

the egg” and “how the baby gets out,” but during this period, it is best to wait until they ask.

Regardless of whether children are given sex education, they will engage in games of sexual curiosity and exploration. At about 3 years old, children are aware of the anatomical differences between the sexes and are curious about how the other works. This is not really “sexual” curiosity because many children are still unaware of the reproductive function of the genitalia. Their curiosity is for the eliminative function of the anatomy. Little boys wonder how girls can urinate without a penis, so they watch girls go to the bathroom. Because they cannot see anything but the stream of urine coming out, they want to observe further. “Doctor play” is often a game invented for such investigation. Little girls are no less curious about boys' anatomy. It is intriguing to closely inspect this “thing” that girls do not have.

One question that parents often have is how to handle such sexual curiosity. A positive approach is to neither condone nor condemn the sexual curiosity but to express that if children have questions, they should ask their parents. Then parents can answer their questions and encourage them to engage in some other activity. In this way, children can be helped to understand that there are ways that their sexual curiosity can be satisfied other than through playing investigative games. This in no way condemns the act but stresses alternate methods to seek solutions and answers. Allowing children unrestricted permissiveness only intensifies their anxiety and concern because exploring and searching usually yield little evidence to satisfy their curiosity.

Many excellent books on sex education are available for preschool children at public libraries. The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States* and the American Academy of Pediatrics[†] have bibliographies of suggested reading material. Parents should read the books themselves *before* giving or reading them to their children.

Another concern for some parents is **masturbation**, or self-stimulation of the genitalia. This occurs at any age for a variety of reasons and, if not excessive, is normal and healthy. It is most common at 4 years old and during adolescence. For preschoolers, it is a part of sexual curiosity and exploration. If parents are concerned about their child masturbating, it is essential for nurses