

[Swinburn, et al, 2010](#)). Because these are formative years for both boys and girls, parents should make efforts to instill positive principles regarding body image, give their children encouraging feedback regarding their appearance, and emphasize the importance of accepting individuals no matter their differences in appearance.

Despite the advances in body image development, preschoolers have poorly defined body boundaries and little knowledge of their internal anatomy. Intrusive experiences are frightening, especially those that disrupt the integrity of the skin, such as injections and surgery. They fear that if their skin is “broken,” all of their blood and “insides” can leak out. Therefore, bandages are critical to “keep everything from coming out.”

Development of Sexuality

Sexual development during these years is an important phase in a person's overall sexual identity and beliefs. Preschoolers are forming strong attachments to the opposite-sex parent while identifying with the same-sex parent. Sex typing, or the process by which an individual develops the behavior, personality, attitudes, and beliefs appropriate for his or her culture and sex, occurs through several mechanisms during this period. Probably the most powerful mechanisms are childrearing practices and imitations. Gender identification is a result of complex prenatal and postnatal psychological factors, as well as biologic, social, and genetic factors. Most children are aware of their gender and the expected sets of related behaviors by $1\frac{1}{2}$ to $2\frac{1}{2}$ years of age.

As sexual identity develops beyond gender recognition, modesty may become a concern. Sex-role imitation and dressing up like Mommy or Daddy are important activities. Attitudes and the responses of others to role-playing can condition children to views of themselves and others. For example, comments such as “Boys shouldn't play with dolls” can influence a boy's self-concept of masculinity.

Sexual exploration may be more pronounced now than ever before, particularly in terms of exploring and manipulating the genitalia. Questions about sexual reproduction may come to the forefront in preschoolers' search for understanding (see [Sex](#)