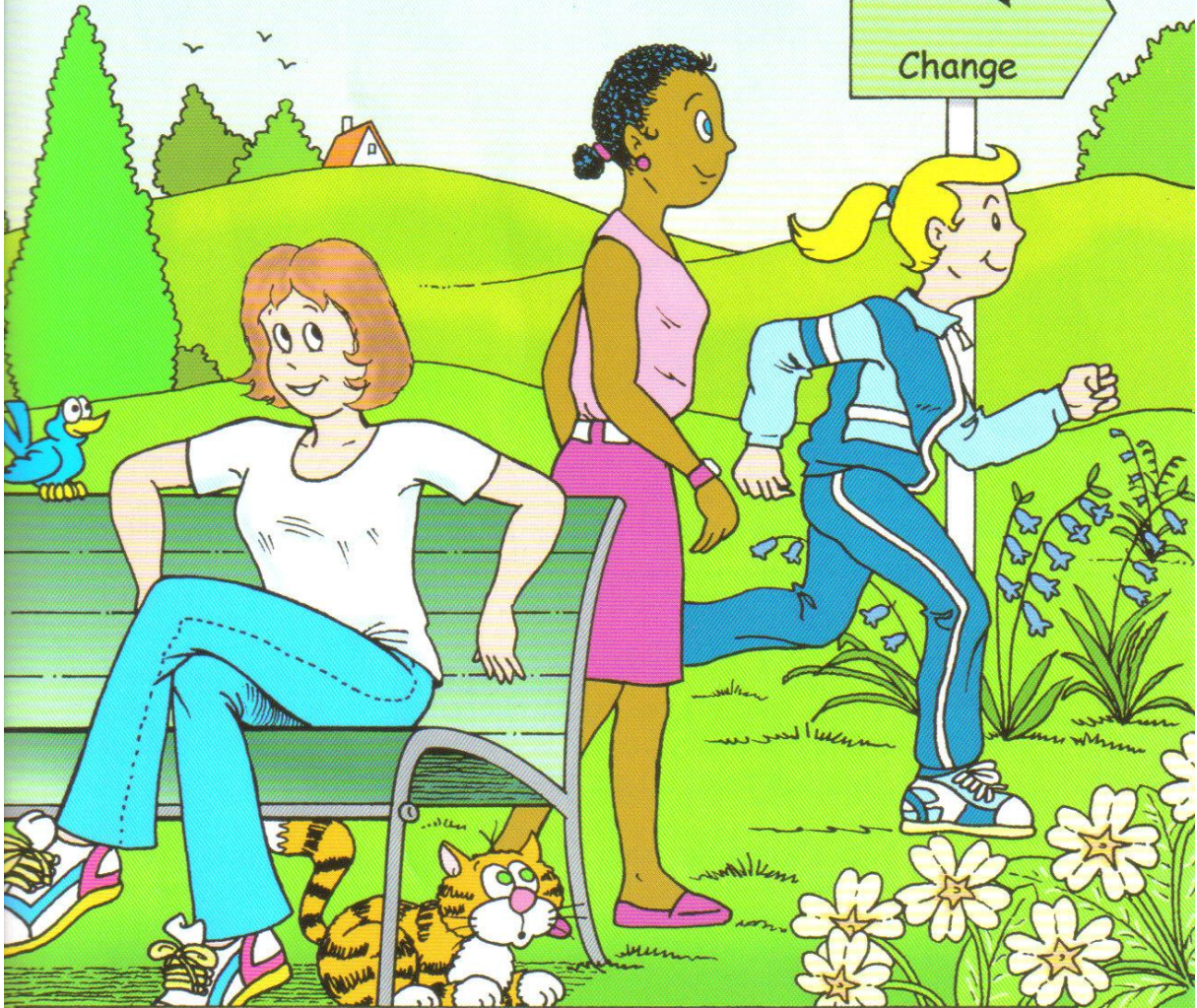
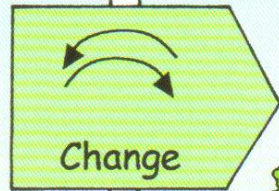
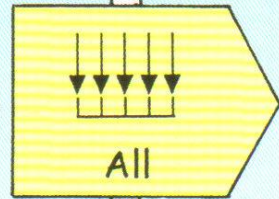
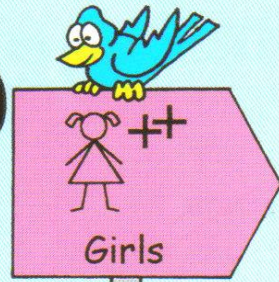


