

Teaching Puberty: You Can Do It!

Growth & Development Curriculum Support for Grades 5 and 6

Lesson 5: Body Awareness for Girls

(to run concurrently with Body Awareness for Boys) If gender-separate classes are not done, move to Lesson 6.

Target Group: Grades 5 and 6
Suggested Time: 60 minutes

Learning Goals:

Today we are learning to:

- review ground rules as a class
- review key information from previous lessons
- review changes of puberty in more detail
- demonstrate confidence in asking questions
- be aware of other resources that can assist us to learn about puberty
- share our learning with an adult we trust

Suggested Materials:

- anatomical diagrams (Appendix G)
- SMART board or white/black board
- flip chart paper
- question box (with a small opening in the lid and the lid taped shut)
- paper for the question box (uniform colour/size)

Rationale for All-Gender vs. Gender-Separate classes

All-gender classes are recommended for Lessons 1- 4 of the puberty classes. Teaching puberty in an all-gender environment encourages students to:

- learn to talk comfortably and respectfully with each other
- learn that as people, some are more or less curious, shy, or confident about this topic
- understand that most of the changes are the same for everyone, decreasing the 'us' and 'them' pattern of thinking

There are also some reasons for teaching some classes separately by gender. In these classes some students may:

- feel more comfortable in asking questions on sensitive subjects
- feel camaraderie when discussing these topics
- feel that they can seek more in-depth information, as needed

It is often assumed that by separating the class into boys and girls we are creating two groups who each have similar anatomy and who will experience puberty in the same way. It is important to be aware that this may not be true, and that trans* students, gender expansive students and intersex students may find this isolating, upsetting, or embarrassing. Some of these students will want to participate with their peers, others may want alternative arrangements. Even when talking to a same gender group it is important to acknowledge that there will be a diversity of bodies and experiences.

Activity #1: Introduction

Discuss as a group where students would like to sit for this informal class (options could be moving chairs to a circle, sitting on floor, remaining at desks).

Review ground rules, what 'puberty' means, use of dictionary words, and the various ways questions can be asked.

Discuss reasons for this 'girls' session – see above.

Talk about how, even in a group of all girls, students will find that they have differences – their bodies will be different, when and how they experience things will be different, how they feel about puberty will be different, and much more. Caution students about making comments about 'all girls' or 'for girls' and encourage them not to make generalizations.

Activity #2: Review Changes in Girls

Review changes of bodies at puberty that have been discussed in previous lessons.

Teacher Prompt:

- "We have already spent some time talking about changes of the female body at puberty. Today we will discuss a few things in further detail, such as breast development, hygiene, menstruation, and menstrual products."

Ask students to recall some of the changes that females go through during puberty.

Use Additional Information below to expand on discussion.

Additional Information for Activity #2

- At puberty, feet often go through a growth spurt first, but the rest of the body will soon follow.
- Hips broaden to prepare for the possible birth of a baby one day.
- Body hair grows in the armpits and pubic area, and can become darker and thicker on the arms, legs, and face.
- Some people choose to remove hair by shaving or waxing (or various other hair removal methods).
- Skin increases oil production, which may lead to pimples or acne.
- Height and weight increase, primarily determined by genes and also influenced by nutrition.
- An increase in body weight is normal and healthy.
- A certain amount of body fat (adipose tissue) is required for the menstrual cycle to begin.
- It is common for one breast to be larger than the other – it is unlikely other people notice this.
- Not all vulvas look alike. Vulvas come in different shapes, sizes, and colours. Labias come in different lengths too.
- It is common during puberty to spend more time with friends and also alone.
- At this stage, young people's feelings and moods can be very up and down, which can be difficult for them and those around them.
- Learning to talk about feelings and new situations continues to be very important.

Activity #3: Breast Development

Discuss common and expected changes in breast and body shape (see Lesson 3).

