



Bright Futures™

prevention and health promotion for infants, children, adolescents, and their families™

The Bright Futures Guidelines,
Third Edition
Health Promotion Information Sheet

PROMOTING HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT AND SEXUALITY

The Bright Futures Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children, and Adolescents, Third Edition features 10 health promotion themes. These state-of-the-art discussions focus on topics of key importance to families and health care professionals in their common mission to promote the health and well-being of children from birth through adolescence. These 10 themes are also woven into the 31 health supervision visits.



What you'll find in the “Promoting Healthy Sexual Development and Sexuality” chapter

Overview: Setting the stage

Families have different perspectives on how sexuality should be discussed with children and adolescents. While respecting different individual and cultural values, health care professionals can address this important component of healthy development by integrating sexuality education into health supervision from early childhood through adolescence. In the supportive environment of the medical home, health care professionals can provide personalized information, confidential screening of risk status, and health promotion counseling for the child and adolescent. Age-appropriate, accurate resources related to sex education and healthy sexuality provide parents with factual information and encouragement as they educate and guide their growing children.

In-depth: Exploring the topic

The chapter also looks at issues related to healthy sexual development that are unique to each developmental stage, along with evidence on the effectiveness of relevant health promotion interventions.

Infancy: Birth to 11 Months

Because intimacy begins in a parent's arms, nurturing the development of the biological and physical foundations of healthy intimacy begins there, too. Infants need to have the sense that they are valued, loved, and important for who they are.

Early Childhood: 1 to 4 Years

Sexual exploration is a normal, universal, and healthy part of early childhood development. Health care professionals should provide reassurance about normal activities, provide developmentally-appropriate parameters for identifying problem behaviors, and encourage family discussion regarding sexuality.

Middle Childhood: 5 to 10 Years

Middle childhood is the time to provide accurate information to children and give them opportunities to explore, question, and assess their own and their family's attitudes toward sexuality and human relationships. Concepts of family, friendship, and other human relationships are core components of healthy sexuality at this stage.

Adolescence: 11 to 21 Years

Experiences with romantic relationships, exploration of sexual roles, and self-awareness of sexual orientation commonly occur during adolescence. Decisions that are associated with sexual development in the adolescent years often have important implications for health and education, as well as current and future relationships. This section discusses the role of the health care professional and features data on sexual decision-making, the percentage of sexually active young people, the onset of intercourse, contraception, pregnancy rates, and sexually-transmitted infections and diseases.



How the theme of “Promoting Healthy Sexual Development and Sexuality” fits into Bright Futures visits

Each Bright Futures health supervision visit is structured around *five priority topics* that help focus the health care professional’s guidance to parents and children. Some priorities are unique to a particular visit; others are featured often and their components evolve in concert with the child’s development.

These examples of priorities, taken from selected visits, show how Bright Futures helps health care professionals talk to families about promoting healthy sexual development during each developmental stage:

Infancy: 2 Month Visit

Infant behavior, including the parent-child relationship; daily routines; sleep location and position and crib safety; developmental changes; physical activities, such as tummy time, rolling over, and diminishing newborn reflexes, and; communication and calming

Early Childhood: 2 Year Visit

Toilet training, including approaches parents have tried, techniques, and personal hygiene

Middle Childhood: 7 and 8 Year Visits

Development and mental health, including independence, self-esteem, establishing rules and consequences, temper problems, managing and resolving conflicts, puberty/pubertal development

Late Adolescence: 18 to 21 Year Visits

Emotional well-being and its relationship to coping, mood regulation and mental health, and sexuality

Additional Resources on Promoting Sexual Development and Sexuality

- American Academy of Pediatrics aap.org
- HealthyChildren.org, American Academy of Pediatrics healthychildren.org
- Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration mchb.hrsa.gov
- Family Voices IMPACT on Health & Wellness for Families fv.impact.org
- Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine, Routine Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare adolescenthealth.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Sexual Health cdc.gov

Bright Futures is a national health care promotion and disease prevention initiative that uses a developmentally-based approach to address children’s health needs in the context of family and community.

Bright Futures Health Promotion Themes

Family Support

Child Development

Mental Health

Healthy Weight

Healthy Nutrition

Physical Activity

Oral Health

Safety and Injury Prevention

Community Relationships and Resources

Healthy Sexual Development and Sexuality

*To learn more about Bright Futures,
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