

# PREPARING FOR PUBERTY



Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) impacts every individual differently, meaning each child will handle puberty differently. Some children struggle with the change, leading to stress for the child and their family. The good news? There are strategies to help support your wellbeing and your child's understanding during puberty!

When teaching a child about puberty, respect should be given to the child's sensory needs and developmental level. The use of evidence-based approaches, reinforcement, and patience will build a positive learning experience.

## Puberty & Autism

- ✖ During puberty, individuals with autism may experience some additional difficulties. Challenges with sensory sensitivities, communication, and self-regulation can make this life stage even more difficult.
- ✖ Puberty changes routines, emotional and physical feelings, involves discomfort, and new expectations around hygiene. The onset of hormonal changes can also impact their emotional well-being and behavior.
- ✖ Puberty is difficult to understand. It's hard to know what is appropriate and inappropriate. It's hard to understand why discomfort happens and is expected.



## How Can You Help?

- ✖ **Create a supportive environment.** Let them know it's OK and you're there to help. Be supportive and open, even if they may not understand. If they can't understand, show them support with compassion and patience.
- ✖ **Reinforcement is key!** Reinforcement motivates children to complete new, challenging, or confusing tasks, such as putting on deodorant, by associating the task with a positive outcome.
- ✖ **Get ready to teach!** Many expectations that come with puberty are brand new. Even if they have watched you do something, you may need to teach them to do it themselves.
- ✖ **Communicate regularly with the school, doctors, and related providers.** Ask questions, share strategies, and communicate needs.
- ✖ **Use social stories to help talk about difficult puberty-related topics.** Social stories can support the child's understanding of the concepts but also make it a bit easier to discuss.

## What if you have questions about puberty or aren't sure what to do?

Collaborate with your child's team (doctor, teacher, psychologist, BCBA, SLP, OT, and other professionals) for help!