Teacher Prompts:

- "When breasts begin to develop, there is often a hard lump that may be felt under the nipple."
- "One breast often develops before the other, and breasts may feel sore at times."
- "It can take 3 - 5 years before breasts are fully grown."
- "If a body grows a baby, after the baby is born, breasts will produce milk."
- "Breasts can also be a source of sexual pleasure for a person and for their partner."
- "Bras, camisoles, or tank tops can be used to provide coverage and support."

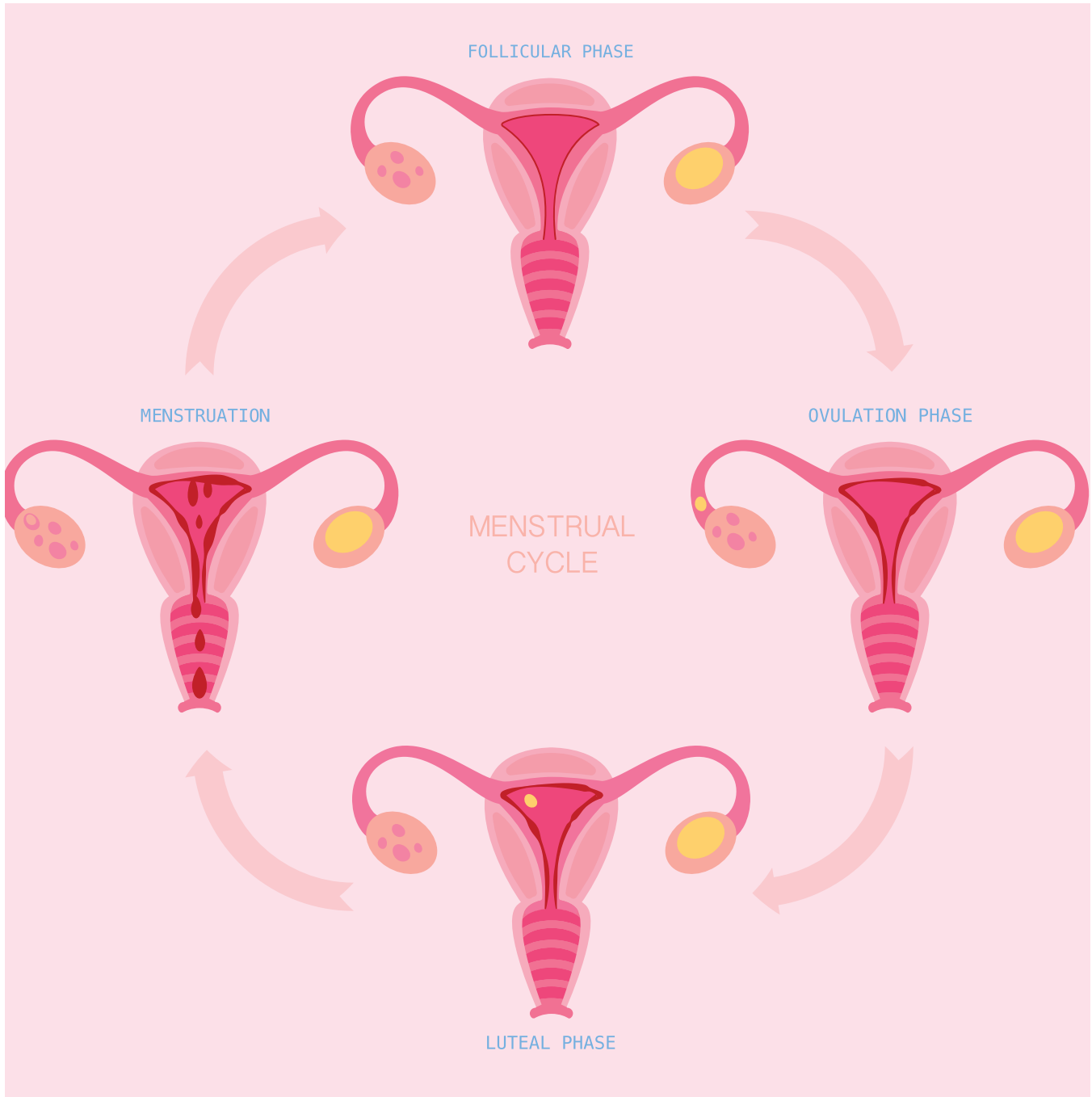
Explain how bras are labelled (e.g. 32A: '32' refers to number of inches around bust line, 'A' refers to cup size).

