



# Mott Poll Report

April 21, 2025  
Volume 47  
Issue 2

## Approaching Puberty: Talking with Tweens about Body Changes

Puberty is a process of physical and hormonal changes that occur over time as a child develops adult body features. Puberty often begins in the pre-teen (or "tween") years. The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of children 7-12 years old about their experiences talking with their child about puberty.

Parents report getting information about how to talk with their child about puberty from parenting resources (34%), health care providers (30%), and schools (14%); however, 44% of parents have not gotten any information on how to talk about puberty. Parents describe their approach to talking with their child about puberty as proactive (54%), only when asked (41%), or trying to avoid it (5%). Common strategies include answering their child's questions (78%) and looking for teachable moments (66%). Parents report their child has asked about their own body (41%), their parent's body (26%), or other puberty-related topics (31%). Nearly half of parents (46%) have talked about their own puberty experiences; however, only 31% of parents say they received adequate puberty teaching from their own parents, while 39% say they their parents did not teach them about puberty at all.

Sixty percent of parents of children 10-12 years, and 17% of parents of children 7-9 years, say they have started seeing signs of puberty in their child. Parents of children 10-12 years say they have talked with their tween about changes in body and emotions a lot (27%), some (42%), very little (19%) or not at all (11%). In contrast, parents of children 7-9 years report talking with their tween about puberty changes a lot (7%), some (28%), very little (34%) or not at all (31%). Parents are evenly split in thinking it is best to start talking about puberty before 10 years (36%), at age 10 (32%), or older than age 10 (32%).

About half of parents (54%) rate themselves as very confident that they can recognize signs of puberty in their child. Parent challenges related to talking with their child about puberty include choosing the right age to start (41%), whether and when to explain sex (40%), what changes to look for (29%), how to feel less embarrassed (20%), and fear of saying the wrong thing (17%). Among parents of children 10-12 years, 25% say their child doesn't want to talk about puberty, while among parents of children 7-9 years, 32% believe their child is too young to understand.

### Parent approaches to talking about puberty with kids age 7-12



**Proactive**  
**54%**



**Only when asked**  
**41%**



**Trying to avoid it**  
**5%**



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital  
National Poll on Children's Health, 2025

### Report Highlights

About half of parents are very confident they can recognize signs of puberty in their child.

Among parents of children 7-9 years, 1 in 6 have started seeing signs of puberty in their child.

Common challenges are choosing the right age to start talking about puberty and whether to explain sex.

## Data Source & Methods

*This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Ipsos Public Affairs, LLC (Ipsos) for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The survey was administered in February 2025 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults who were parents of at least one child age 1-18 years living in their household (n=2,021). Adults were selected from Ipsos's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 67% among panel members contacted to participate. This report is based on responses from 911 parents with at least one child age 7-12. The margin of error for results presented in this report is ±2 to 5 percentage points.*

*A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics, and the Susan B. Meister Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Center.*

*Findings from the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health do not represent the opinions of the University of Michigan. The University of Michigan reserves all rights over this material.*

### C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

**Co-Director:**

Sarah J. Clark, MPH

**Co-Director:**

Susan J. Woolford, MD, MPH

**Poll Manager:**

Sara L. Schultz, MPS

**Data Analyst:**

Acham Gebremariam, MS

**Student Research Assistant:**

Leah Beel



**SUSAN B. MEISTER  
CHILD HEALTH EVALUATION  
AND RESEARCH CENTER**  
MICHIGAN MEDICINE

## Implications

Puberty is the gradual process where, over several years, a child's body changes and develops adult reproductive features. Although puberty occurs for nearly every child, there is wide variation in when it starts; for example, some girls start puberty as early as 7½ years or as late as 13 years; puberty typically begins a year or two later for boys. Black or Hispanic children tend to start puberty earlier than white children. Girls with obesity start puberty at a younger age, while boys with obesity start puberty later than other boys.

Roughly half of parents in this Mott Poll were very confident they could recognize the signs of puberty. Typically the early signs of puberty include the appearance of hair in the pubic area, often accompanied by body odor; growth of testicles and scrotum (for boys) and breast buds (for girls), and overall growth spurts. Due to the differences in the onset of puberty, children will have growth spurts at different ages causing some to be concerned that they are not as tall as their peers. In addition, weight gain can occur during puberty, which can cause children to feel self-conscious.

A common question for parents is when to begin talking to their child about changes related to puberty. Though it's tempting to feel that the child is too young, parents may be surprised to notice their tween is starting to show signs of puberty or may be caught off guard by their child's questions about body features. Starting the discussion early will allow parents to frame the information in an age-appropriate way, and let children know what body changes to expect, so they aren't left wondering or worrying. Without parent discussion, children are likely to hear about puberty-related topics from their classmates or through social media, TV or movies.

Often, parents rely on their own experience – but in this Mott Poll, many parents said they had little or no discussion of puberty when they were young. For this reason, it will be helpful for parents to look for resources on how to talk with kids about puberty. Annual check-ups, sometimes called well-child visits, are a good opportunity for both parents and children to learn about puberty-related changes. The primary care provider will do a physical examination and ask the child questions. This is a chance for parents to listen to the terminology that providers use, and how they describe the different changes that are occurring. Parents should encourage their child to ask questions of the doctor, as well as asking their own; parents can also ask for resources that explain puberty in an age-appropriate way.

Parents in this Mott Poll described common questions about how to approach puberty discussions. For example, many parents wonder how much girls should learn about pubertal changes among boys, and vice versa. Another challenge described by parents is whether, when, and how much to talk about sex and reproduction. Parenting books and magazines, as well as online content from reputable sites, can provide additional ideas for parents on how to approach tricky topics. In addition, parents may want to learn about the health education offered through their child's school, building on that information in their discussions at home.

Along with physical changes, puberty is also a time of emotional disruption, and this can create difficulties in communication. Many tweens are embarrassed to talk with their parent about puberty. In this situation, parents can provide an age-appropriate book or video and allow the child to read it privately. Parents should also be ready for teachable moments when a child asks a question. Finally, parents should remember that this is not a one-shot deal. Discussions should occur over time, as the child gets older and experiences different aspects of puberty.