons about physical sex characteristics, it is important to understand and acknowledge this diversity with reference to the policies in your local context.

## Teaching activity 1: Body parts

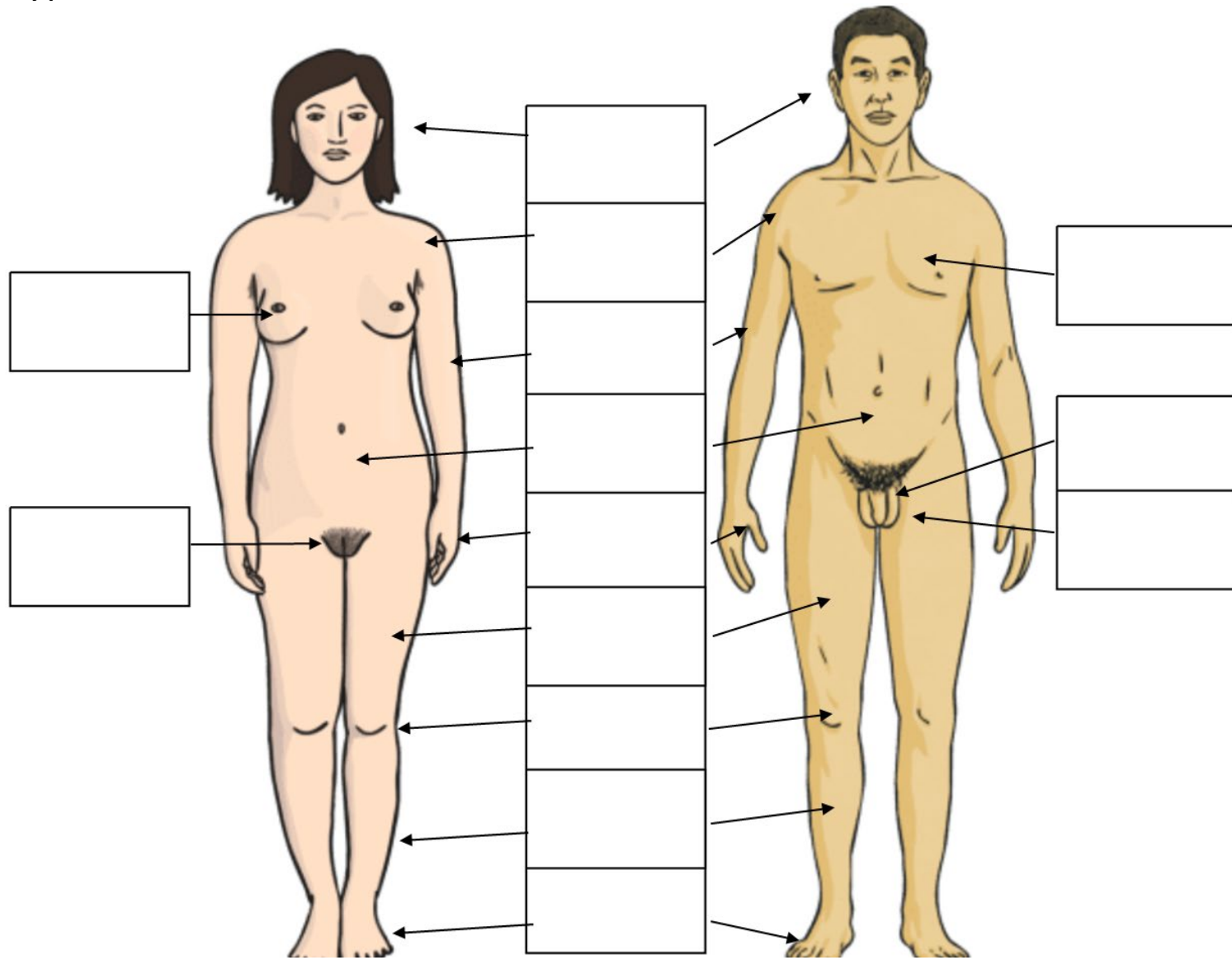
In this activity students will learn about body parts using the worksheets on the next two pages. It is recommended that all students label both the male and female body parts in this activity. This is to ensure they have a basic understanding of human anatomy before continuing with the rest of the module.

Provide students with a copy of both worksheets. Ask students to cut out labels and glue them onto the correct body part. Alternatively, students could write the name of each body part in the correct box.