Girls!  
Girls!  
Gurlz!  
COMICS

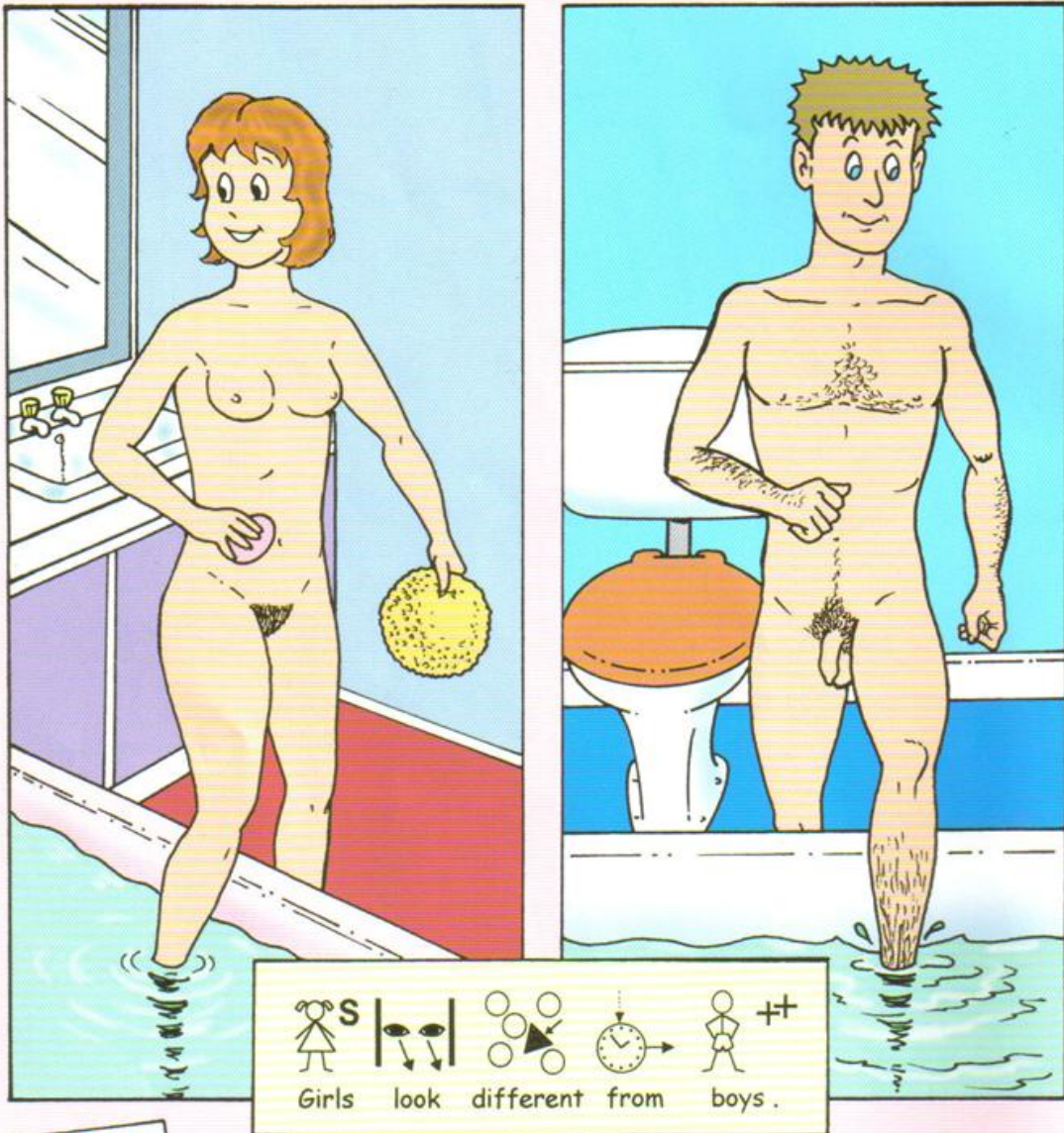
# GIRLS ALL CHANGE!



Girls All Change! is a comic book for girls who have learning disabilities. It is designed to take them, their parents and carers through puberty and some of the issues and concerns that may be experienced.



