

## Information for Families

### FAQ: The Importance of *The Growing Up Program*

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#### **Is it necessary for my child to be learning about puberty at such a young age?**

*The Growing Up Program* introduces the topic of puberty at grade 3 and builds upon student knowledge throughout the upper primary school years. Research has found that children in Australia are showing signs of puberty earlier than in the past. An Australian study in 2015 found that 16% of girls and 7% of boys are showing definite signs of puberty at 8-9 years of age, with 74% of girls and 53% of boys showing signs by 10-11 years of age (Edwards, 2014). This highlights the importance of discussing puberty and the changes children can expect to occur at this age, as many young people will be beginning to notice signs of puberty, or recognise changes in their peers.

#### **Why does my child need to be taught protective behaviours?**

*The Growing Up Program* introduces protective behaviours in a very gentle way. It is not about making children scared of the world, but providing them with the knowledge and skills to identify when a situation is making them feel unsafe, and how and where to access help should they ever need it.

Recent studies have shown that Australia had one of the highest incidences of child sexual assault in girls, with 21.5% of study participants reporting having suffered abuse prior to the age of consent (Collin-Vézina, Daigneault, & Hébert, 2013), however there is concern that many assaults still go unreported (Tarczon & Quadara, 2012). Findings of these studies have resulted in calls for education programs, such as *The Growing Up Program*, to educate children in protective and help seeking behaviours.

#### **Why does my child need to be taught cyber-safety?**

It is important for children to be taught cyber-safety early on so that they develop safe online habits and understand the importance of speaking to a trusted adult if they ever feel uncomfortable or unsafe online.

Unfortunately many young people are being exposed to pornography at a young age, and this exposure is influencing their perceptions of respectful relationships. A 2015 study has found that the median age of first viewing pornography in Australia is 13 years old for boys and 16 for girls (Lim, Agius, Carrotte, Vella & Hellard, 2017). This does not mean that the viewing was intentional, for many children the viewing of adult content is accidental (Flood, 2007). By educating children about safe online practices early on, it is hoped that accidental viewing of content will reduce, and children will know how to respond and who to talk to if help or advice is ever needed.

**I am concerned about the age at which young people are becoming sexualised.**

We share your concern about the sexualisation of young people. Research demonstrates that imposing adult models of sexual behaviour and sexuality on to children and adolescents at developmentally inappropriate stages is harmful. The information we provide is focussed upon increasing the safety and health of young people and actually is a protective factor against sexualisation. Providing accurate and age-appropriate information helps young people with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to make healthy choices which in turn may reduce their vulnerability to abuse.

## References

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Edwards, B. (2014). Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children. *Family Matters* (95), 5-14. Retrieved from: <https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/fm95a.pdf>

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