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<sup>5</sup> <http://livingwellwithautism.com/assets/docs/autism-spectrum-disorder.184122715.pdf>

Worksheet: Body parts



Worksheet: Body parts labels

shin	hand	thigh
arm	penis	stomach
shoulder	vagina	breasts
chest	head	knee
	testicles	



## Teaching activity 2: Changes in puberty

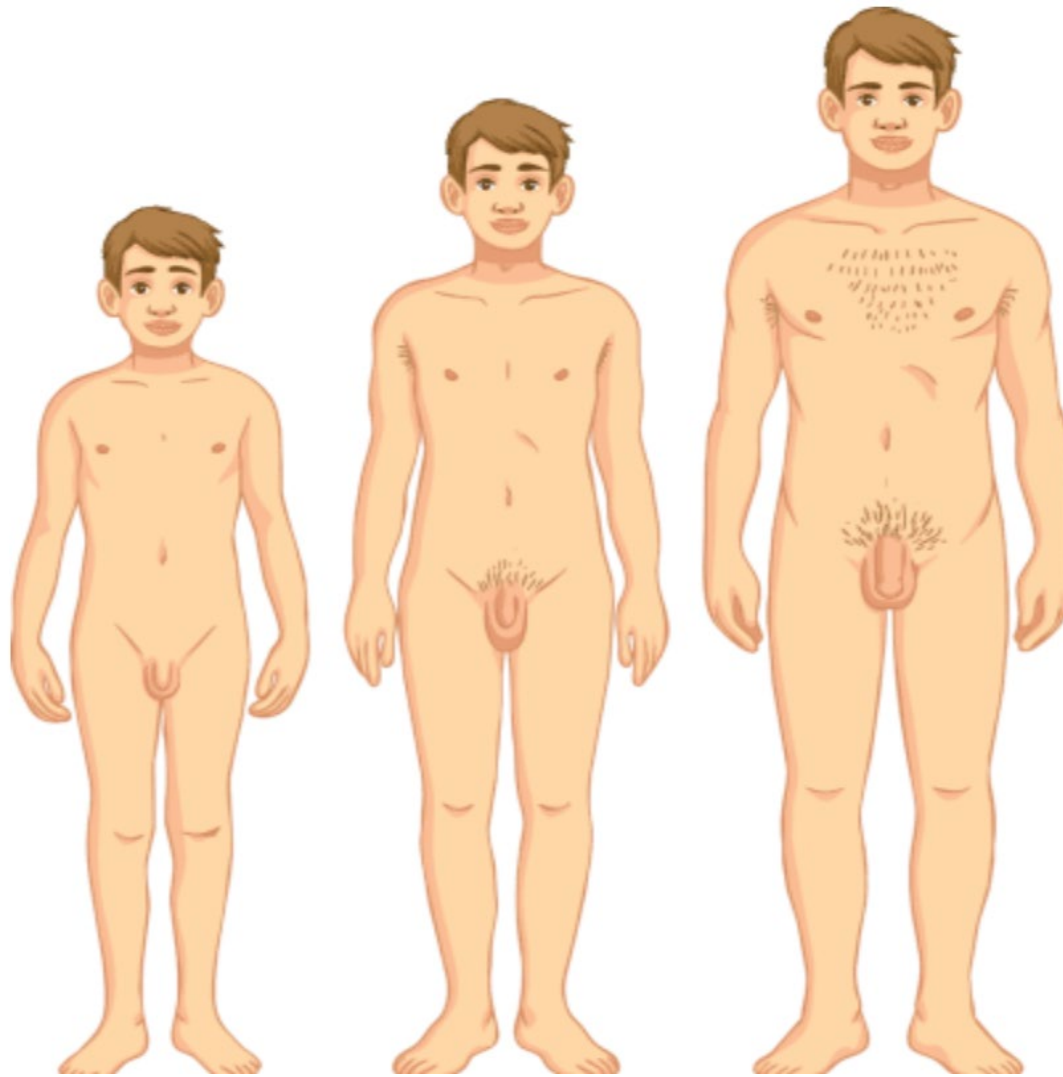
In this activity students will learn what happens to their body during puberty based on changes they can see. It is recommended that all students complete both the male and female pubertal changes sections for each activity.

There are some options in the way that you could present this activity depending on your context and that of your students.