Additional Information to Activity #3

- Size is primarily determined by genes but can be affected by surgery, pregnancy, nutrition, and adipose tissue.
- Breast cancer is extremely rare in puberty; lumps should not require a consultation with a doctor.

Activity # 4: Review the menstrual cycle

Using a poster or diagram (Appendix G) and the Additional Information below, review a basic overview of the menstrual cycle.



Teacher Prompts:

- “As we discussed in Lesson 4, beginning at puberty, the ovaries release an ovum about once a month. Most of the time the ovum does not meet with a sperm cell in the fallopian tube, and it then dissolves. Two weeks later, the lining that had been building up in the uterus is not needed, and it will slowly flow out of the cervix, through the vagina to the outside of the body. This is called menstruation or ‘getting your period.’”
- “How might someone know they are going to start their period soon? – Up to two years before someone gets their first period, they might have some discharge (fluid) coming from the vagina – this may dry on their underwear to leave a little white or yellowish mark.”
- “Menstruation usually begins after someone has started to develop breasts and after they have some pubic and underarm hair.”
- “Is menstrual blood always red? – No. Someone would know that they are starting to have periods when they find some fluid on their underwear or on the toilet paper when they wipe – this fluid may be dark brown, red, or pinkish in colour.”
- “How often does a period come? – Menstruation may be irregular at first and may come every 21 to 42 days; if a period often comes sooner or later than this, or if a someone has not had their period by age 16, they should tell their health care provider.”
- “Menstruation continues to happen approximately every month; it stops during pregnancy and menopause.”
- “It is a good idea to mark the beginning of your period on a calendar each month. This can help predict when the next period may come.”

Additional Information for Activity #4

- Usually a period is heaviest for the first day or two, then the flow decreases over the next few days.
- Menstrual fluid (about 2 tablespoons to a ½ cup per menstrual period) will come out during the day and night usually for between 3 and 7 days.
- Pads (which stick to the inside of the underwear) or tampons (which are inserted into the vagina) or a number of reusable products can be used to absorb the menstrual fluid.

Activity #5: Menstrual Discomforts

Lead a discussion on cramps and possible tips to relieve them.

Teacher Prompts:

- “Has anyone heard of menstrual or period cramps?”
- “Some people get abdominal pain, cramping, headaches, diarrhea, or changes in mood with their periods; others do not.”
- “Nausea can accompany the cramping for some people.”
- “Cramps usually start on the first day of a period but may start a day or two earlier.”
- “Cramps can be felt in the lower belly, lower back, or even in the thighs.”
- “What could someone do to alleviate the symptoms?”
- “Symptoms may be eased by applying heat with a heating pad or hot water bottle.”
- “Eating a diet with lots of fruit and vegetables, and getting regular exercise, may help prevent cramps for some people.”
- “Students should talk with a trusted adult before trying certain herbal teas and remedies.”

Additional Information for Activity #5

- Those who experience such painful cramps that they miss school and other activities need to talk to a health care provider about possible use of medications.

Activity #6: Menstrual Products

Using the Additional Information below, lead a discussion on the variety of menstrual products available (e.g., pads, panty liners, tampons, reusable products).

Teacher Prompts:

- “There are many products available that absorb the menstrual fluid as it leaves the body, so that it does not stain clothing.”
- “Pads have sticky adhesive on the back so that they can stick onto the inner lining of underwear and catch the fluid as it is leaving the vagina.”
- “Tampons or menstrual cups are inserted into the vagina to absorb the fluid before it leaves the body.”

