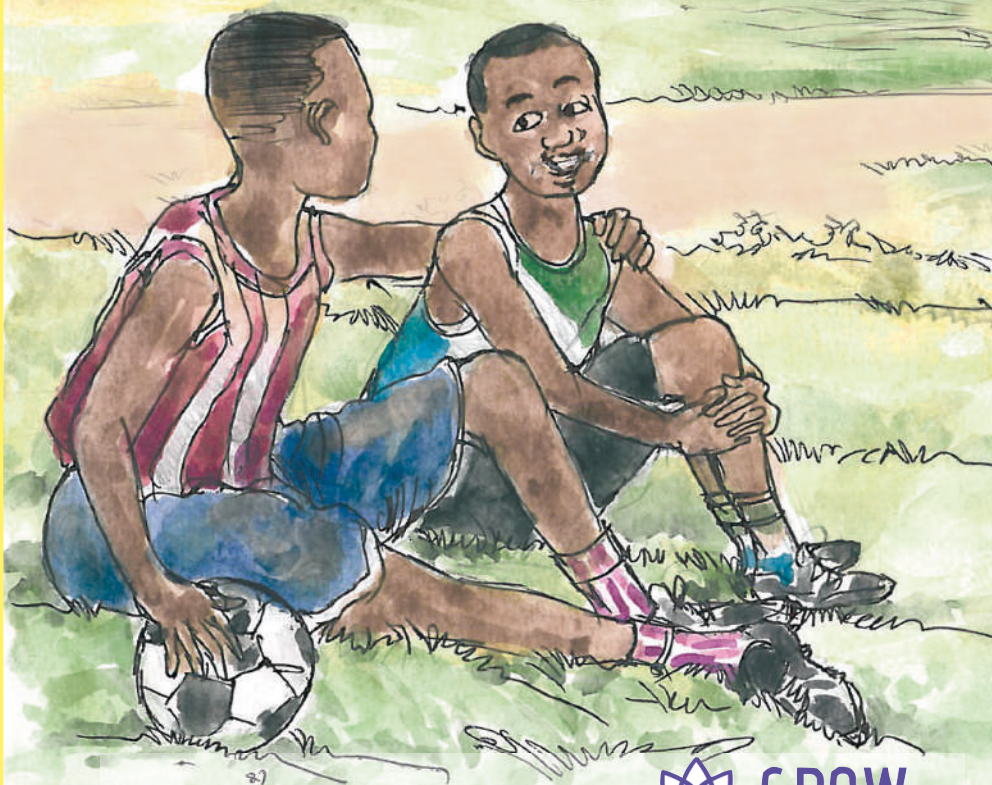


# GROWTH AND CHANGES For Boys in Sierra Leone



Promoting every  
child's right to read



GROW  
& KNOW

# GROWTH AND CHANGES

## For Boys in Sierra Leone

Text written by: **Marni Sommer, Grow & Know**

Personal stories: **Boys from Sierra Leone**

Illustrations by:

**Leslie Lumeh**

Canada<sup>ca</sup>

code

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teachers, community members,  
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## Vocabulary List

These are words that readers may find unfamiliar. Be prepared to assist youth to learn these words and to understand the meaning. These words and the associated concepts are explained in detail in the book.

**Adolescence:** the time after the onset of puberty when a child becomes an adult, between 10 and 19 years old.

**Contract:** when a muscle becomes shorter and tighter. The muscles in the uterus contract, causing cramps when menstruating.

**Erection:** when the tissue inside the penis fills with blood to cause the penis to grow larger and harder.

**Ejaculate:** to release semen from the body through the penis.

**Hormones:** chemical substances that help control how cells and organs do their work.

**Menstruation:** also known as ‘having a period’. When the lining of the uterus and blood comes out through a girl’s vagina.

**Pre-menstrual Syndrome:** the changes in the level of hormones in a girl’s body before having a period that can result in physical pain or changes in mood.

**Puberty:** the time when a child’s body begins to develop into a young adult, usually between 9 and 14 years old.

**Semen:** sticky, milky-white fluid that comes out of the penis when a boy ejaculates. The semen contains sperm.

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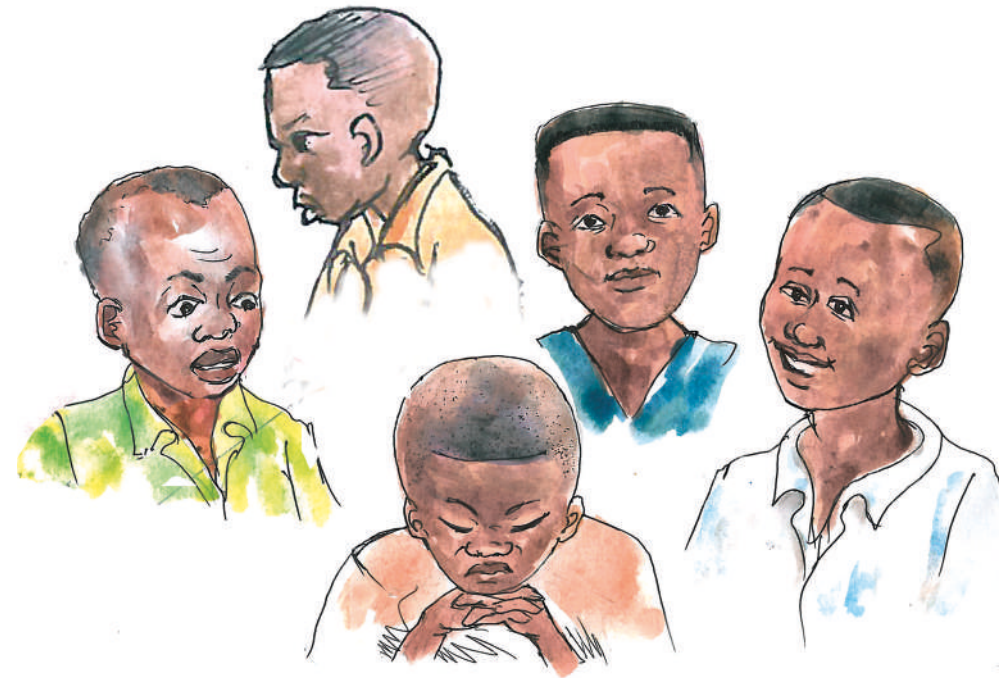
# WHAT IS PUBERTY?