## BASIC GENDER DIFFERENCES



### PARENTS:

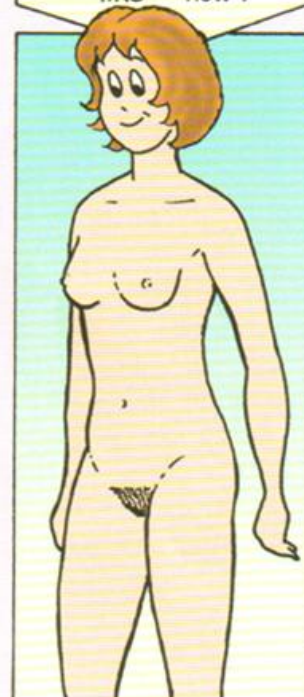
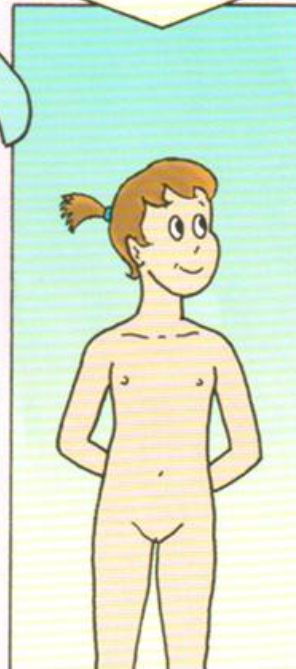
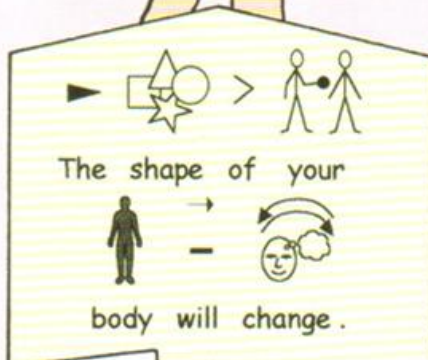
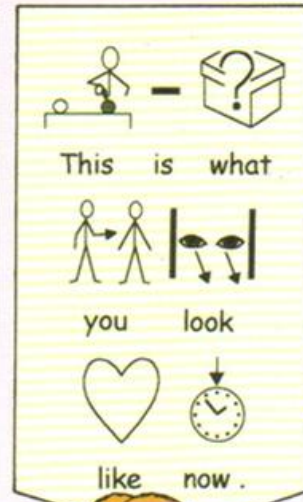
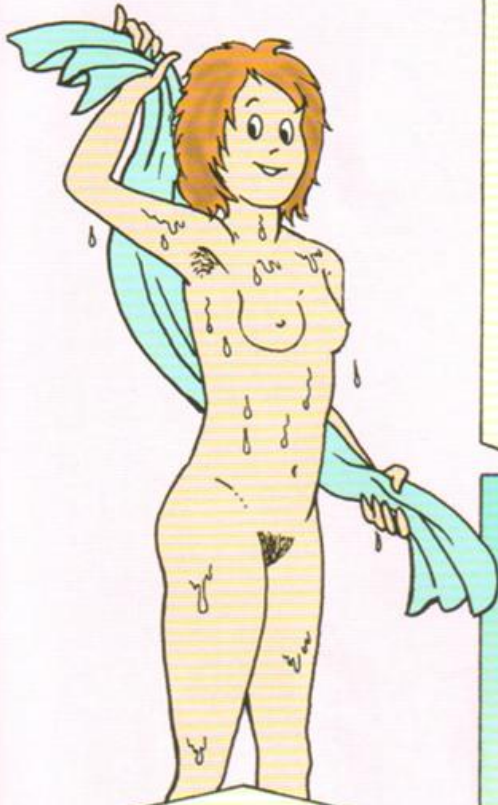
Puberty is a time of change for girls and boys, both physically and emotionally. These changes can begin to occur from around the age of 9 until the late teens. Every person is different. When these changes occur they will be at a time that is right for that person.

Puberty begins when the brain sends out chemical signals called hormones. Hormones cause both physical and emotional changes within the body. In girls these hormones signal the ovaries to produce oestrogen. This makes the breasts develop and menstruation start.

Testosterone is the name of the hormone that causes changes in boys and causes the penis and testicles to grow.



