

GIRLS: IT'S GOOD TO TALK!

Most of us don't like change. We are happy as we are and change can be a scary thing. But everything in life changes and it's actually a good thing.

Friends can help each other

When you go from being a girl to being a young woman (known as "puberty") there are lots of changes physically and emotionally. You may feel like you want to hide away and that you are the only girl you know this is happening to. That may be the case, but all your friends will go through this experience between now and when they finish secondary school too.

If you are the first to start puberty, then you will be the wise old woman who can help them and answer questions from them. If you are the last, then you can ask your friends for advice.

Friends are great people to talk to because they are your age and they will talk in the same language as you. You will all be able to help and understand each other's moods and feelings.

Talking to your parents

You may not want to talk to your friends about puberty. There are other people you can talk to. I know you are probably thinking, "Not my mum or dad", but yes I am.

Mum has been through it all before. It may have been 20 years ago but she will still remember all the angst and worry you are feeling now. I think also it helps if mum and dad know how you feel so they can at least give you some encouraging words, some sympathy and a great big hug.

Talking to them will help them understand the reason why you don't quite feel yourself. They may be more accepting of your behaviour and your moods if they understand the reasons behind it! Ask mum or dad for some time, and talk to them on their own if you are too embarrassed to discuss things over the dining room table. Talk openly if you can about your feelings and ask them all the embarrassing questions you want answers to. Otherwise tell them what you know about periods and puberty and ask them to fill in the blanks.

Find a way to communicate

If you feel too shy to do this then you could always write them a letter, send them a text or an email about your worries. Sending them a message any of these ways will take the embarrassment out of the situation. It doesn't matter how you do it, but having mum and dad on your side will help you through this change into becoming a young woman.

What if your parents can't help?

It may be that mum and dad don't feel able to talk to you about your periods - they may not know what to say or have the time. Don't feel disheartened as it doesn't mean they don't care. They do, but it may be that they have other things on their mind at that time. Perhaps you could tell them how important it is to you that they find five minutes to talk with you about growing up. When is the best time for them?

Think about your friends now. Have you ever asked a friend for some help and they have said, 'no' or they did not feel able to help? Did you fall out with them or did you remain friends? I doubt you did. It's the same with parents. If they are unable to answer your questions or unable to explain what you need to have explained, it doesn't mean that you can't ask them again in the future. Think positively and understand that we don't always have answers for all the questions.

It's true that some parents are not very good at talking about growing up, and they may suggest that you talk to someone else.

Who else to ask

If mum and dad don't want to talk to you about periods, or they don't feel like the right people you want to discuss puberty with, why not talk to the school nurse, a female teacher, a school counsellor or someone else's mum?

Adults will be flattered that you asked them for their time and for their advice.

How puberty can affect you

Talking is great medicine to get rid of fears. But it is also important to understand and accept what is happening to your body and emotions.

Periods can make us feel crabby, emotional and you may feel angrier than usual with people around you. It's like someone else has taken over your body. You may experience stomach aches, headaches and some girls feel like they have no energy. You may also feel quite anxious about how your changing body looks. All girls experience this. It's how you deal with it that counts.

- ❖ Be kind to yourself. When your tummy hurts and you feel tired, wear comfy clothes, have a lovely warm bath or take a hot water bottle to bed. It can be a time to pamper yourself a bit.
- ❖ You are still the same person inside. You still have people around you who love you and want to be around you. You are still kind, generous, funny and a great friend.
- ❖ These changes are natural.
- ❖ Don't be worried about your friends growing or changing faster or slower than you.
- ❖ You are an individual and that's what makes you unique.
- ❖ Puberty does not last forever - if you get spots just remember they are not going to be there when you get married!
- ❖ It may seem like you are putting on weight but don't forget you are still growing and as you get taller you will get thinner again.
- ❖ If you need to be on your own then do it.
- ❖ Jot down your feelings if you don't want to talk.

There are going to be lots of changes going on inside your body, and on the outside. Try and carry on with life as normal. If you like to exercise, then do. Eat healthy food and try to avoid eating too much sugar, chocolate and salty foods. Eat regular meals. If you need to take some pain relief tablets to ease any period pain, ask mum or dad first.

There is a good side!

See all these changes to your body as a step closer to being able to do things that mum and dad have been saying "no" to for years. Puberty and periods are there to remind you that you're becoming a young woman. No matter how annoying they are sometimes, they are there for a reason. Embrace it!