Between the ages of 9 and 14, most girls and boys begin to notice changes in their bodies. These physical and emotional changes take place over a number of years.

These changes are called **puberty** or **adolescence**. Girls and boys at this age are often called **adolescents**.



Puberty starts when extra amounts of chemicals called **hormones** begin to be produced in the body. These hormones lead to changes in the body. In addition to causing physical changes, the hormones cause emotional changes. So, a growing boy may feel happy one moment, and then angry or sad, or confused the next moment.



Puberty is the time when **boys' bodies begin to produce sperm and girls' bodies begin to release eggs**. It is the time when you develop into young men and women.



It is a special time. It is your body's way of maturing. Then one day, you can have children and start your own families.

Even though a boy's body is able to make a baby, this does not mean that boys are ready to have children.

It is also physically unsafe for a girl to have a baby at a young age. Young boys and girls can miss out on school and other life chances, if they have to care for a baby.



## **When does puberty begin and how long does it take?**

Generally, changes start later for boys than for girls. Some boys start when they are 9 years old, some start after the age of 14. Any age in between is also normal.

For some boys, changes may take place within a year or less. For other boys, the changes can take place over 6 years.

## **Physical changes that take place in boys during puberty.**

The physical changes for boys include:  
His muscles start to grow bigger. His shoulders get broader. He grows hair in new places, such as on his upper lip and chin, on his chest, in his armpits, and in his pubic area. His voice will break and become deeper. His testicles, scrotum, and penis grow larger. He will be able to ejaculate sperm.

There is no exact order in which these changes happen. It is different for every boy. Do not worry if your changes are different than the changes of your friends.

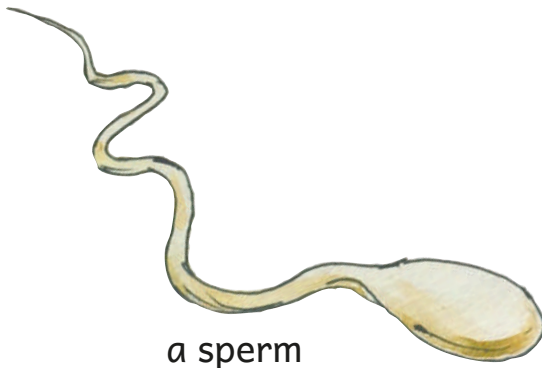


## What is sperm?

Sperm are the male cells that make it biologically possible for a man to create a baby with a woman. When a boy goes through puberty, the testicles start to produce sperm.

**Sperm** are so small that they can only be seen with a microscope. They are part of the sticky, milky-white fluid called **semen**.

Semen comes out of the penis when a boy ejaculates (releases semen from a penis). Semen is a mixture of fluids and sperm.



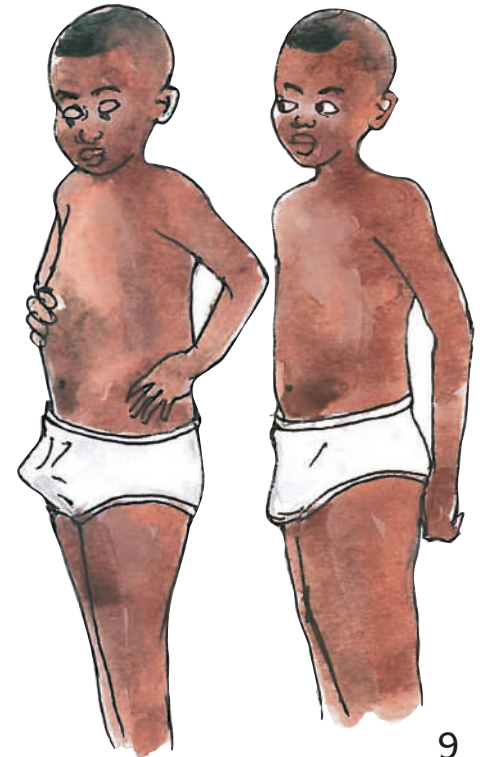
a sperm

# ERECTIONS

## What is an erection?

An erection is when the tissues inside the penis fill with more blood than usual. The tissues become stiff when they are full of blood. Then the penis grows larger and harder, and points away from the body. Boys have erections more often during puberty.

An erection can happen quickly or slowly. It can last a short time or a long time. This is true for all boys and men.



