

Adult Guidance

Puberty

Ensure that you check and comply with your school's sex education policy before teaching this lesson.

Statutory Guidance

This unit covers the Human Life Cycle and puberty is clearly an important stage of development. Children cannot be withdrawn from science lessons which cover statutory content of the national curriculum. However, it is essential that you consult your school's policies for Science and Sex and Relationships Education prior to teaching this lesson to ensure that the content of the lesson matches those policies.

Puberty

Puberty usually starts sooner for girls than boys but lasts roughly the same amount of time. While girls can start the process from 8/9 years old, the average for boys and girls is around 10 with some boys starting the process around 11/12.

As this is a Year 5 unit, the children may already have started to experience some changes to their bodies or moods. The extent to which this personal experience should be shared as part of a science lesson is down to the professional judgement of the teacher and the school. In most cases, such discussions are better in specific PSHE/Sex and Relationships lessons which can also discuss the emotional changes that children are undergoing and teach them how to cope with these.

Physical Changes

From a science perspective puberty is taught due to the significant changes that take place from childhood to becoming an adult. Other than during the first year of life, such dramatic changes do not take place.

Both the hypothalamus and pituitary gland are involved in development during puberty. Testosterone in boys and oestrogen and progesterone in girls is responsible for the main changes that occur physically. Puberty occurs for the purpose of preparing the body physically to reproduce as an adult.

However, it is important to ensure that children understand that just because the physical changes take place and that reproduction is possible does not mean it is meant to occur during adolescence. It should be clear that puberty is a process that takes place over the course of several years. For example, a girl's body is not ready to become pregnant as soon as she starts her period, other physical changes to the body need to have taken place in order for her to have a safe and successful pregnancy. These changes can occur in a short or a long time frame as it varies from person to person.

Post-Lesson

It is not recommended that this lesson be taught without connection to lessons which discuss the emotional changes that occur during puberty. Follow-up sessions may include specific lessons for boys and girls to explore changes further or discuss them as well as Sex and Relationships lessons which focus on emotional and physical changes.