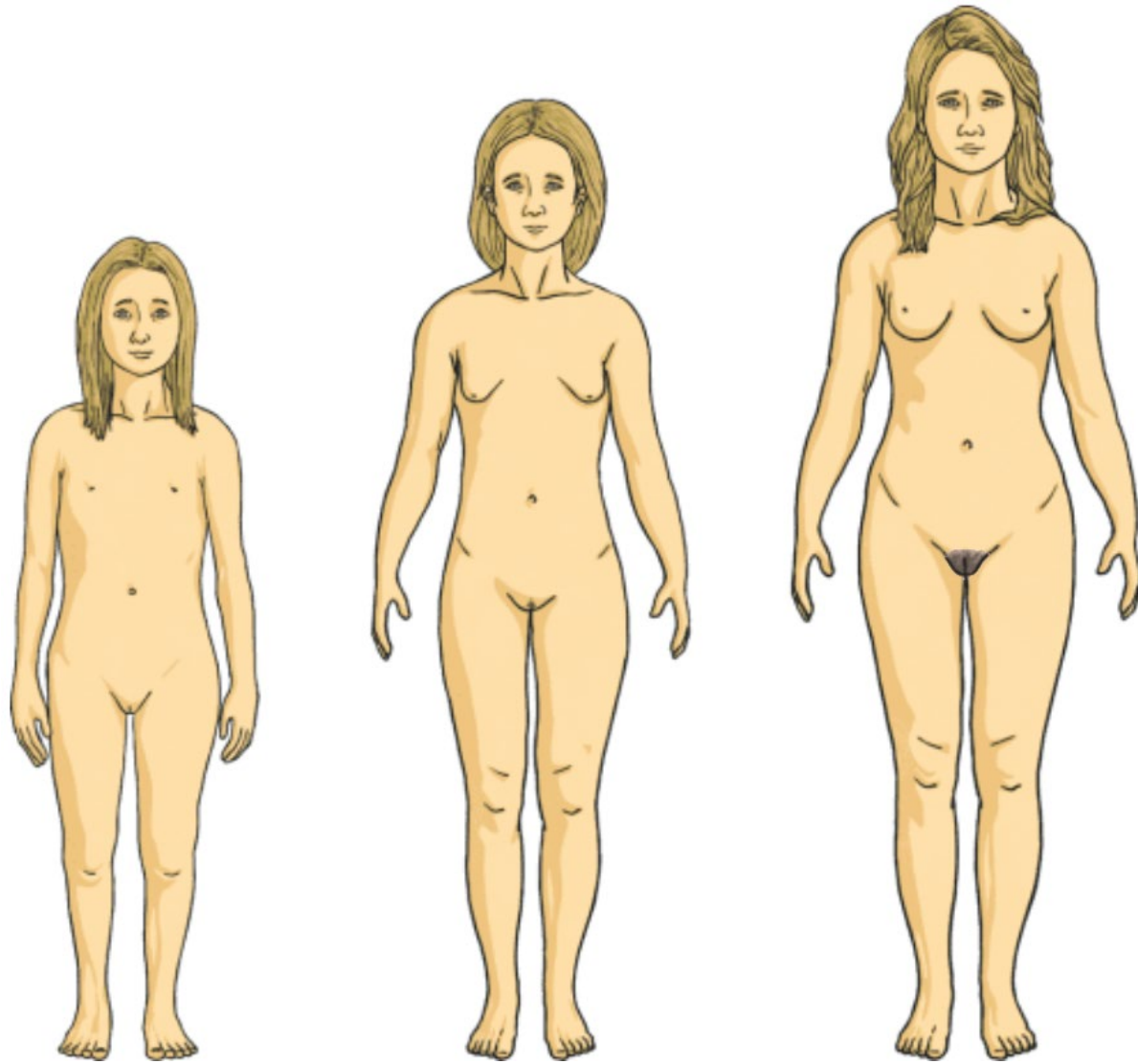
Provide students with a copies of the worksheets on the next two pages. Each worksheet contains three pictures of females or males in different stages of development. Ask students to undertake one of the following three activities:

- Option 1:** Circle noticeable changes in the bodies. Discuss the changes in the group after everyone has circled at least two things on each person.
- Option 2:** Label the body parts that have changes (use labels from the previous activity). Write down what these changes are.
- Option 3:** Write a descriptive paragraph for each of the puberty changes (girl and boy).

**Worksheet: Puberty changes to a boy's body**



**Worksheet: Puberty changes to a girl's body**



After the students have completed at least one of the previous options, they can move on to the next set of activities. These will look in more detail about how these changes impact them, and how to manage these impacts.

Books, videos, cartoons or visual social stories are appropriate to introduce puberty body changes to students. Choosing resources will depend on the level of ability of the students you are teaching. Some students will benefit from all types of resources, while others, potentially with high-level language skills, will not be engaged in learning based on the social stories. Examples of visual 'what to do stories' are included on the next two pages. The Visual puberty for boys worksheet provides examples of what boys will experience during puberty. Ask your students to add appropriate images using a resource such as the SECCA app.



[SECCA app](https://app.secca.org.au/)<sup>6</sup> allows you to create specific content for your students. Requires free registration.

