

GROWING into YOU!

**SNEAK
PEEK**

**An Inclusive, Shame-Busting,
Get-Real Guide to Your Changing
Body and Mind**

Melissa Pintor Carnagey, LBSW
Founder of Sex Positive Families

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Melissa Pintor Carnagey



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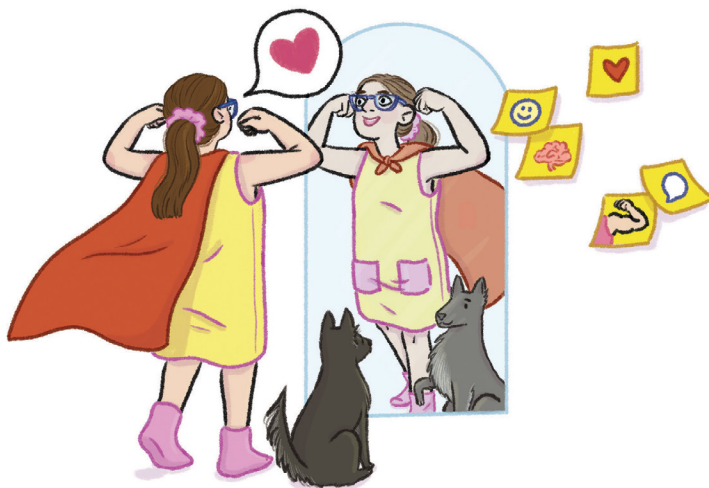
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For Tyson, Owen, and all the tweens and young teens who
deserve to feel prepared and supported during puberty



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Introduction

Did you know that breast buds aren't something just girls develop?

Or that voice changes don't happen just to boys?

What about the fact that once a person has their first period,
it can take up to five years for their cycle to become regular?

What if I told you that all these facts have one thing in common:

puberty!



If you're reading this, you might be looking for more information about what puberty means for your body, your brain, and your emotions. Or maybe a trusted adult gave you this book to read, and you're not sure what you'll get out of it yet. Here's what I can promise: in this guide, you'll find lots of information about topics such as bodies, puberty, gender identity, consent, and healthy relationships.

In my experience, talking or even thinking about these topics might make you feel one or more of the following ways:

uncomfortable

nervous

curious

excited

meh

worried

awkward

annoyed

embarrassed

fascinated

giggly

interested

nothing at all

Whatever you are feeling is totally welcome here. The only feeling we don't want to invite to this party is **shame**, because shame can make you think there's something wrong or bad about you, your curiosities, your body, or your puberty journey. Nothing is further from the truth!

ABOUT THE READER (THAT'S YOU!)

This book is for you because you deserve to know what to expect during puberty—and you deserve to learn about it in an inclusive way, using language that aligns with your identity. This book is also helpful for parents, caregivers, and trusted adults who may not have had this kind of honest, shame-free education growing up, and who want to learn ways to support their young person during puberty.

You know yourself best.
You are unique, unlike anyone else on Earth.*

*Yes, even if you are a twin!

Who Are You Today?

Throughout our lives, and especially during puberty, we experience many changes: in our bodies, in how we think and feel, and in how we relate to others and the world around us. Take a moment to think about who you are right now. Let's capture and honor this version of you by answering these questions in a notebook.

- * How old are you?
- * Which pronouns do you use? (Pronouns are words like *she*, *he*, *they*, and *ze*, which people use when they're referring to us but not using our name.)
- * What three words would you use to describe yourself today?
- * What do you feel happiest doing?
- * What's your favorite snack? (Feel free to munch on it while you read!)

In your notebook, draw a picture of yourself that includes the unique things that make you *you*! Include ways you like to express yourself. Maybe it's through your hairstyle or the clothes you wear. You can also draw a background that shows you in your favorite place or enjoying your favorite things. There's no wrong way to draw yourself!

This is the *you* today.



You will continue to grow and change.

Who will you be in the future?

You get to decide!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR (THAT'S ME!)