## BODY CHANGES



### PARENTS:

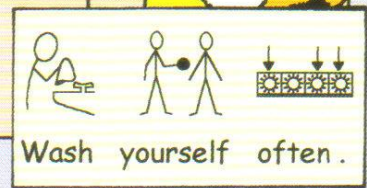
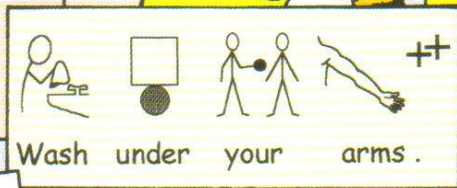
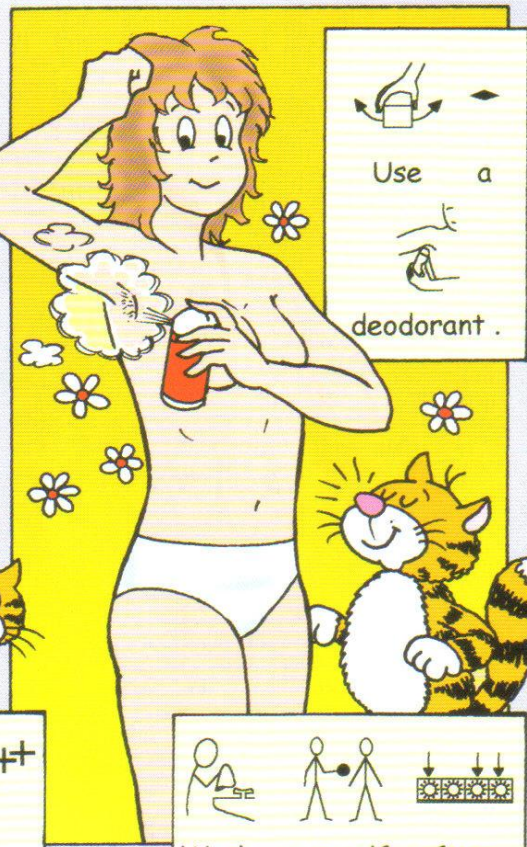
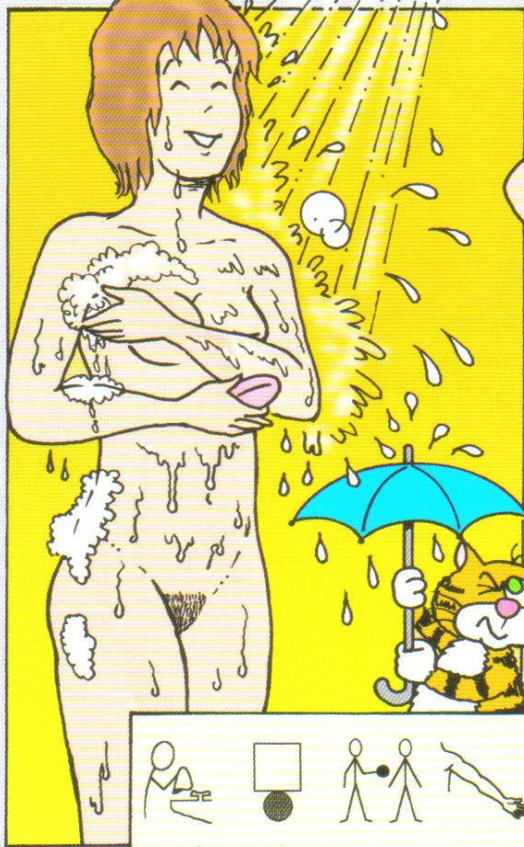
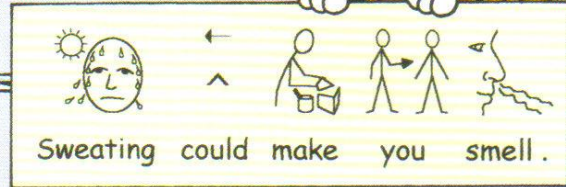
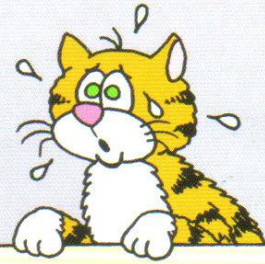
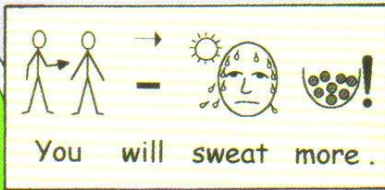
The ovaries in a girl's body produce two hormones. One is called oestrogen which is the more important one in relation to the changes that take place at puberty. The other hormone is called progesterone.

The production of oestrogen causes a girl's periods to start, her breasts to develop as well as stimulating the growth of hair on her body. Typically this is under her arms and in the pubic area. Also she will grow some hair on her arms and legs.

Girls do not generally experience the dramatic growth spurt that boys have when they change from boys to men. However, in general girls reach puberty sooner and may put on more weight at this time. Their hips become wider and so their waistlines become more visible.



## SWEATING



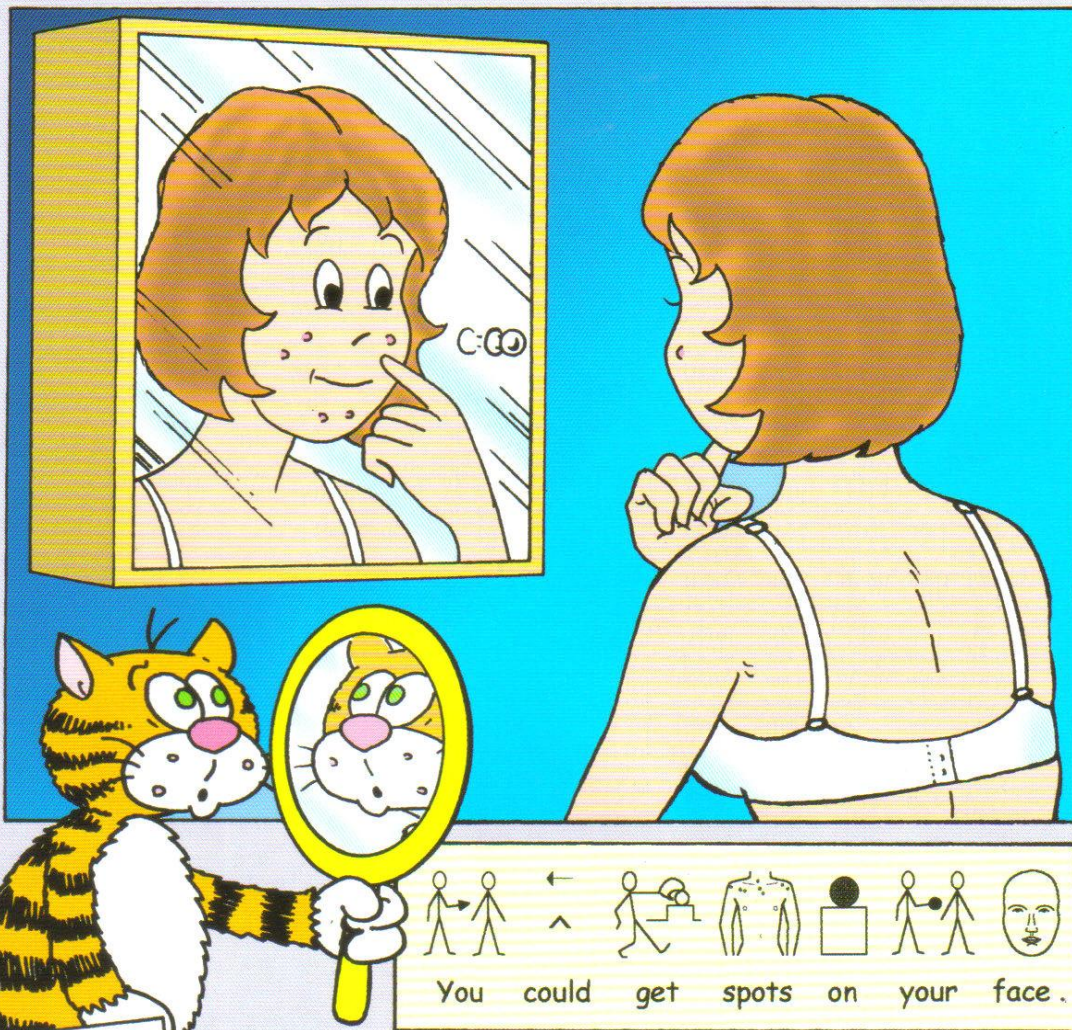
### PARENTS:

Hygiene is especially important as your daughter gets older. She will sweat, so a shower, a bath or washing underneath her arms will be necessary on a daily basis. In addition, it is important that she changes her pants and socks or tights every day, as these may cause her to smell. Her hair may also become greasy and needs to be washed regularly.

Genital hygiene is also significant. It is normal to sometimes have a whitish, sticky discharge coming from the vagina, so it is even more important to wash in this area too.



## SPOTS

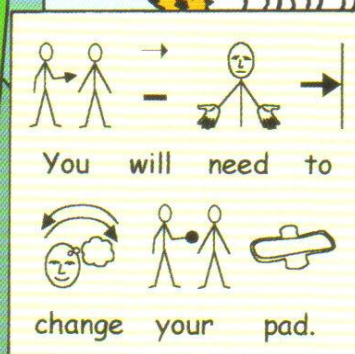
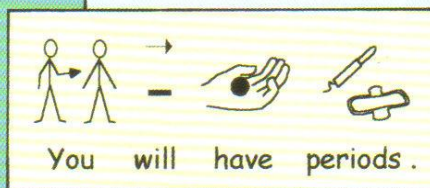


### PARENTS:

A lot of girls get spots during puberty. They may occur on the face, neck, back and chest. Spots are caused by inflammation of small oil glands that surround the hairs in these areas. The inflammation is triggered by oestrogen and progesterone. Most spots tend to go away in time. Sometimes however, the oily glands can be over stimulated to form acne. This is a condition that can last much longer, sometimes until people are in their twenties. If your daughter has a lot of spots that don't clear up, she may have developed acne. A doctor will be able to offer treatment for this. Advice on suitable treatment for spots can be obtained from a pharmacist. A mild soap or cleanser is best to use to clean areas affected by spots as other soaps can aggravate the condition. Whilst there is no scientific evidence to support the theory that fatty foods or chocolate can cause spots or acne, you may notice that eating certain foods may cause the spots to increase, so it is best to avoid these. Drinking lots of water and eating a healthy diet will also benefit your daughter's overall health.



## MENSTRUATION



### PARENTS:

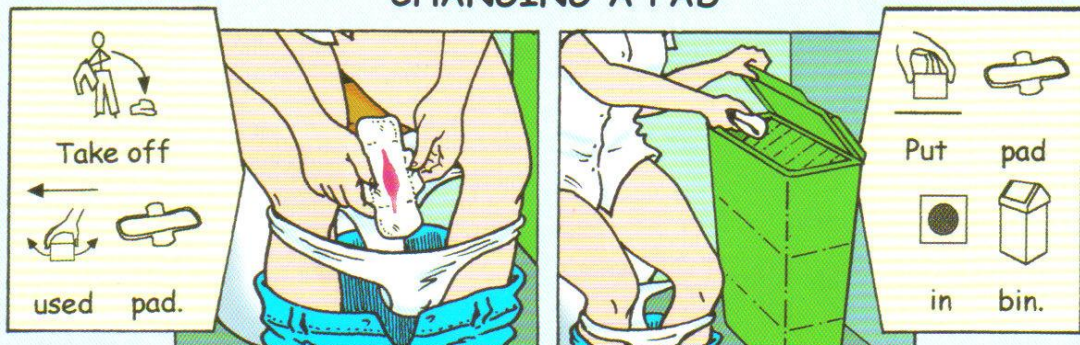
Menstruation starts during puberty. This can occur anytime between approximately the ages of 9 and 16 years and is the result of the release of hormones.