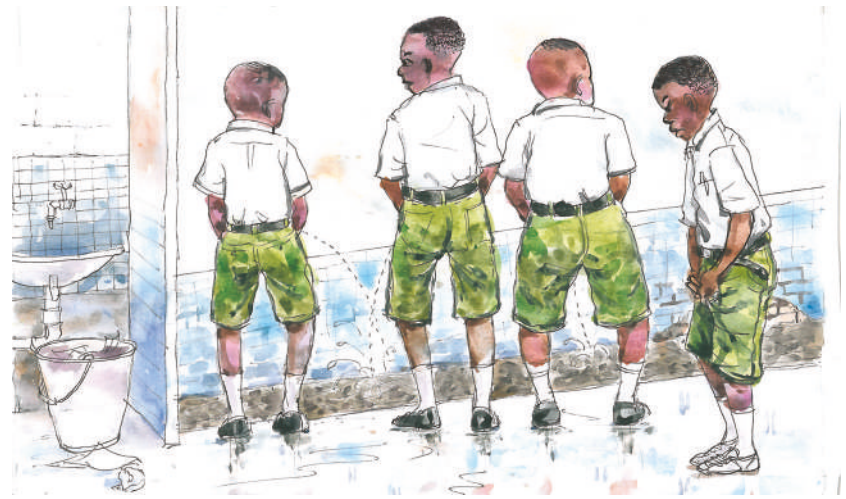
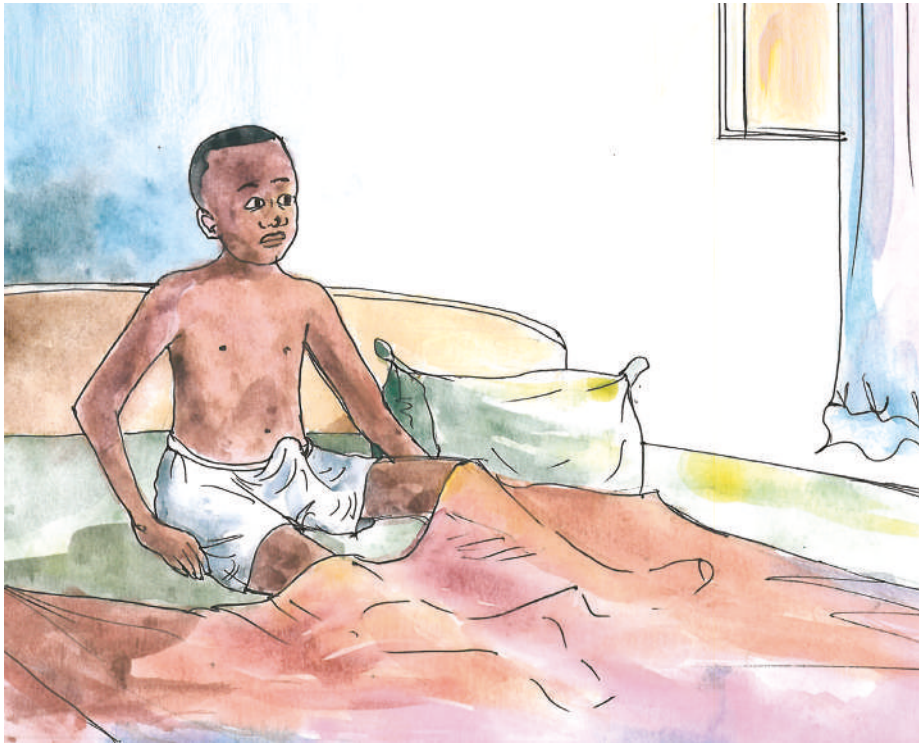


## Why do erections happen?

Erections can happen when a boy wakes up in the morning, or if the penis is touched, or if a boy is having sexual thoughts.

This is the same for boys and for men.

Sometimes, it can happen for no reason at all. **This is normal during puberty.**



## Shapes and Sizes

Many boys worry that their penis is too short or too long, or that it is too thin or too fat. There is no one right size or shape. **Any size and shape is normal.**

When a boy has an erection, his penis may point in different directions or point upwards. **Any direction is normal.**

If you are cold or nervous, less blood flows to your penis and it may get smaller in size. If you are warm and relaxed, more blood flows to your penis and it may get larger.

## How to manage erections?

Having an erection when you are not expecting one can be embarrassing, but it is normal. It happens less as you get older.

During puberty, **erections can happen at any time or place**. For example, when you are in class, during sports, or waiting for the bus.

Some advice for managing erections include: stay seated, wear bigger trousers, put your hands in your pockets to hide it, shift your books to cover it, or think about something else until it goes away.



## What are wet dreams?

A wet dream is **when a boy ejaculates sperm during sleep**. About one-third of boys have their first ejaculation during a wet dream.

You might wake up and find your underwear is wet with semen. You might remember having a dream with sexual thoughts. This is all normal. As you grow into a man, you will have fewer wet dreams.



# UNDERSTANDING GIRLS

## How do girls' bodies change during puberty?

A girl can start the changes of puberty before a boy. **The changes in girls include** her breasts begin to develop and her hips become broader. Hair starts to grow under her arms and between her legs. She also starts to menstruate—also called **having a period**.

**Menstruation** means that a girl's body is preparing for the future, to be able to get pregnant and have a baby. During menstruation, the lining of the uterus, which includes blood, comes out through the vagina. Bleeding usually lasts 3 to 7 days. It usually happens every month.





### **Show each other respect.**

Boys and girls should be understanding and not provoke each other during puberty. Boys' and girls' bodies and emotions are changing a lot during this time. Everyone's body is doing what it is supposed to do. Be kind to each other during this time of change.

Sometimes, girls can feel pain from their menstruation. Some boys can feel shy because of erections and ejaculations. Some girls' and boys' bodies change faster or slower than others. These are all normal feelings and experiences.

Puberty can be a confusing time, so it is important that you treat each other with respect. Do not shame others for the changes taking place in their bodies during this time of growth.

Adults may also start to treat you differently and expect you to be more responsible. So, treat each other like brothers and sisters, and offer help and support in chores, in education, or in sports activities.

You are all growing and becoming the wonderful people you were born to be.

# PRESSURES

## Pressures boys may feel as they grow into young men

As boys go through puberty, they may feel many pressures from older boys and men. You might hear on the radio, on social media, on television, or from other people that young men should: have a girlfriend, drink alcohol, try smoking cigarettes or other drugs, and show how strong and brave they are by fighting. These things can harm your health. They can also make it hard to have a successful life.