You might be curious about who's written this book. Hi, I'm Melissa. I use she/her/hers or they/them/theirs pronouns.

I'm a nonbinary sexual health educator and social worker who teaches young people and families about topics like bodies and puberty. I created an online platform called Sex Positive Families because I'm passionate about helping young people, parents, and caring adults learn how to talk more comfortably about these very human things. I've taught interactive workshops about bodies and puberty for thousands of tweens, teens, and parents from around the world, and I've even included some of their thoughts within sections of this book. If you're curious about these workshops, visit giypuberty.com to learn more and sign up. We'd love to have your family join us!



— TELL ME MORE! —

What does **sex positive** mean? The answer might surprise you! It simply means having an open, shame-free understanding of bodies, sexuality, and sex.

Being a sex-positive family means that honest conversations and education about these topics are treated as a healthy part of growing up, not avoided or silenced. Research shows that when young people receive sexual health education and support from their trusted adults, they are better able to make informed decisions about their bodies, relationships, and sex, and know who to turn to for guidance when they need it. Puberty education is one of the many stepping stones to building a solid founda-

tion of health: physical health, sexual health, and mental health.

When I was a tween and teen, talking about bodies, puberty, and sexual health was taboo. It was hard to get accurate information or feel comfortable talking to my parents, which left me feeling alone, confused, and unsure when the many changes began to happen to me. I wish I had a trusted adult who made it comfortable for me to open up. I've learned that my experience is not so uncommon, and that many grown-ups did not have enough support like I did—but they want a better experience for their own children.

Now that I'm a parent of three young people, I've been able to break this cycle and have countless conversations and teachable moments with my kids to help them navigate their own puberty journeys without shame or taboo.



If I could time-travel to my tween years, I'd give this book to myself and my parents. I believe if we'd had resources like this to normalize conversations about puberty, our family may have felt more comfortable connecting, and it could have helped me to feel better prepared, informed, and supported through my puberty journey.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Throughout the book, you'll find journal prompts (**Let's Write About It!**) and activity ideas (**Let's Have Fun with It!**). I recommend keeping a pen and a notebook or piece of paper nearby while reading so you can write down your responses, thoughts, and questions. You can keep them to yourself, but I also encourage you to share any questions and feelings that come up with your trusted adults, if you feel safe to do so. You might feel weird at first if you aren't used to talking about these subjects with them, and it might not go "perfectly" the first few times you try—but don't let shame join the conversation. To help you connect with trusted adults on these puberty topics, you'll notice that each section of this book also includes a **Let's Talk About It!** section with conversation starters. Talking openly is the best way to learn from one another!

Who counts as a trusted adult? Trusted adults can be found in many different roles and parts of your life. They could be a parent, stepparent, older sibling, aunt, uncle, grandparent, godparent, older cousin, teacher, counselor, youth leader, coach, pastor, mentor, nanny, neighbor, or other member of your community. They could also be a professional provider you go to for services like therapy or medical care.

However, their title or the role they play in your life doesn't guarantee that you'll see this person as someone safe and trustworthy to turn to when you have questions or need support during puberty. You get to determine who is a trusted adult in your life.

To help you identify a trusted adult in your world, think about someone who has some of these traits:

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| * Easy to talk to | * Trustworthy |
| * Kind | * Reliable |
| * Makes time for you | * Affirms and respects your identities |
| * A good listener | * Nonjudgmental |
| * Patient | * Respects your boundaries |
| * Respectful | * Feels safe to you (this is a big one!) |
| * Honest | |

Which qualities feel most important to you when you are looking for support? Are there other qualities you would add to this list? As you navigate changes to your body and mind during these years, you can refer to this list when you encounter new people and situations.

It's also possible that a trusted adult is not available to you right now, or that you may prefer to keep the things you're learning to yourself. That's okay, too. Use this book and its resources in whatever ways feel most comfortable to you.