Bleeding occurs from the vagina as a result of the lining of the uterus being shed. Some girls may settle into a pattern of having regular monthly periods, while others to begin with, may have irregular periods, eg with several months in between.

Periods may be light or heavy and this varies from girl to girl. However, if there are concerns about very heavy periods, medical advice should be sought.



## CHANGING A PAD



### PARENTS:

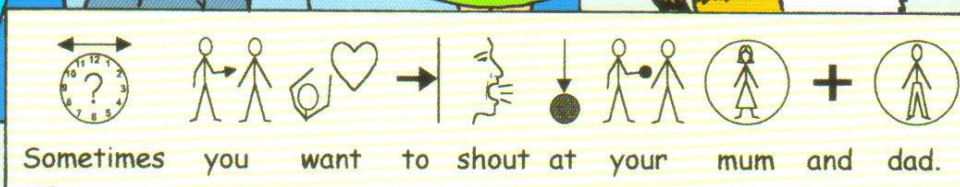
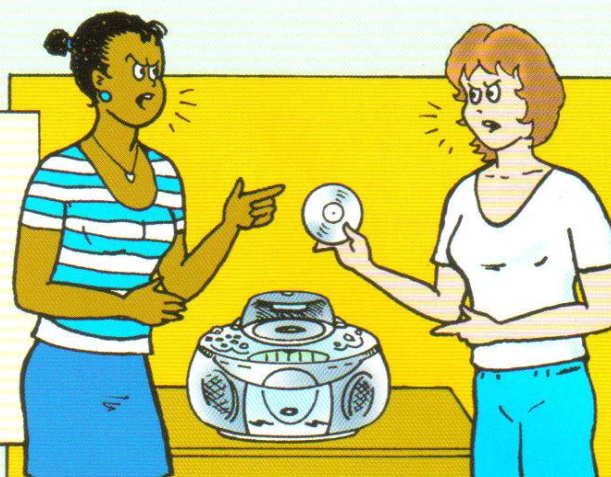
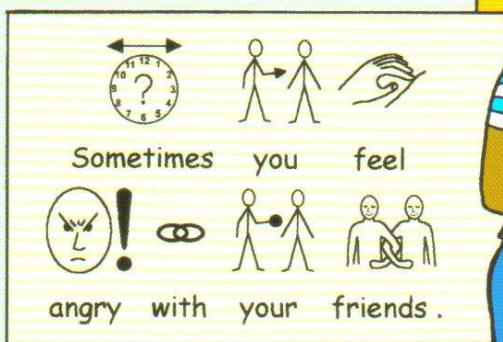
It may be helpful to make a note of when your daughter's periods start and you will see a pattern emerging eventually. Some girls in the week before their period begins may experience pre-menstrual tension. This is when mood swings may occur and they may appear angry or upset for no other apparent reason.

Girls will need to wear a sanitary pad in their pants during their period and they will need to be encouraged to change it on a regular basis throughout the day. Extra thickness pads can be worn at night.

When a girl starts her periods she has the potential to become pregnant and therefore contraception may need to be considered at some time. This could be discussed with your daughter's school nurse or doctor.



## EMOTIONS

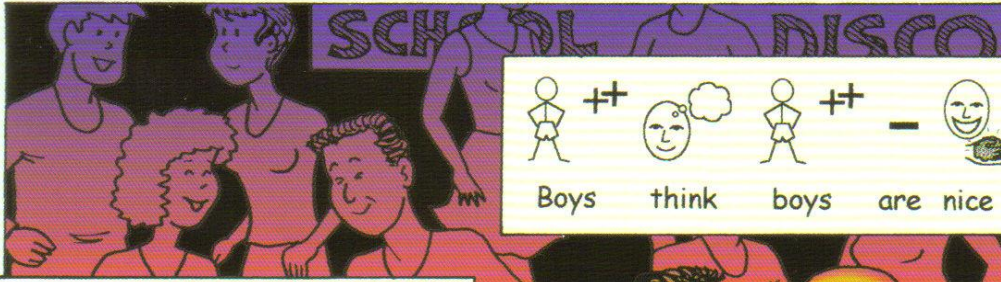






### PARENTS:





When your daughter is going through puberty she will experience emotional as well as physical changes. She may become argumentative, challenging, tired and tearful. Once again, this could be due to the influence of hormones. Your daughter will go through a range of emotions and may find it difficult to express them. These may be expressed in unacceptable behaviours. Try not to get too angry or frustrated with her as these negative emotions can be damaging to the relationship you have with your daughter. She will require understanding and reassurance from you to cope with her emotions when she is going through puberty. If she has any brothers or sisters, they will also need to be encouraged to treat her with understanding.