Alternatively, if you have an account, you can download a visual story from [Boardmaker online](https://www.boardmakeronline.com/)<sup>7</sup>.

### **Additional visual resources for teaching about puberty and private parts**

For boys:



[Puberty Social Story](https://www.livingwellwithautism.com/assets/docs/Puberty_Social_Story224173449.184123317.pdf)<sup>8</sup> published on Living well with Autism



[What are private parts](https://www.livingwellwithautism.com/assets/docs/what_are_private_parts.186100701.pdf)<sup>9</sup> published on Living well with Autism

For girls:



[Introductory videos on puberty for girls](https://kidshealth.org/en/kids/center/girls-puberty-center.html)<sup>10</sup> a series from KidsHealth



[Visual story](https://www.boardmakeronline.com/Activity/337205)<sup>11</sup> (requires Boardmaker membership)

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<sup>6</sup> <https://app.secca.org.au/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.boardmakeronline.com/Login.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.livingwellwithautism.com/assets/docs/Puberty\\_Social\\_Story224173449.184123317.pdf](https://www.livingwellwithautism.com/assets/docs/Puberty_Social_Story224173449.184123317.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [http://livingwellwithautism.com/assets/docs/what\\_are\\_private\\_parts.186100701.pdf](http://livingwellwithautism.com/assets/docs/what_are_private_parts.186100701.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <https://kidshealth.org/en/kids/center/girls-puberty-center.html>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.boardmakeronline.com/Activity/337205>

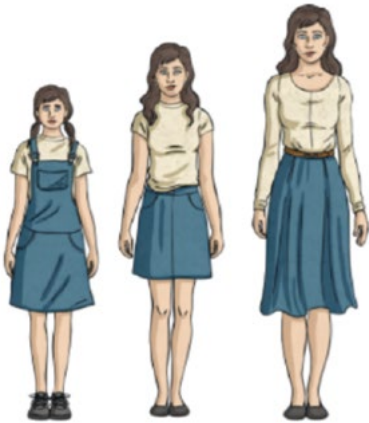
**Example: Visual puberty story for boys**

This story is a way to outline the hygiene needs of pubescent boys. Make this a visual story by adding appropriate images from your PODD or from the web-based [SECCA app](#).

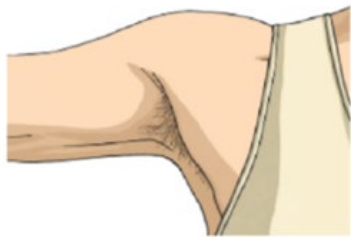
I'm growing up	I used to be a small boy	Now I'm a young man	My body is changing
This is a good thing	I'm getting taller	Soon I will have more hair on my legs	Hair will grow under my arms
I might grow chest hair	And I will have pubic hair near my private parts	When I am about 15, hair will grow on my face	My voice will sound lower
My penis is also growing	Soon I will put on deodorant every day	Dad and Mum will show me how to shave	These changes happen to all boys
Sometimes I might feel embarrassed about these changes	Sometimes I might feel proud	It's okay to ask questions about these changes	My parents love me and they understand

### Example: Visual puberty story for girls

This story is a way to outline some of the physical changes that girls might expect during puberty.



When girls go through puberty their bodies change. These changes can take a long time. They can start anywhere from the age of 8 and last until the girl is a teenager.



In puberty, armpit, leg and pubic hair will grow. This is normal. Armpits may start to become more smelly in puberty and you may need to start using deodorant. Deodorant is put on your armpits after a shower or a bath or swimming. You may choose to shave your legs and/or your armpits.



Girls also start to grow breasts during puberty. Sometimes, breasts can hurt as they are growing. This is normal. You can wear a bra to help support your breasts. A bra should feel comfortable and supportive. Until your breasts stop growing, you may need to buy a different size bra every 3–6 months.



Girls in puberty start to menstruate. This is also known as getting your period. Periods are usually every month and can last from a few to ten days. During your period, blood comes out of your vagina. Pads, tampons, period cups or period underwear are used to keep you clean.

## Public versus private body parts

Before starting this section, it is important to check that students understand the concepts of public and private spaces and the activities that are linked with these.



[Private vs public behaviours](#)<sup>12</sup> is a visual story that helps students to identify locations that are private and those that are public, and a range of behaviours appropriate to the type of location (account required to download).



[Public vs private definitions and behaviors: for teens and adults](#)<sup>13</sup> is an example of a simple sorting activity created using [Boardmaker](#) visuals (account required to download).

### Additional resources



[Organization for Autism Research](#)<sup>14</sup> has a more complex presentation of the concepts of public versus private. It is provided here as an additional resource for teachers rather than students. It includes information about:

- why understanding the difference between public and private is important
- what public, semi-public, semi-private and private places are
- what behaviours, conversations and personal information are okay in each type of place.



