

PUBERTY – Let's get off to a good start!

Bernd Drägestein

Institut mannigfaltig München, Germany

Part 1: Practical Guidance and Didactical Approach

Background and keywords:

Today, children are entering puberty at an increasingly younger age. At the same time, they are being bombarded with information that is generally disconnected and unfiltered, coming from many different sources. Television, Internet, video, magazines, classmates, older brothers and sisters, other youth and/or adults are the source of factual information, as well as erroneous statements, exaggerations and at times even misleading information. Boys (and girls) are breaking completely new ground as they start puberty; In fact, at no other time are physical and psychological changes that this process of sexual maturity brings along with it, so consciously noticeable, as at the onset of puberty. In particular, gender-oriented male socialization (the "doing gender") is often characterized by a number of pressures that boys have to learn to cope with, which can grow into clear challenges or excessive pressures at the onset of puberty. Topics such as "Getting Help", "The body as a functional instrument", "Need-oriented communication and information" or "Insecurity versus no problem attitude".

The purpose of this undertaking is to constructively support boys to cope with upcoming challenges and at the same time to provide them with an experience model and to offer them a forum for airing out different issues related to coping with (personal) changes. More concretely, it seems appropriate to offer boys a learning setting which on the one hand increasingly fits in with this life stage and on the other hand, where they can experience the social function and informal nature of youth groups in a new or different light.

For boys, same-age and same-gender learning situations prove to be ideal as

- They share a common understanding and are encountering similar life situations
- The deliberate (periodic) separation from girls is seen as a relief
- The same-gender learning situation provides known social security.

The goal should be to foster, together with the boys, a learning process that takes place in an atmosphere of trust and which includes learning material that the boys can clearly identify with on a personal level. In addition to the practical information and knowledge disseminated, this project also addresses social and emotional issues the boys can relate to.

Similar topics:

Identity, body and health, culture and society

Materials:

- large paper sheets
- different coloured felt-tip pens

Duration:

Depends on the boys' ease of communication, at least 45 minutes

Number of participants:

To ensure good social interaction, no more than 12 boys should participate in this activity

Age:

10 to 11 years old boys

Aims:

- To promote social interaction
- To gain knowledge and an appreciation for physical changes
- To gain knowledge and an appreciation for emotional and psychological changes
- To reduce stress by relevant clarifications
- To promote self-confidence
- To develop a feeling of trust about one's body

(Short) explanation:

An outline of a boy is traced on paper. The class will work together, using the outline of the boy created as the framework for filling in answers to questions such as "What changes occur to the body and the mind when a boy develops into a man?" All answers should be entered at the corresponding spot on the body model with two different coloured felt tip pens (one colour for the body and the other for the mind). Answers will then be discussed.

A boy lays on his back on a large piece of paper. A second boy traces his body with the help of a felt-tip pen. Small additions can be added later (eyes, mouth, nose, hair on the head, the navel, genitals (sex organs...)).

The group sits in a circle around the model of a boy and pool their knowledge and experience related to the question: "What changes take place in the body and the mind, when a boy develops into a young man?" These answers should then be written in the proper place on the model of a boy with two different coloured felt-tip pens to differentiate between changes to the body and to the mind. During this documentation stage, the themes raised will be answered by the youth themselves and/or handled in further detail by the group leader, questions answered, "secrets aired out" and myths unveiled.

Themes include for example:

- Pubic and body hair growth
- Development of penis and testicles
- Sperm production and ejaculation
- Fertility
- Different names for the penis (term pool)
- Changes in body and muscle structure
- Skin and pimples
- Hygiene
- Physical growth
- Voice change
- Development of sexual organs
- Moodiness
- Feelings
- Relations
- Homosexuality and Heterosexuality
- Puberty development

Reflection:

For this teaching session, it has been seen time and again that it is important and more constructive to organize groups that are definitely of a manageable size. The topic of puberty, physical development and sexuality has in a number of cases caused a feeling of insecurity among certain boys or even troubled them. For this reason, it would seem crucial for this all-male learning set-up to ensure there is an atmosphere of trust conducive to open dialogue with the boys. It should be the kind of environment where boys feel free to ask questions and to express other areas of insecurities. For this reason the group set-up must be made a priority.

This involves: drafting up together rules that should be respected for communication processes as well as a feeling of well-being in the group to ensure a protected learning environment. Furthermore, depending on the group dynamics, it would be useful to carry out group promotion exercises aimed at encouraging a group identity and spirit as well as to reinforce group mobilization.

In order to constructively organize the different feedback phases in the context of the learning situations, a group-related feedback culture should be learnt or present, i.e. these feedback situations become a routine learning process. The organization structure encourages the boys to speak freely and generally gives them a feeling of security.

Variations (Continuation):

If time and materials permit, and the group size is manageable, you can form two groups for the creation of the model of a boy, and lastly working on their own they can answer the following question: "What changes occur in a boy's body during puberty?" Let the answers be filled in. Then the boys from the second group present their answers. Lastly all small groups communicate their findings in the large class group. To ensure the right answers have been given, if needed the correct answers can be filled in on the empty boy-model.

