

HEALTHY TOUCHING

It is healthy and common for children to touch their genitals. Many children of all ages and genders do so. Why do they touch themselves? Because it is soothing, relaxing, fun to explore, helps them fall asleep, and because it feels good. Before children begin puberty, touching their genitals is not a sexual behaviour. It is not driven by sexual needs, wants or fantasies, the way it often is for adults.

If your child touches themselves it does not mean they are developing in a sexually unhealthy way. You may not like the fact that your child is behaving in this way, but it is important to remember that it is not harmful to your child, and is often a healthy behaviour. Exploring and getting to know one's own body is important.

It is important that older children, teenagers and adults are comfortable with their bodies. This makes it easier for them to talk to their parents and health care providers as soon as they notice something that may be problematic such as a rash, lump or swelling. Comfort with their body could save their life.

Your religion, culture or values may not align with masturbation. If this is the case it is important to talk to your child about this without shaming them. Children do not understand the social implications of their actions. Often self-exploration is simply curiosity, and touching or rubbing themselves is a way to self-soothe. By yelling or physically making a child stop, you will increase their anxiety and possibly instill feelings of guilt or self-hatred.

Although touching yourself is a healthy behaviour it is important to teach children that it is a private behaviour done alone in places such as a bedroom or bathroom. It is important to mention to the child that the bathroom cannot be a public bathroom, as this could be unsafe.

If your child is too young to understand the difference between private and public behaviour and they are touching themselves in public, simply give them something to hold that requires both their hands or distract them in some other way. Do this nonchalantly without upsetting them. If your child is old enough to understand the difference between private and public, gently remind them that they are in public where people do not touch themselves and that they can continue in private when they get home.

Masturbation is something many people enjoy. People of all ages, genders, orientations, abilities, cultures and religions. It is easier to enjoy masturbation as an adult if you had positive experiences with touching yourself as a child. Experiences without shame, guilt and negativity. Think about your child's present and future and if you are comfortable, allow them the positive experience touching themselves can bring.