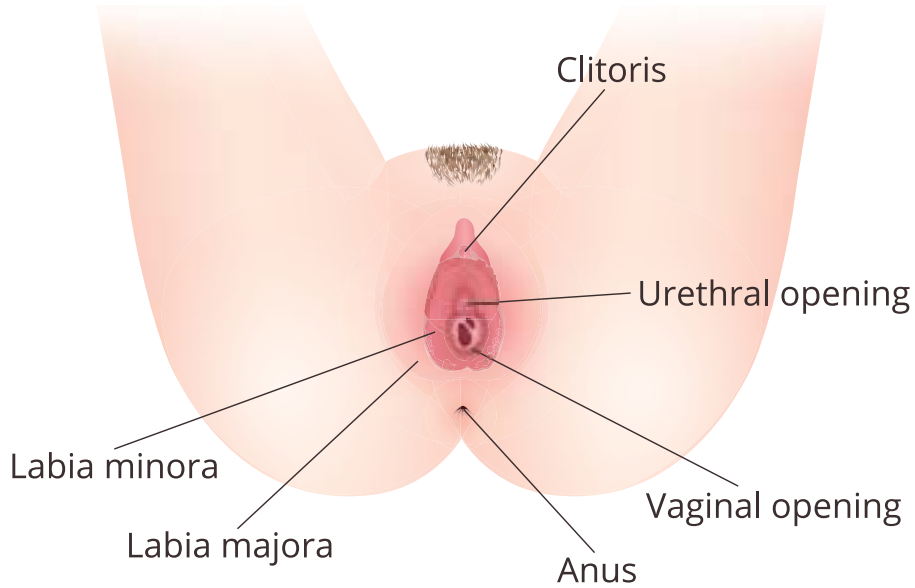
Show students samples of different pads and tampons. Pass them around so each student can have a closer look at them during the discussion.

Teacher Prompts:

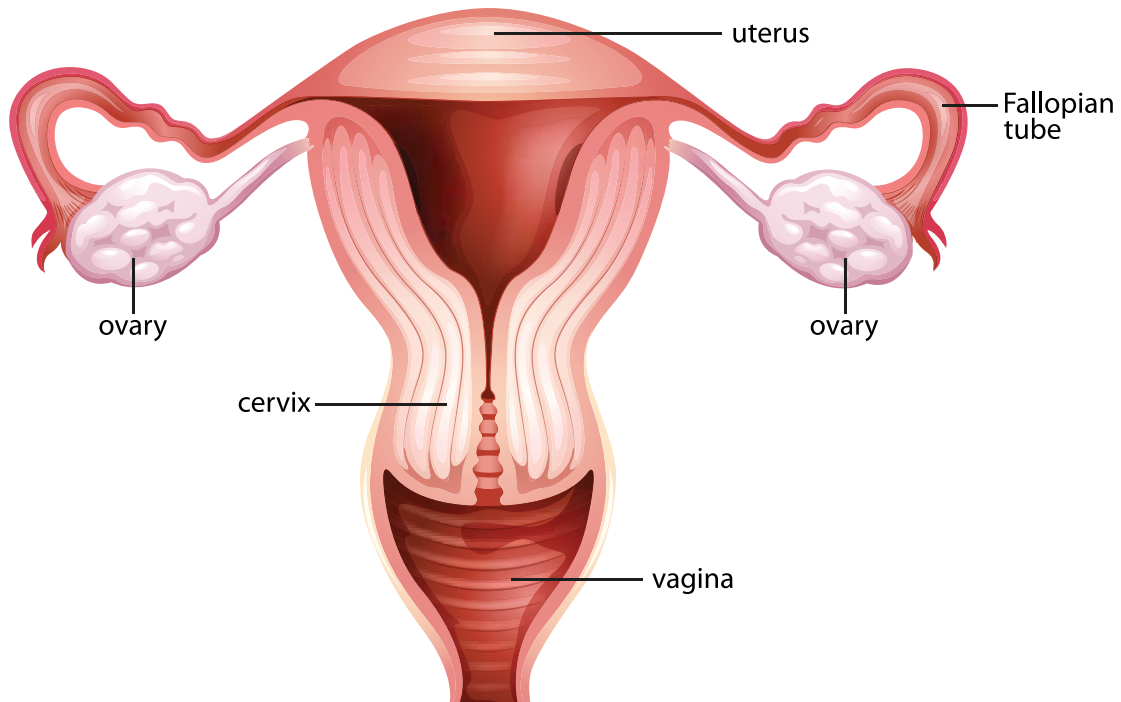
- “What could someone use if they started their period away from home and were not prepared with a pad or tampon?”
- “Where could someone carry their menstrual products when they are away from home?”