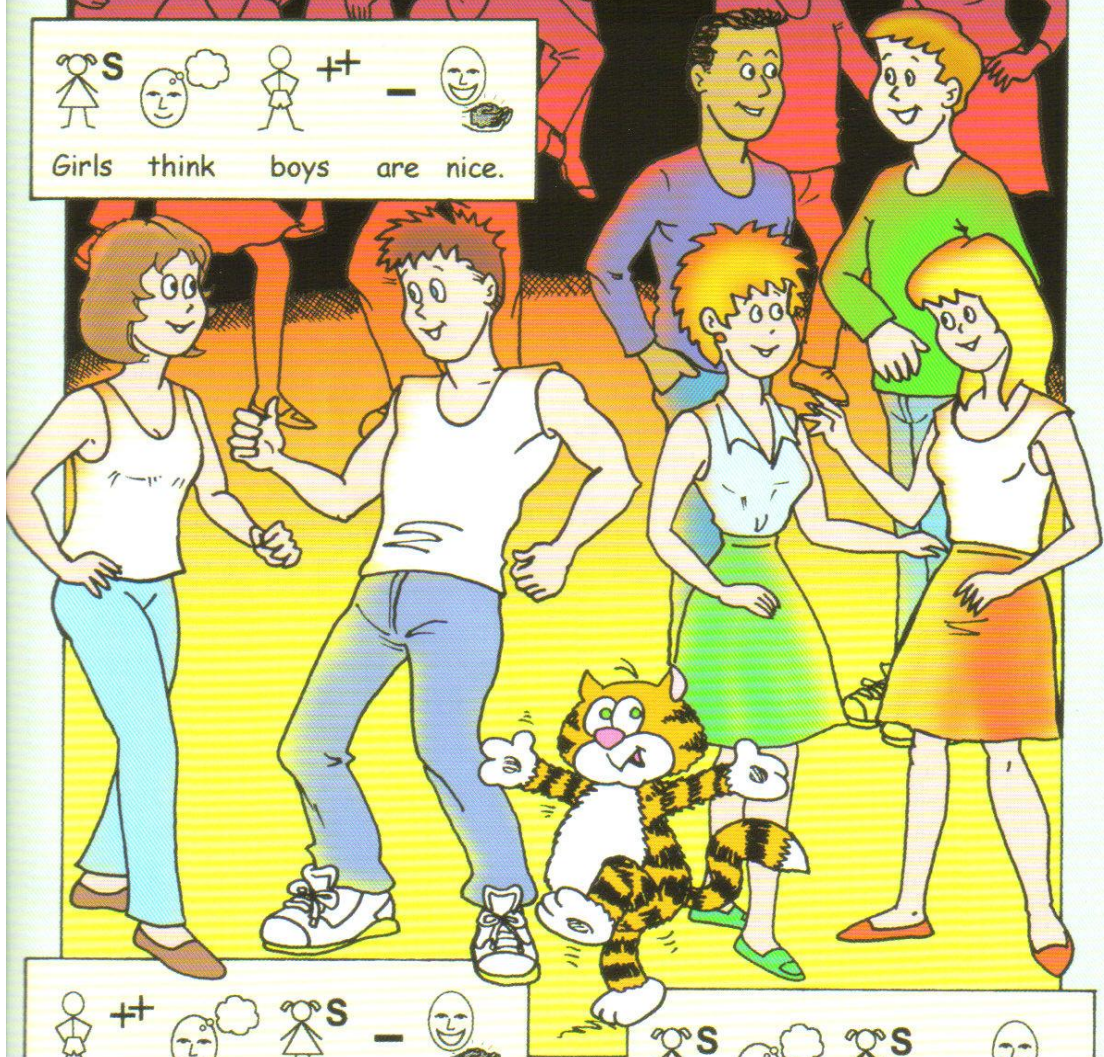






# RELATIONSHIPS







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 Boys think boys are nice.

 S   ++ -   
 Girls think boys are nice.



 ++   S -   
 Boys think girls are nice.

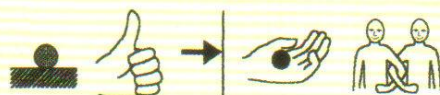
 S   S -   
 Girls think girls are nice.

## PARENTS:

As your daughter gets older she will become sexually and emotionally attracted to other people. This is part of puberty. She may wish to explore her feelings further by touching and kissing other people. However, she will need to be made aware that some people may not want her to.



## RELATIONSHIPS



It is good to have friends .

### PARENTS:

Sharing, trust and understanding are the basis of a good friendship. Friendships can become more established during puberty, at school and through family life.

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

**Q.** Do parents of other girls, who have learning disabilities, experience the same problems and concerns about puberty issues?

**A.** Yes they do - in varying degrees. Some parents find it difficult to accept that their child is becoming sexually aware. The common problem shared is that your daughter has the body of a teenager, but her development level makes it more difficult for her to understand herself - her changing shape, her emotions, her desires and her behaviour. Within learning disabilities there is a wide spectrum, which means different girls do have different

problems. The issues discussed in this booklet form a core, which is common to most girls and their parents.