[PANTS resources for schools and teachers](#)<sup>15</sup> has lessons plan and associated resources from the UK National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. The resources teach about private body parts using the 'pants' rule, which may suit students with autism who have difficulty managing complex rules and social norms.



The SECCA app has some [interactive games](#)<sup>16</sup> around the concept of public/private (free registration required).

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.boardmakeronline.com/Activity/3209147>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.boardmakeronline.com/Activity/5280686>

<sup>14</sup> <https://researchautism.org/sex-ed-guide-public-private/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/schools/pants-teaching/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://app.secca.org.au/app/scr/foundations/7/games>



[Everyone has private parts](#)<sup>17</sup> are visual stories explicitly teaching the concept of private body parts, using accurate names. Take care with this resource especially if a student is receiving personal care support from an adult in school or in the home. The visual can be problematic in this case as carers may be need to touch parts of the body normally considered private. This exception, as part of the carer's role, will need to be explicitly taught.

### Individual safety

It is important students understand that to keep themselves safe they need to keep their 'private body parts private'.

You could use the following statement to introduce this concept:

'Private body parts are the parts that are covered by your bathers or a bikini. Private body parts are special and touching them can feel nice. It is ok for you to touch them in private.'

Of course, there are exceptions to this rule, which is important for students to learn explicitly. For example, when other people help with toileting and when medical professionals touch others to examine private parts. In the first case, an example might be wiping a student's bottom after a bowel motion, prior to putting on new continence underwear.

The following background information will help you support students' understandings of the exceptions that apply to the notion of privacy:

- If medical assistance is required, people may need to see or touch private body parts; for example, a doctor may need to examine a vagina or testicles. If a doctor needs to do this, a parent or carer should be in the same room with the student.
- No one except the student should be touching their private body parts, unless the individual needs physical help to wash them or physical help with toileting, due to

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<sup>17</sup> [http://livingwellwithautism.com/yahoo\\_site\\_admin/assets/docs/what\\_are\\_private\\_parts.186100701.pdf](http://livingwellwithautism.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/what_are_private_parts.186100701.pdf)



disability. If someone is helping to wipe their bottom after a poo, they should ask first and the student and their parents or carers should have agreed that this help is required.

- If the student thinks they can wipe themselves, or they want to learn how to do this, they need to let their parent or carer and/or teacher know.
- If anyone asks to, or just touches their private parts, they need to tell a parent and/or teacher, especially if the person touching them says it is a secret.

### **Teaching activity 3: Public versus private body parts.**

Provide students with a copy of the handout on the next page. Ask them to circle the private body parts for both boys and girls.

A handout version of the background information above has been written for students. Provide copies of this information to students and encourage them to spend some time familiarising themselves with the content. Use the content to discuss situations where there are exceptions to the general rules for private body parts.

**Worksheet: Public versus private body parts**

Circle private body parts in **RED**.



## **Handout: Your body parts and other people – What’s OK and what’s not OK**

### **Seeing a doctor or nurse**

Some people may need to see or touch our private body parts, if we need medical assistance; for example, a doctor may need to examine a vagina or testicles. If a doctor needs to do this, your parent or carer should be in the same room with you. No one except yourself should be touching your private body parts, unless you need physical help to wash them or physical help with toileting, due to a disability.

### **Going to the toilet**

If someone is helping you wipe your bottom after you have had a poo, they should ask you first and you and your parents or carers should have agreed that you need this help. If you think you can wipe yourself, or you want to learn how to do this, you need to let your parent or carer and/or teacher know. If anyone asks to, or just touches your private parts, you need to tell your parent or carer and/or your teacher, especially if the person touching you says it is a secret.

### **Getting changed at home**

It is usually ok if one of your family members sees you naked at home when you are getting changed or in the bathroom. If you are not comfortable with this, you should ask them to STOP LOOKING and GO AWAY or CLOSE THE DOOR. If they won’t stop or go away or close the door, you can tell your teacher. If anyone else wants to watch you when you are going to the toilet or having a shower or bath, you should tell them very loudly to STOP LOOKING and GO AWAY. If they don’t, you need to tell your parents or carers or a teacher, who will help you.

### **Sending photos of your private parts**

No one should be sending you photos of private parts or asking you to take photos of your private parts and message them these. As you are still under the legal age of consent, which is 16 or 17 across Australia, depending what state you live in, this is against the law and the police need to be told. Your parents or carers or your teacher can help you if someone does send you a photo of their private parts or asks you to send them photos of your private parts.