Use a diagram or poster to show how the tampon fits inside the body.

ANATOMY Female External Genital Organs



Female Reproductive System



Put a slender-sized tampon in a glass of water to show how it absorbs and holds fluid.

Note: Remind students that inside their body there will not be as much fluid to absorb as in the glass of water.

Additional Information for Activity #6

- Pads are placed in the underwear to absorb menstrual flow.
- Pads come in different sizes (e.g., slender, long), thicknesses (e.g., maxi, super, mini, night time), and styles (e.g., with or without tabs or 'wings', with or without deodorant).
- Menstrual products with deodorants are not needed and can cause irritation.
- Pads need to be changed every 3 - 4 hours or more often if the period is heavy.
- If a pad is unavailable, one can be made by folding up toilet paper or paper towel.
- Used pads should be wrapped in toilet paper or the plastic wrapper from the fresh pad and put in the garbage; never put pads down the toilet.
- Pads should be worn overnight (not tampons).
- If someone has a very heavy period, they may want to get a thicker or more absorbent pad.
- Tampons are absorbent, densely-packed material (usually cotton) that are tube-shaped and are inserted into the vagina to catch menstrual fluid before it leaves the body.
- Tampons come in a variety of sizes and absorbencies (e.g., slender, regular, super absorbent) and many come with applicators (to help with insertion) made of plastic or cardboard.
- Some people never use tampons, some use them for swimming or certain activities, and some use them throughout their period.
- Tampons should be changed every 4 - 8 hours or more often if needed; a tampon that is too absorbent for a girl's flow will be more difficult to remove as it dries out the vagina.¹
- Tampons should not be worn for longer than 8 hours at a time and should not be worn overnight due to the risk of a rare infection called Toxic Shock Syndrome.²
- Many people use a light pad with a tampon to protect against leaks.
- Tampons cannot get lost in the body since the cervix stops them from going into the uterus.
- Used tampons should be wrapped and toilet paper and put in the garbage for disposal. Do not flush down the toilet.
- If menstrual fluid leaks onto clothes or sheets, items should be rinsed and washed in cold water as soon as possible to avoid stains.
- Some people choose to use environmentally-friendly products that can be reused, such as menstrual cups.

1 Government of Canada. (2015). *Menstrual tampons*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-medical-devices/menstrual-tampons.html>