When a boy feels pushed to do these things from other boys (or girls) of their own age, this is called **peer pressure**. It can be hard to say no.





However, if you want to grow into a healthy young man, you must take good care of your body, focus on your studies, and avoid these risky behaviours.

## WHO CAN YOU TALK TO?

When your body is changing, you may have questions. You may feel confused about what is normal. You can talk to elders and adults who you trust, such as older brothers, uncles, fathers, grandfathers, mothers, teachers, and health workers.



They have experienced all the same changes that you are having now. They can answer your questions. They can also help you to manage peer pressures from other boys and girls.

If someone makes comments about your changing body that make you feel unsafe, share it with someone you trust.

If you think there is a body change that is not normal, such as a lump or pain in your testicles, then it is good to ask a doctor or a nurse for advice.



## BOYS IN SIERRA LEONE SHARE THEIR STORIES

These are real stories from boys in Sierra Leone who have recently experienced puberty, peer pressure, and violence. They wrote down what happened to them and gave their advice, so you know you are not alone on your journey to becoming a young man.



## Story 1

Once upon a time when I was in Class 6 at the age of 10 years, **I experienced my first erection.** I was in school when I saw my penis erect. I found it difficult to understand because I never experienced this thing before. So, I went to a corner in the school where after some time my penis cooled down.

During that day, I was so sad because I never experienced such a situation like this. I decided not to tell any of my friends because you can't tell everybody your secret, as they can become your enemies tomorrow.

But I told my father since he is my trusted friend, I explained everything that happened.

My father said, "My son, it's a change that occurs in every human being who experiences life—it will happen to you also."



So since that day, when my penis becomes erect, I have learned to be patient with it 'till it cools down.

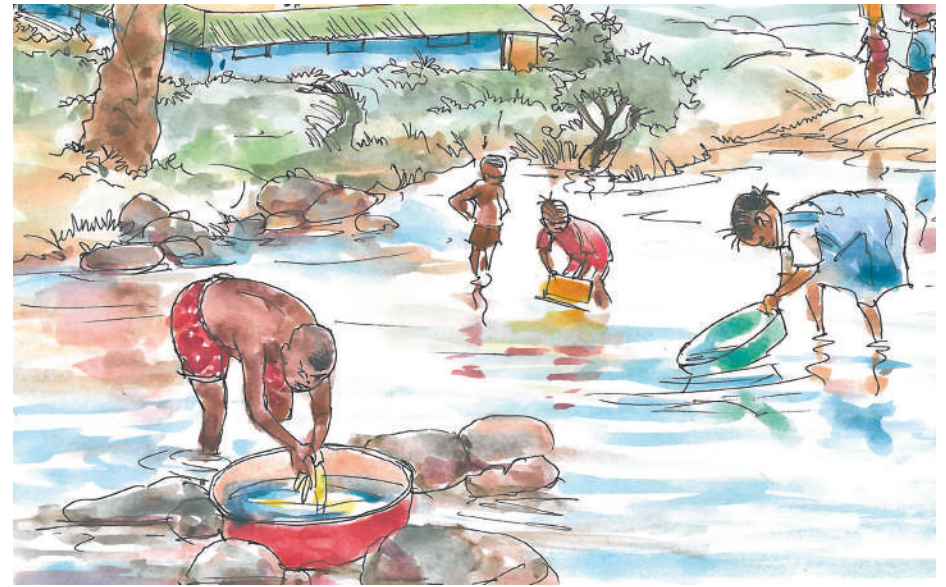
My advice is do not panic if it happens to you because it is a natural situation that occurs. Explain to your father or your science teacher in private so that you will have a solution to your problem.



## Story 2

Once upon a time, I was at the age of 13 years when I had **a wet dream**. When I woke up one morning, I saw that my trousers and bed were wet. In the first place, I was so scared because I thought it was a bad thing that happened to me. I was so confused and uncomfortable because I also thought it could be an illness or some evil that had happened to me.

When I went to school that morning, I told my English teacher because he was my favourite teacher. He told me that it is not a bad thing.



He said it is normal and natural to have a wet dream. He also said that it is a sign of maturity. When it happened again, I managed to go to the stream and wash my whole body and the cloths that I wore when I had the wet dream.

So, my advice to all my younger brothers who are yet to experience this is that a wet dream is normal. It happens to all boys growing up. Don't be confused by this experience, it shows you have reached your puberty stage.

## Story 3

I was 17 years old and I usually walked with my friends to school. My friends were good at stealing people's property but I was so afraid of that.

But **my friends pressured me** to join their habit of stealing. I told them stealing people's property is not a good idea. But they threatened me, saying that if I did not join them to steal I would be removed from the group and beaten, and they will avoid me.

At the time, I was so fond of my friends and I did not want to lose their friendship. But I was determined not to join them, so I left the group and I was all alone.

On a Monday morning, I was in my house when I heard people saying that my friends were caught stealing from a neighbouring house.

They were taken to the station. I was lucky to have left this group of boys, or I would have been in police station with them.

My advice to my younger brothers is to be strong to avoid bad company.



## Story 4

In my home village, I had eight boys as friends when I was 13 years old. In one of my friend's compounds, his parents planted fruits such as mangoes, oranges, and potatoes. One day, some of my friends came to my house and told me they were hungry and that **we should go steal fruits** from our friend's compound. I didn't want to do it but there was no way out as all them had agreed to go.

So, I decided to go with them. When we reached the compound, they thought no one was there but there was a security man. We had started to pluck the fruits when the security man saw us and asked, "Who is that?" We did not answer him and ran away from the compound.



But we left our slippers behind, and the security man collected our slippers and took them to our parents. This incident was embarrassing for me, and I was ashamed of myself. So, I decided not to move with bad friends again but to always stay with my parents.