## Being safe around other people

### Interacting with others

When discussing safety, it is important to briefly touch on the concept of consent, especially in terms of interacting with other people in an age-appropriate way. For example, students need to understand that they should seek consent before holding hands with someone in the playground, and that adults should seek consent before holding their hand.



[Consent for kids<sup>18</sup>](#) is an animated video from Blue Seat Studios describing consent.

Use this video to introduce concepts such as asking for consent to hold hands and other types of touch.



Remember to discuss exceptions to the rule. Occasions such as preventing someone from being run over by a car or being hit by a ball may need to be explored.

Consent as it relates to the use of personal devices is also age-appropriate to discuss.



The [eSafety commissioner website<sup>19</sup>](#) is recommended for resources to cover this topic. It contains training in eSafety, classroom resources and information for parents.

Alternatively, in some states and territories, police offer workshops for students that cover cyber-safety, including:

- online photos – what is it ok to post?
- texting – how many texts is it ok to send to one person if they are not replying?

### Periods and how to manage them

Please note that for some girls with autism, periods can be incredibly difficult to manage. Some of the newer types of sanitary products, like period underwear, are environmentally friendly, cost-effective and much easier to use.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3nhM9UIjc>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.esafety.gov.au/>

For students with blood phobias, sensory sensitivity to the smell of blood, executive functioning difficulties and/or hand–eye coordination difficulties, period underwear can offer dignity and a degree of autonomy. Depending on the flow level, period underwear can be worn for up to 12 hours before being rinsed and then put into the washing machine. The student may need someone else to rinse them if this would be overwhelming for them. Black period underwear will hide the blood and coloured period underwear will provide a more visual signal around the blood.

## Resources

### Books



*Autism-friendly guide to periods* by Robyn Steward

Written by a person with autism, this is a detailed guide for tweens and teens on the basics of menstruation. The book offers clear visual information on what periods look like, clear descriptions of what they feel like, and how to manage hygiene and pain. The book uses flaps and step-by-step photos of how to change pads and tampons, and discusses alternatives to pads and tampons, while covering possible sensory issues for people with autism.

### Videos/cartoons



[All about getting your period](#)<sup>20</sup> is an animated video that starts off with the many euphemisms about getting a period.

Use this video to discuss the euphemisms, remembering to be explicit when explaining. It could be useful to construct a ‘word wall’ on a whiteboard or using sticky notes on a blank wall.

### Apps, websites and visual social stories



[Sustainable Period Project](#)<sup>21</sup> can send schools a free kit including four types of menstrual products (three are reusable), leaflets and a USB of teaching resources.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RX4NJrJxwss>

<sup>21</sup> <https://sustainableperiodproject.org/>



[Amaze All About Getting Your Period resource](#)<sup>22</sup> This resource explains the process of menstruation, or getting your period.



[Using tampons social script](#)<sup>23</sup>



[Using pads social script](#)<sup>24</sup>



[Tampons task analysis \(can be made into a flip book\)](#)<sup>25</sup>



[Pads task analysis \(can be made into a flip book\)](#)<sup>26</sup>



Remember, the explanation for your students should be age and stage appropriate. Bear in mind that many of the students will be starting to menstruate soon, if they have not already done so.

If students and their families decide to use reusable products, you could adapt the above resources for these products.

## Erections and how to manage them

Male students going through puberty will experience more frequent erections, possibly during school hours. They may be embarrassed about this, or sometimes they may respond in unhelpful ways, such as thinking they need to masturbate when they have an erection, no matter where they are.

Once again, it is worth stating that learning related to this topic should be age and stage appropriate.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://amaze.org/video/all-about-getting-your-period/>