Finally, I invite you to use this book at your pace—because puberty is a journey, not a race. You might skim some of the chapters, try out some of the conversation starters or activities, skip around, or go through the entire book from start to finish. Some of the information may not apply to you yet, but you can revisit it when you're ready. Some of the information may never apply to you, but I encourage you to read those sections, too. Learning about bodies, identities, and puberty experiences that are different from your own is an important way to foster empathy for and appreciation of others. You'll notice this book was written inclusively to help you and other tweens and young teens of many different bodies, gender identities, and puberty journeys see yourselves reflected and learn many different facts about growing up.

No matter how you experience this book, I hope it becomes a useful guide to support you along the journey of **growing into you!**





“It’s not
just hairy
armpits!”

—Lucas, 11 years old



PART 1

What's the Deal with Puberty, Anyway?



Puberty Is . . .

You probably already know a bit about puberty—from school, in pop culture, by seeing other people go through it, or because you're experiencing puberty right now! When you hear the word *puberty*, what words come to mind?

Take a moment to explore this word cloud, based on one made by real tweens and their trusted adults in one of the Growing Into You!™ virtual puberty workshops.



If any of these words are new to you, that's okay! As you can see, there are a range of physical, emotional, social, and mental changes that happen during puberty—and we'll learn about all of them.

— TRY THIS —

- * Point to the words in the cloud that relate to emotions during puberty.
- * Find the words that relate to body parts and physical changes during puberty.
- * What words would you add to the cloud?

Now let's look at a definition of puberty:

**Puberty is a process of changes that cause
a child's body to mature into an adult body.**

This maturing develops the brain, bones, emotions, and even the ability to reproduce. But, wait, you might be wondering—what does it mean to reproduce? *How* do people reproduce? Keep reading; I'll give you all the info later in this book! (Or if you're like me and don't like waiting, you can hop over to page 43 for more info about this!)

Puberty Is Not . . .

1. **A race. Your body has its own pace!** Did you know that every person goes through their own unique puberty experience in their own timing? Not even identical twins go through the exact same changes at the exact same time. There are as many unique puberty experiences as there are people on Earth!
2. **Something that happens overnight, or over a summer.** Puberty happens in stages that can take five to 10 years to be completed. For many people, these changes begin between ages 8 and 10 and end between ages 18 and 21. For transgender young people who use puberty blockers during adolescence, it's possible to experience changes later in adulthood, like having a second puberty once they are no longer taking puberty blockers. (We'll learn more about puberty blockers on page 72.) Either way, puberty doesn't happen overnight; it happens bit by bit over several years. This means you'll have some time to get to know your body as it is changing.



3. **Binary.** The word *binary* refers to something that has just two elements. Puberty is not binary because it is not limited to only two types of experiences based on gender or body parts—for example, “girl puberty” or “boy puberty.” Each person’s body and identities are diverse and unique. The changes you will go through depend on the particular body parts you have and how they function. We’ll learn more about this in “All Things Anatomy” starting on page 37, so you can better understand what to expect in your unique puberty journey.



Real Questions,

Real Answers

Asking questions is how we learn. Throughout this book, I'll share answers to some of the questions I've received from tweens who attend the Growing Into You!™ virtual puberty workshops. Maybe you've wondered about some of these things, too!

Do dogs and cats go through puberty?

Yes! Animals also go through growth that causes physical and behavioral changes, brought on in stages by hormones that support reproduction. The process and timing can look different for every type of animal. Dogs typically experience puberty between six months and two years old, which is when puppies transform into adult dogs. Dogs with a uterus experience discharge, bleeding, and heat cycles (called estrus), which make it possible for them to reproduce. Dogs with testicles experience the descending of these parts into their scrotum during puberty, similar to what happens to humans with testicles. Cats experience puberty in similar ways and timing. Because humans have complex brains, we experience social changes during puberty, too—like having crushes, changing friendships, and evolving identities—that are quite unique from the experiences of the rest of the animal kingdom.