My advice to younger boys is not to follow bad boys that are doing bad things but to always follow good boys that are doing good things.

## Story 5

One Monday morning, when I was 14 years old, my friends and I were on our way to school. My friends asked me to **follow them to the bush**. I asked them, “What are we going to do in the bush?” They said they were going to teach me how to smoke. When we got to the bush, they asked me to smoke with them, but I refused. I left them there and went to school. My teacher asked me about my friends. I told the teacher that I left them on the road waiting for somebody.

The next day, I woke up in the morning, took my bath and dressed. I was on my way to school when I saw my friends smoking again in an unfinished building near the school. I said, “I will never join your group because these bad things will destroy my life. Smoking will damage my lungs, and later on in life I will be affected by high blood pressure.”



I would like to advise my younger ones that when you face such **peer pressures**, try to avoid them because it can destroy your future. You you might be affected by a disease called cancer. So, if you want to be a good person in society, you have to avoid these bad influences.

## Story 6

Once upon a time when I was living with my aunty, there was one fateful day. My aunt's husband got dressed for work. As he was about to leave the house, my aunty asked him for money to prepare food for the house. He shouted at her that he did not have money for the food and left the house.

Later that day, he returned home from work very drunk and asked my aunty for his food. My aunty replied that she did not prepare food because he did not leave any money. My aunt's husband then became angry. He went in his room to get a belt, which he used to beat her.



I was very sad when this incident happened before my eyes. I was powerless to help my aunt. I managed the situation by shouting for help from our neighbours. They came in to stop my aunt's husband from beating her. Later, the elders in the community fined him for beating his wife.

My advice to my younger ones is that whenever they are faced with similar situation, they should call neighbours and the elders in the community for help.

## Story 7

I was embarrassed when **I had a fight with my elder brother** in front of our parents.

It was an argument about the football match of Sierra Leone versus Benin played in Guinea. I was supporting Sierra Leone and my brother was supporting Benin.

We were watching the game in our parlour when Sierra Leone scored a penalty against Benin. Sierra Leone later won the game, and my elder brother was angry, but I was happy and laughing.



Then my elder brother became angry and punched me in the face. Blood started coming out of my nose. My parents rushed with me to the hospital for treatment.

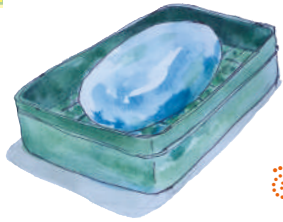
When we returned home, our parents settled the matter. They warned my elder brother that he should always have patience with his younger ones and never hit me again. I felt bad because the fight was in front of our parents, and I vowed never to fight in front of them again.



The advice I have for my younger brothers is to stay out of fighting because fighting is not good for young boys like us.

# HOW TO...?

## How to keep clean during puberty?



- ☉ Bathe every morning and evening to manage new body odour.
- ☉ Wash your clothes (also your underwear!) when they get dirty so they are neat and clean.
- ☉ Change your underwear daily to manage smell and discomfort from sweat and dirty clothing.

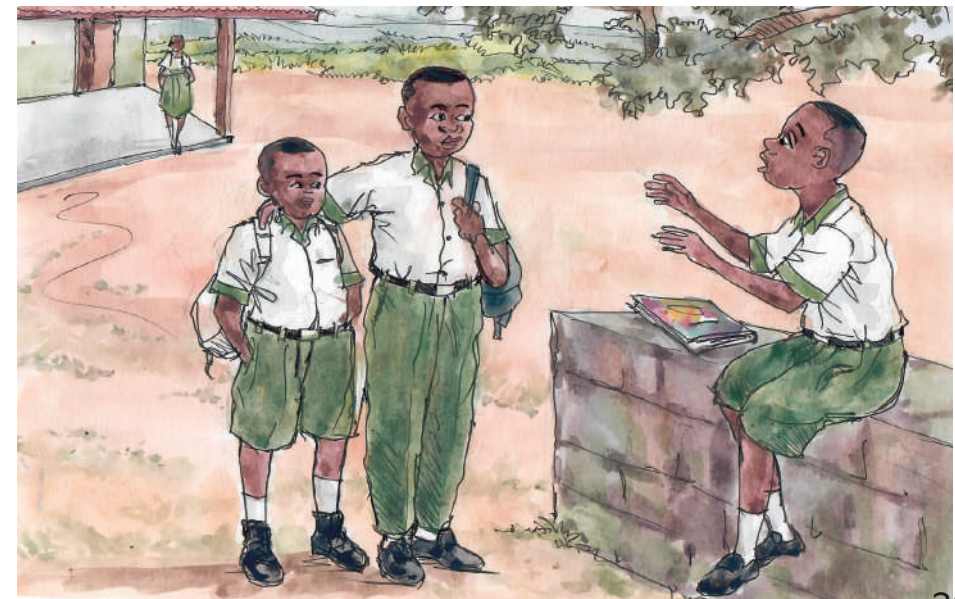
## How to manage wet dreams and ejaculations?

- ☉ Wash your penis and the area around it.
- ☉ If you wake up with wet underwear or bedsheets, make sure to wash them the same day.



## How to manage peer pressure from other boys and girls?

- ☉ Explain to them that smoking and drinking alcohol are not good for your health, your studies, or your future.
- ☉ Explain to them that you are not ready to have a girlfriend because you need to study and work hard.
- ☉ Explain to them that fighting is not good for your health. A man does not need to fight to show he is strong or confident.



## IS IT NORMAL...?

### **Is it normal to get pimples during puberty?**

Yes, many boys and girls get pimples during puberty because the body starts to produce more oils in the skin. Be sure to wash your face with soap and water twice a day to help reduce pimples.

### **Is it normal to feel like something is wrong with your body during puberty?**

Yes, many boys feel like their changes are not normal or they are the only ones changing. Do not worry, all boys go through the same physical and emotional changes.