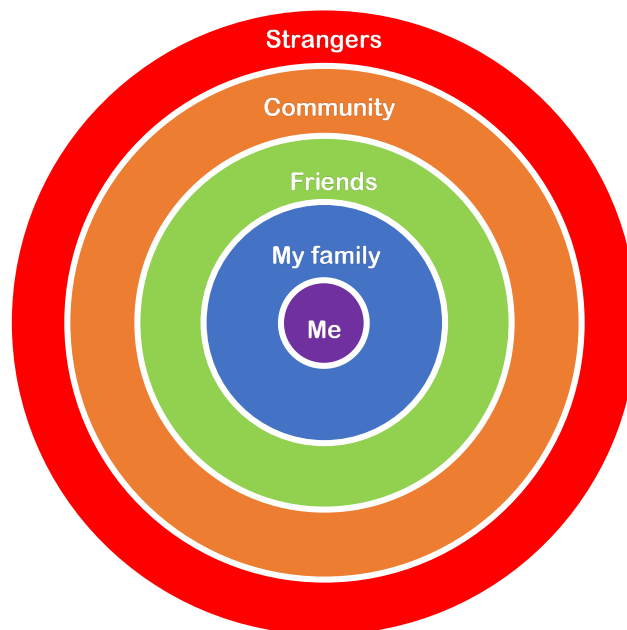
<sup>23</sup> [https://www.amaze.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Using-Tampons-Social-Script\\_FINAL2023-1.pdf](https://www.amaze.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Using-Tampons-Social-Script_FINAL2023-1.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.amaze.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Using-a-Pad-Social-Script-February-2019\\_RS-FINAL\\_2023-updated.pdf](https://www.amaze.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Using-a-Pad-Social-Script-February-2019_RS-FINAL_2023-updated.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> [https://www.amaze.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Tampons-Task-Analysis-February-2019\\_RS-1.pptx](https://www.amaze.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Tampons-Task-Analysis-February-2019_RS-1.pptx) <sup>26</sup> [https://www.amaze.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Pads-Task-Analysis-February-2019\\_RS.pptx](https://www.amaze.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Pads-Task-Analysis-February-2019_RS.pptx)

## Friendships and relationships: changes as we grow up

This section is designed to help your students understand the different kinds of friendships and relationships that can develop during and after puberty. The different kinds of relationships students will have at this stage are illustrated in the 'circle of security' below:



The following activities should help students to link public and private behaviours with the different parts of the 'circle of security'.

Some students with autism may struggle to understand the difference between friends and community members.



It is important to have completed [Module 2 Year 5-6: Developing positive relationships](#) before doing the next activity. Module 2 introduces students to the topic of healthy and unhealthy friendships/relationships.

In the next activity students will explore the concept of good friends versus acquaintances and be introduced to the concepts of boyfriend/girlfriend, dating, consent and being/staying safe.

It is important that students be able to understand who they can appropriately hug/kiss and start to be confident in their awareness of safe and unsafe touch. This section can be more

complicated to cover than it appears, as it is important to take into account the cultural norms of your students. For example, in some cultures, kissing to greet people may be the norm but it may never occur in others. No matter what the cultural norms are, asking first before interpersonal touch is a 'better safe than sorry rule'.



[All about hugs<sup>27</sup>](#) is a visual story that illustrates the complexity of knowing when to hug. This particular story shows that no hugging should take place at school. However, some schools do allow hugging.

Use this visual story as an example to create a version that is consistent with the needs of your students and the community norms of your school.

#### **Teaching activity 4: Good friend or acquaintance?**

This activity asks students to identify the people that they can kiss and those people who they can hug. Use the worksheet on the next page to facilitate a discussion about the nature of being an acquaintance or a good friend and who they can appropriately hug/kiss and who falls outside that category of relationship.

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<sup>27</sup> [https://livingwellwithautism.com/assets/docs/all\\_about\\_hugs.18692725.pdf](https://livingwellwithautism.com/assets/docs/all_about_hugs.18692725.pdf)



**Worksheet: Good friend or acquaintance?**

Students: In the circles below mark with an X the people that you can kiss and with a 0 those people who you can hug. Are kisses all the same, or are some kinds of kisses different? What is an acquaintance? How is an acquaintance different from a good friend?