My mom told me that she started growing boobs and had her period at age 10. Will puberty happen just like this for me, too?

Sometimes genetics—the traits you can inherit from your parents and ancestors—can cause similarities in puberty experiences, but most of the time your changes and when they happen will be completely unique from your relatives' experiences.

Some of my friends are getting taller, and their voices are getting deeper. I haven't experienced this yet! Am I a late bloomer?

It's common to wonder if your body is doing what it should when you think it should. And you might be tempted to compare yourself to your friends or to other people around you. You might even hear other people compare your body to those of others or use terms like “late bloomer,” as if puberty is a competition! Talking this way about puberty and bodies is not helpful or accurate and can contribute to feelings of insecurity. Try to remember:

Puberty is not a race. My body has its own pace.

If you're worried or wondering about how your body is changing, talk with a trusted adult. This can be a good opportunity to visit with your pediatrician or another medical provider who can help you understand your unique puberty journey and answer your questions.

Let's Write About It!



This section is just for your thoughts! Grab your notebook, paper, or device, and remember, there are no wrong answers.

- * Think of other things that go through physical changes, like plants, animals, or seasons. Draw a few of them in their different forms—before, during, and after their changes.
- * Now think about yourself just two years ago. Make a list of some ways you've changed since then. For example, have you experienced physical changes like getting taller, growing breasts, or a change in hairstyle? How about social changes, like making new friends or trying new hobbies?
- * Celebrate your uniqueness! Think of three things that make you totally one of a kind. Jot them down.

Let's Talk About It!



With a parent, trusted adult, or friend, read these questions out loud and start chatting together.

- * Sometimes puberty can feel awkward to talk about. Why do you think that is?
- * To ask a trusted adult: How old were you when you started going through puberty? Who taught you about puberty or helped you through it? If you did not have support, how did that feel?

Let's Have Fun with It!



Take the learning into your world by trying out this activity.

Create an Affirmation Station to help remind you of how unique and amazing you are, *exactly* as you are! Affirmations are positive, motivational statements that can improve your confidence and self-esteem. These phrases may feel true for you, or they can represent a feeling you *want* to feel true for you. Some examples of affirmation statements are:

I believe in myself.

I am brave.

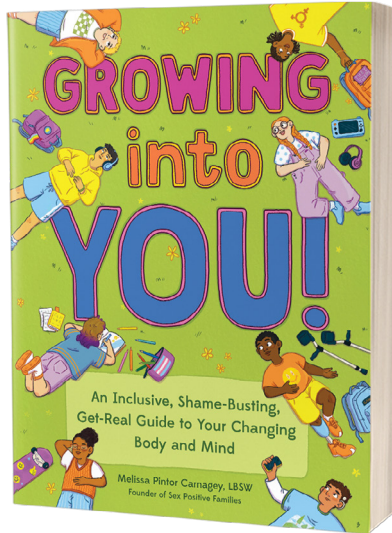
I am enough, just as I am.

I can do hard things.

- * Jot down three or more affirmations using sticky notes or create them digitally to print out or save on your device. You can make up your own affirmations or use the above examples. Put them somewhere you can easily and regularly read them to yourself, like on your bathroom mirror, next to your bed, in your locker, or as digital wallpaper.
- * Stand in front of a mirror, look yourself in the eye, and say your affirmations out loud. Try this at least once a day, in the morning or before bed. It's totally okay if it feels awkward or silly the first few times. Keep practicing until it feels more comfortable.

Learn more in *Growing into You!*

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by Melissa Pintor Carnagey, LBSW
Founder of Sex Positive Families



Pick up your copy wherever you buy your books!



Melissa Pintor Carnagey (she/they), LBSW, is the founder of the online education platform Sex Positive Families and the creator of the Growing Into You!™ puberty workshops. As a Black, Puerto Rican, and Mexican sexuality educator, social worker, and parent, she believes that all children deserve holistic, comprehensive, and shame-free sexuality education. Melissa lives in Austin, Texas, with their family.