### **Is it normal for a boy's voice to "break" and change during puberty?**

Yes, the sound that comes when a boy's voice is changing (or when your voice breaks) is a normal physical change that boys experience during puberty.

### **Is it normal for some boys to grow bigger than other boys during puberty?**

Yes, boys go through the same changes during puberty, but each person will grow to be different heights and weights. So, do not worry if your body is a different size or shape from your friends or brothers.

### **Is it normal when a boy sees or thinks about a pretty girl he has an erection?**

Yes, this is a normal thing for an adolescent boy to experience. But, it does not mean a boy is ready to have sex. It is just a normal body reaction during puberty.

### **Is it normal for boys and girls to have new feelings towards each other during puberty?**

Yes, during puberty, boys and girls may have new feelings towards each other. They can be different than when you were younger. But, it is important for boys and girls to respect



each other as friends. You can support each other in studies and sport activities while going through puberty.

**Is it normal to feel depressed and so consider using drugs to cope?  
Should I ask for help?**

Yes, sometimes boys feel very sad or depressed during adolescence. You might not know how to manage these feelings, but taking drugs is not a healthy choice.

If you are feeling this way, you can talk to somebody you trust, like your parent, grandparent, teacher, friend, healthcare worker, or coach to help you through these feelings.

**Is it normal if a boy does not want to use drugs, cigarettes, or alcohol, and tries to stay away from bad groups that might pressure him?**

Yes, and it is most healthy if a boy stays away from using these things and avoids bad groups. These behaviours can be bad for your growth, studies, and your future life chances.

**Is it normal that some boys become rude and stubborn during puberty? Can they feel like fighting over a girl?**

Yes, during puberty, a boy's body is going through many different physical and emotional changes, and these new experiences can lead a boy to misbehave sometimes, and to feel like fighting. Parents, teachers, and friends can help a boy to behave well.

**Is it normal for a boy to start puberty before the age of 10 but another boy to start puberty after the age of 14?**

Yes, the changes of puberty begin at different ages in each boy.

Some boys begin as young as 9 years old, and some boys begin at 15 or 16 years old.



## TRUE OR FALSE

The urine and semen get mixed together when a boy is ejaculating. **FALSE**

It is normal for one testicle to hang lower than the other one so it is easier to walk. **TRUE**

Even though he is too young to be having sex, a boy who is growing into a young man may start to have sexual thoughts. **TRUE**

It is possible for a boy to stop himself from having a wet dream during puberty. **FALSE**

When you are feeling cold, the testicles will move closer to the body to keep warm.

**TRUE**

If a girl's egg is mature, but she has not yet had her first period, she is still able to become pregnant if she has sexual relations.

**TRUE**

We are told when growing up that if a boy ejaculates by himself, his sperm will be infertile and not able to create a baby with a woman.

**FALSE**

If a boy sleeps on his back, he will have a wet dream. So, you should always sleep on your belly.

**FALSE**

If a boy does not grow hair by 17 years old, he will never grow hair again.

**FALSE**

It is possible for a boy who is an adolescent (aged 12 to 19) to impregnate a girl.

**TRUE**

If a boy wakes up in the morning without an erection, it is a sign of impotency.

**FALSE**

The body is always making more sperm, so a growing boy and a man cannot use it all up.