**Q.** How can I help my daughter cope with her periods?

**A.** Preparation is important and this can be done at home as well as in school. Be positive, remain calm and remember this is a normal process in any girl's life. You can use this booklet to show her what it will be like. You can explain that this is a part of growing up, that periods will keep on happening and it is not something they need to worry about. Some girls will need supervision and



**Q & A Continued.**

support when changing and disposing of pads and this may need to be reinforced on a regular basis.

**Q.** What do I do if my daughter has periods and still needs to wear a nappy/continence pad.

**A.** Your daughter does not need to wear a sanitary pad as well as a nappy/continence pad during a period. She can just wear a nappy/continence pad which will serve a dual purpose for both urine and her period.

**Q.** What can I do if my daughter appears to be masturbating?

**A.** Masturbation could be in the form of a girl touching herself between her legs inside or outside of her clothes. Individuals may choose other ways to masturbate. It may be helpful for you to discuss any issues with your daughter's school nurse if you are concerned.

When and if your daughter does masturbate, do not get angry with her if she begins to do it in an inappropriate place or situation. Talk to her about privacy and encourage her to go to a private place such as her bedroom or wherever is appropriate to your family environment.

**Q.** How can I cope with my daughter's verbal anger, frustration and aggression?

**A.** It is recognised teenage behaviour to show such emotions, at a time when the body is changing and when your daughter is showing a growing desire for independence. As parents, you need to try to avoid confrontation for things that don't matter. At times, confrontation is unavoidable, in which case it is important that you try to remain calm and not return her anger with yours. When she is verbally aggressive tell her that you don't like

it and it's not nice to talk to anyone like that. Try not to return it with insults or your own aggression.

**Q.** How can I cope with my daughter's physical anger, frustration and aggression?

**A.** Physical aggression can be more difficult to cope with than verbal aggression, because you may need to protect yourself and others as well as furniture and objects.

Protect people *before* objects. When anyone is being physically aggressive they are acting with emotion, so *will not* be open to reason. Keep your voice low and calm. Repeat a simple instructional phrase that may stop her action such as "go and sit down", or "put the chair down". This is more effective than saying "stop it", as that will not help her work out what to do. When she is calm after an event, you may wish to discuss it briefly with her, explaining why she should not hurt you or others or destroy objects.

It is important to have consistency of approach, behaving in the same way each time she shows aggression. This will help her to understand what is appropriate. Try to be one step ahead and if you know what will trigger an aggressive physical incident, try to avoid the trigger. If it is something that has to occur daily, for example going to bed, offer rewards for compliance and give praise when things go well.

**Q.** How can my daughter cope with her own anger?

**A.** If your daughter can understand explanations of why she needs to be kind, not hurt others, not be rude etc., have a chat with her at a convenient and calm time. *Be positive* and remind her when she has achieved in these areas. Give her strategies to enable her to cope with how she feels. For example, when she is angry let her



**Q & A** Continued.

know that she can tell you by signing or speaking, not by hitting people. Also it is a good idea for her to have time on her own to calm down, for example in her bedroom. After she has calmed down, discuss it briefly with her and carry on as normal. Don't refer to the event during future incidents.

**Q.** How do I approach my daughter's sexual and emotional attraction to other people?

**A.** Accept that during and after puberty it is perfectly normal to feel sexually and emotionally attracted to others. This is an inevitable part of growing up. Your daughter may naturally want to be with boys and may want to touch them, dance closely with them or cuddle them. Often a girl may be attracted to one particular boy or sometimes there is rivalry between two or more girls for a boy's affection. The attraction may go further and your daughter may want to touch, stroke or explore in a

more intimate manner. You need to tell your daughter what you find acceptable. Each family will have its own ideas. You should not expect your daughter to automatically know what is socially or morally acceptable. You need to clearly reinforce what you decide is acceptable within your family. It is possible that your daughter may be sexually and emotionally attracted to other girls and not to boys or as well as boys. All girls need to form friendships with other girls and want to do "girls together" activities. This is perfectly natural and is different to sexual attraction.

We are all sexual beings by nature. It is now generally recognised that no one chooses her or his sexuality. Our sexuality is an essential part of who we are, how we behave and how we see ourselves in relation to others. Today's culture allows young people to explore their sexuality and not just accept what society has, in the past, seen as "normal".

## FURTHER HELP

This booklet will not be able to answer all your questions regarding the issues you and your daughter may encounter during her journey through puberty. If you do have questions that are not answered by this booklet, you could approach your daughter's school nurse or class teacher, who may be able to offer advice or point you towards an individual or organisation that will be able to help.

Text by Linda Ebdon, Audrey Owen and Belinda Heaven. Cartoons by Mike Higgs.  
Thank you to colleagues, Bettridge School girls, their parents and carers for their input to Girls All Change!

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