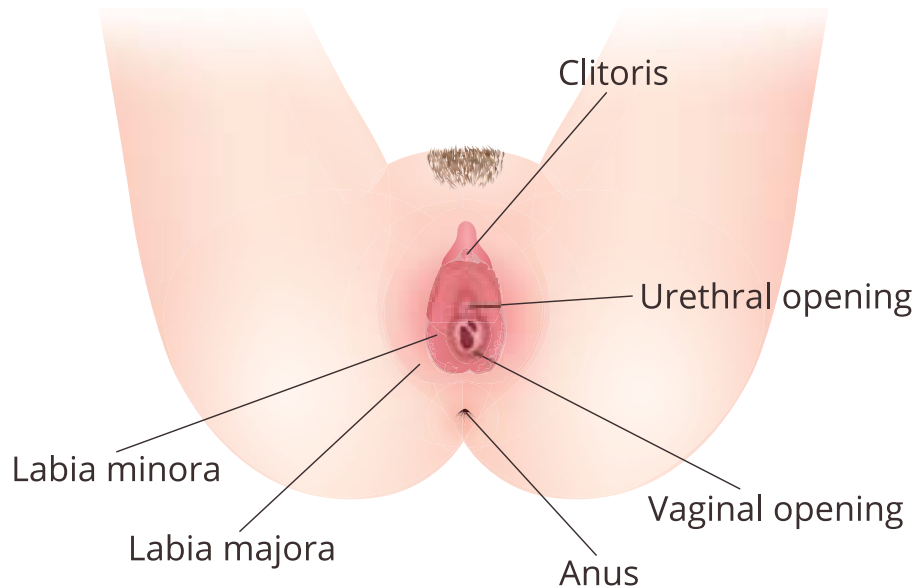
2 *ibid.*

Activity #7: Vaginal Health

Remind students about the difference between a vagina and a vulva. The vulva is the name of the external genitals that include the labia and the clitoris, while the vagina is an internal structure that has an opening within the vulva.

ANATOMY

Female External Genital Organs



Using the Additional Information below, lead a discussion related to vaginal and vulvar health.

Teacher Prompts:

- “As you enter puberty, it is normal and natural to have fluids (secretions and discharge) coming out of the vagina.”
- “The vulva (external) can be cleaned by bathing or showering daily with mild soap and water.”
- “The vagina (internal) cleans itself so there is no need to wash inside (douche).”
- “The vagina has a natural odour and if you think that the odour has changed, you may want to discuss it with a trusted adult.”

Additional Information for Activity #7

- Vaginal infections can be caused by some soap products (including bubble baths), by wearing non-cotton underwear, by prolonged use of panty-liners, or from wiping from back to front after a bowel movement.

Activity #8: Personal Hygiene

This activity uses a kit made up of several products that pertain to puberty. Choose from the following list of products and have them (or photo representations) together in a container for the students to explore.

(Some teachers may choose to use all products for all groups, and some may select only certain products to discuss, based on the group.)

- T-shirt
- socks
- deodorant/antiperspirant
- shoe insoles or box of baking powder
- athletic support device (to protect the crotch/genitals)
- bra/camisole
- wash cloth
- soap
- toothpaste/toothbrush
- floss
- water bottle
- underwear
- razor/shaving cream
- shampoo
- baseball hat
- hot water bottle
- menstrual products (disposable menstrual pads of various sizes, reusable pads, tampons, menstrual cup (e.g., Diva, Keeper or Soft Cup)
- hairbrush
- healthy snacks

Using the various products, have students pick an item, describe what it is and how it relates to puberty.

Use Additional Information below to facilitate discussion.

Additional Information for Activity #8

- Once puberty has begun, an increased production of sweat can lead to body odour if the sweat stays on the skin/clothes and bacteria develops; this means that people need to wash daily with soap and water – especially underarms, groin, and feet.
- Deodorant or antiperspirant can be worn on clean underarms to decrease odour.
- Clean underwear, shirts, and socks should be worn every day. Clothes need to be washed regularly.
- Baseball hats and other hats require regular cleaning as the head produces more sweat.
- Pimples are caused by the increased amount of oil (sebum) that the skin produces starting in puberty. Although washing with soap and water, eating well, and getting enough sleep can help the skin, sometimes it is not enough and extra creams and medications are needed. A health care provider can help determine if someone needs prescription medication.
- Hot water bottles or heating pads can be used to help people experiencing menstrual cramps.

Wrap Up for Lesson 5

- Summarize what was discussed in this lesson and ask for any questions.
- Encourage students to share what they have learned with a trusted adult.
- Write the Kids Help Phone contact information on the board (1-800-668-6868, www.kidshelpphone.ca) and remind students that contacting Kids Help Phone is free, confidential, anonymous, and that it can be a safe place to discuss concerns.
- Discuss what will be talked about in Lesson 6: inappropriate sexual attention and contact, naming and describing emotions, and more time for questions.
- Give students paper and ask for contributions to the question box.

Adapted with permission from Toronto Public Health (October 2022)



HEALTH
DEPARTMENT

Durham Health Connection Line | 905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729
durham.ca/sexualhealth

If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.