**TRUE**



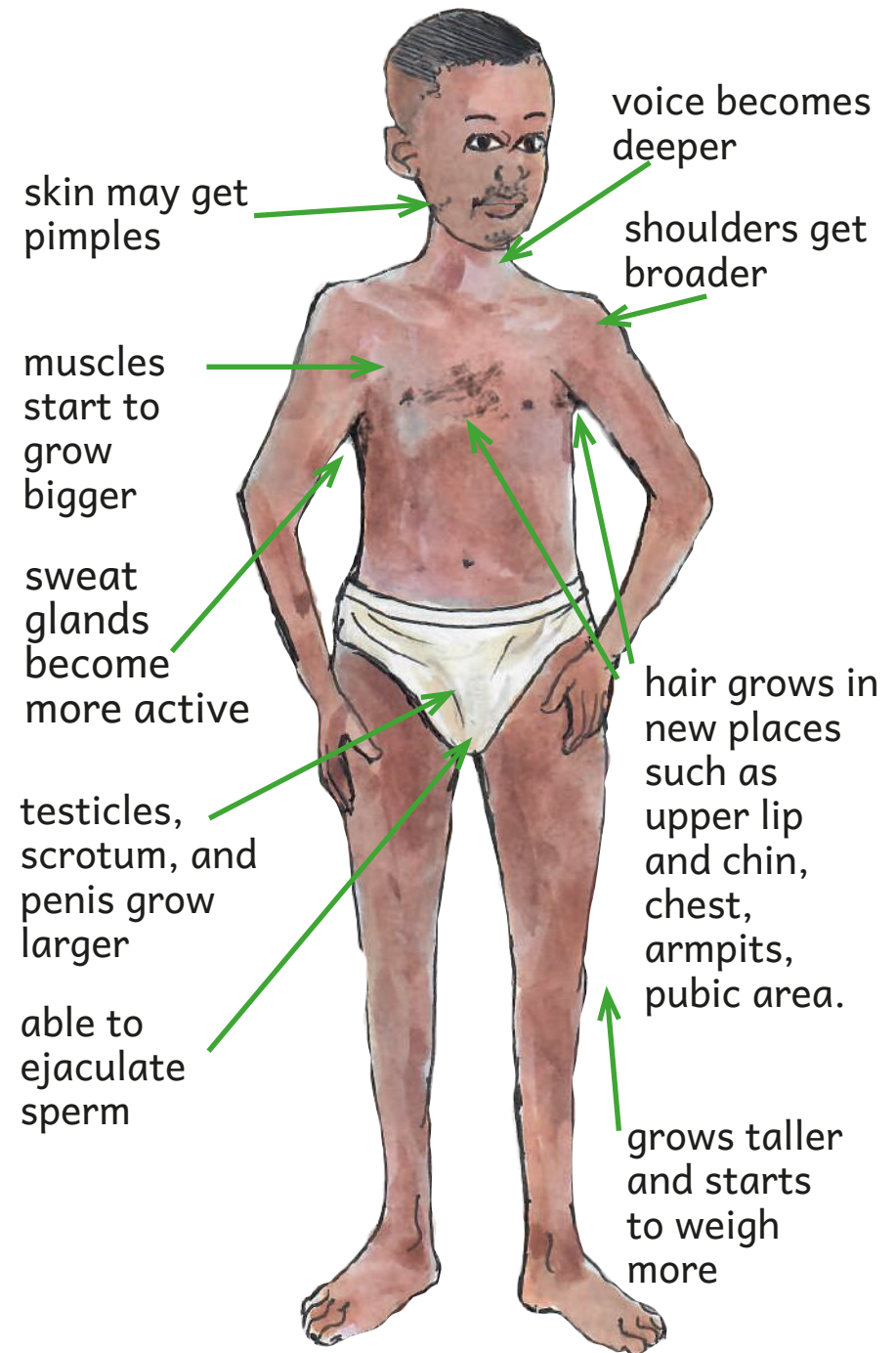
# BODY CHANGES

## Body Changes in Boys During Puberty

Boys often start experiencing puberty later than girls of the same age.

The changes for boys are:

- Your muscles start to grow bigger.
- Your shoulders get broader.
- Your sweat glands become more active, so you will smell more like an adult.
- You grow hair in different places on your body (on upper lip and chin, on the chest, in armpits, and pubic area).
- Your voice will become deeper.
- Your testicles, scrotum, and penis grow larger.
- You will be able to ejaculate sperm.
- Your skin makes more oils so you may get pimples.
- You grow taller and start to weigh more.

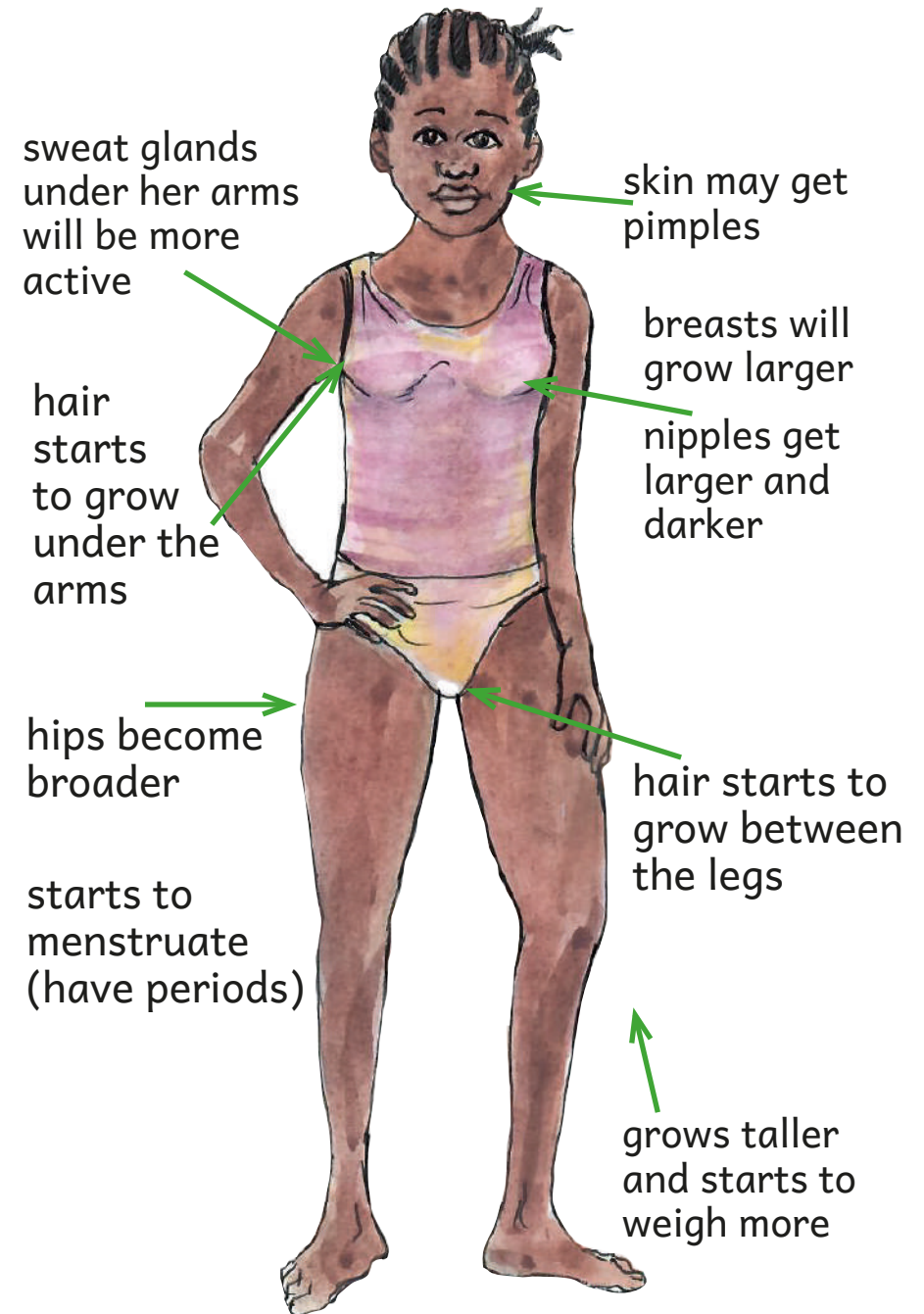


## Body Changes in Girls During Puberty

Girls can start the changes of puberty before a boy.