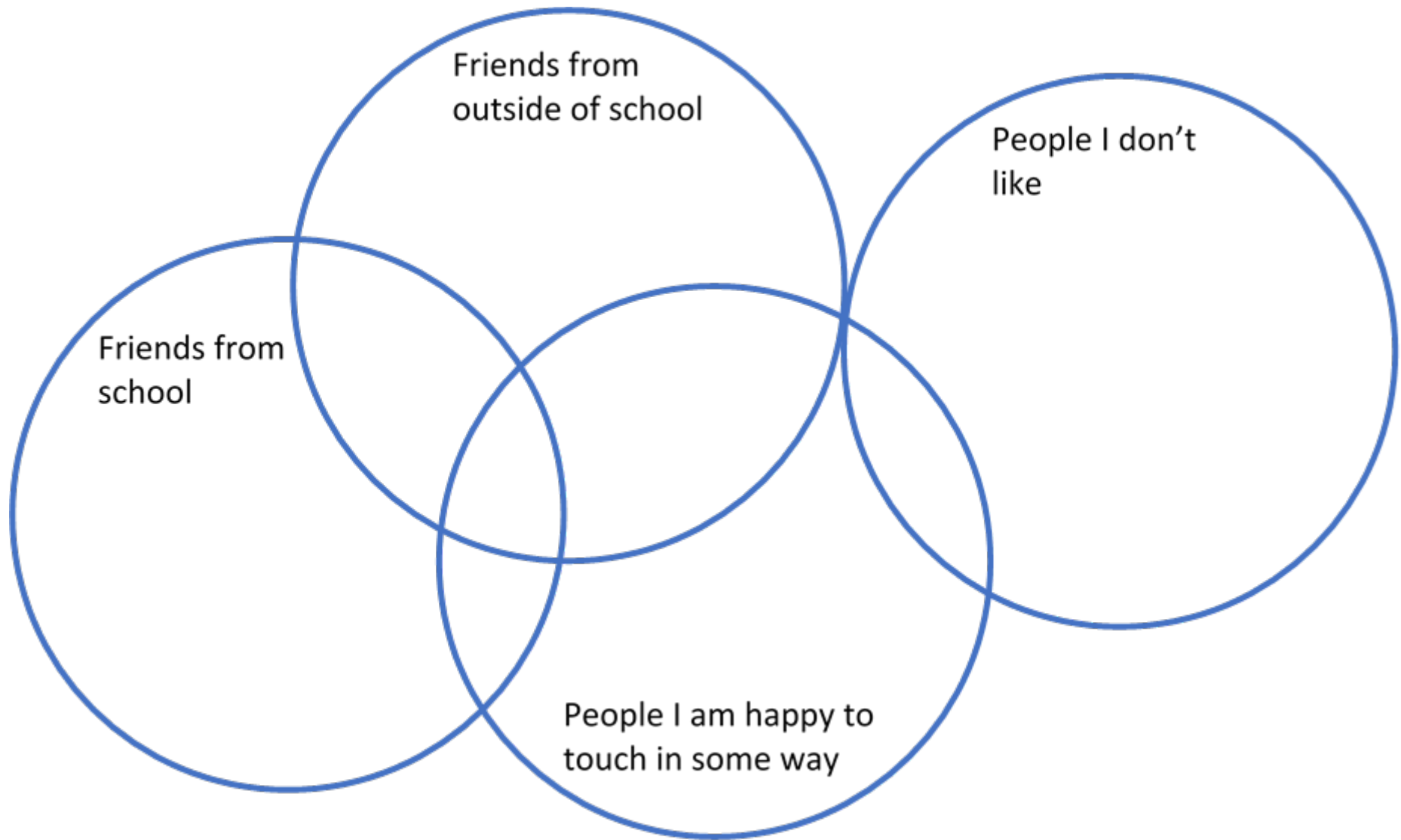
### **Teaching activity 5: Who my friends are**

In this activity students identify and categorise people into friends at school, friends outside school, people whom they are happy to touch, and people that they do not like. Provide each student with a copy of the worksheet on the next page and ask them fill in the circles with the names of people they know at school and at home. Some students may choose to do this activity on their own and prefer not to share their responses.

#### **Extend this activity**

Place four hula-hoops or four pieces of paper on the floor. Using sticky notes create labels for each hoop, replicating the configuration of the worksheet. Ask students to write their answers on sticky notes and then place them where they think they belong.

Worksheet: Who my friends are



## Healthy relationships

Young people on the autism spectrum may be vulnerable to abuse within relationships of all types. This makes it vital that they understand the concepts of healthy versus unhealthy relationships, in tandem with developing an awareness of the different types of friendships, including dating.



[\*What makes a relationship healthy?\*](#)<sup>28</sup> is an animated video that can be used to introduce the concept of healthy relationships.

At this stage of schooling, students may be talking about having ‘crushes’ on other students or ‘going out’ with someone. In popular culture, students may be exposed to ideas about romantic relationships.

Students with autism can have differences in social communication which can sometimes lead to difficulties in adolescence. Students with autism may feel left behind or caught up in situations that they do not fully understand. Each student will be at a different stage of emotional development that cannot be ascertained by their physical development. You may find some students with autism will be engaged by this topic, while others will not be interested at this time. Use your judgement about the extent to which you explore this topic depending on the needs and contexts of your students.

When students first start experimenting with relationships, these relationships are often based more in talk than in action. This can be confusing for some students with autism. For example, when they hear someone say, ‘I’m going out with Jarrah’, they may wonder what this means as they note that the person has not actually been anywhere with Jarrah. Some students with autism do not always understand that when peers say they are doing something that does not always mean that they actually are.



[\*Ask a tween: What is dating like?\*](#)<sup>29</sup> is a short US-based video that can be used as a conversation starter depending on the context for your students. It explores the topic of relationships from the perspectives of 12-year-olds.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://youtu.be/UB9anEZx9LU>

<sup>29</sup> <https://youtu.be/tFmiHWTWcrl>



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