The changes in girls include:

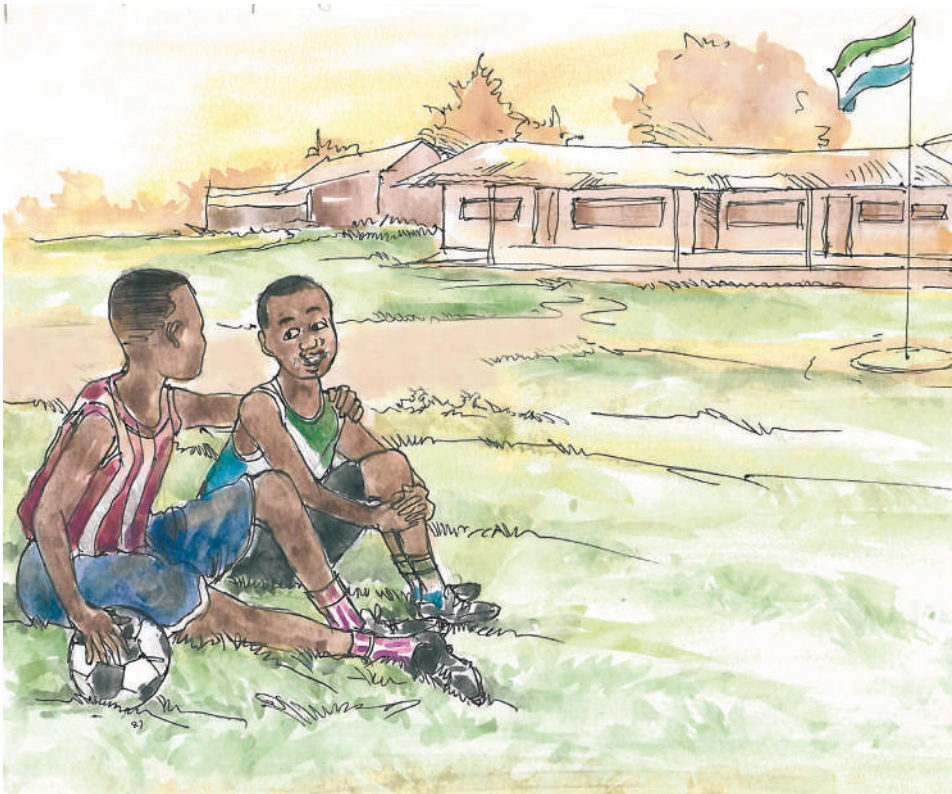
- Her breasts will grow larger and be more sensitive.
- Her nipples will get larger and darker in color.
- Her hips become broader.
- Hair starts to grow under her arms and between her legs.
- She starts to menstruate (have periods) once a month.
- Her skin makes more oils causing pimples.
- Sweat glands under her arms will be more active, so she will smell more like an adult.
- She grows taller and starts to weigh more.



# CONGRATULATIONS!

You have now learned about growing from a boy into a young man! We hope you feel strong and proud of your body and mind.

Respect yourself and also respect others!



These two books, *Growth and Changes for Boys* and *Growth and Changes for Girls*, are for young people who are in their last year of primary school (Class 6) and who are reaching early puberty. Boys and girls will find valuable information and answers to important questions about their physical development and health. These books can be read independently or with the support of a trusted, informed, approachable adult.

Boys and girls are encouraged to read both books. It is recommended that girls and boys read and discuss the books in separate groups, because they may be shy to discuss these topics in mixed groups.



**Transforming Girls' Education Project (TGEP)** is a project funded by the Government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada (GAC) implemented by CODE in partnership with The Association of Language and Literacy Educators (TALLE) and McGill University. The project aims to improve learning outcomes for girls attending upper primary classes (grades 4 to 6) when barriers to girls' access to education increase. The project is focused in four districts in Sierra Leone (Karene, Bonthe, Port Loko and Western Rural Districts). While TGEP is designed especially for girls, it supports all children's growth and development to reach their full potential. The TGEP program benefits include the support of Teacher Educators across Sierra Leone; Pre-service Teacher Education, In-service Teacher Training; Teaching Guides; and other resources.

**Grow & Know** develops puberty books in partnership with local stakeholders in each new country with the overall aim of empowering girls and boys about their changing bodies, enabling them to feel confident as they grow up. Participatory research with girls and boys is conducted in each new country, to capture their stories and questions that are included in the book. To date, they have developed books in nine countries and distributed over two million copies. [www.growandknow.org](http://www.growandknow.org)

**TALLE** is a Sierra Leonean NGO of Language Arts Educators who support the effective teaching and learning of Language Arts to boost quality learning outcomes among students. TALLE-RSL works with education stakeholders to promote the use of appropriate student-friendly methods and materials in teaching students' skills that help them think, read, and communicate meaningfully and well.

**CODE** (formerly the Canadian Organization for Development through Education). Since 1959, CODE has been working towards its vision of a literate world, growing into Canada's leading international development agency focused on education and literacy. CODE has been active in Sierra Leone since 2011, focusing on childhood literacy and supporting the creation of locally produced, culturally meaningful books for children. [www.code.ngo](http://www.code.ngo)

This book provides information for boys in Sierra Leone who are on their journey to becoming young men. You will read first-hand stories about growing into young men, and get advice from your peers in Sierra Leone.

Not for Sale

Canada 

code

Promoting every  
child's right to read

Reading Level:  
610-1000L  
Class 6, ages 9+

