

Native Women's  
Association of Canada



L'Association des femmes  
autochtones du Canada

# NWAC'S CULTURALLY SAFE PARENT AND CAREGIVER STARTER TOOLKIT

Talking To Youth About Gender, Sexual  
Orientation, Safe Sex, and Sexually  
Transmitted Blood-Borne Infections



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# OVERVIEW

This toolkit was created to help empower parents to educate their children to create healthy boundaries and relationships with their bodies and sexual health. It also identifies the importance of accepting differences when it comes to bodies, gender identity, and sexual orientation. As parents, it is never too early or too late to start having these conversations with your child(ren) and this toolkit will help you navigate this process. While these conversations can be difficult, it's important to remember that as Indigenous people, our strengths are embedded in our families, cultures, teachings, languages, and storytelling.

To start this toolkit off in a good way, we wanted to begin with a story, which is based on an excerpt from Dr. Jennifer Leason's article, "Forced and Coerced Sterilization of Indigenous Women: Strengths to build upon", published in the Canadian Family Physician Journal.

"I would like to share a story about meenun obinoji, blueberry children. My favorite memory as a child was going blueberry picking with my sister, cousins, mom, auntie Shirley, and my nanny (grandmother) and her sisters, my great aunts. I spent many childhood summers in Dryden and Blueberry Lake, Ont. We would

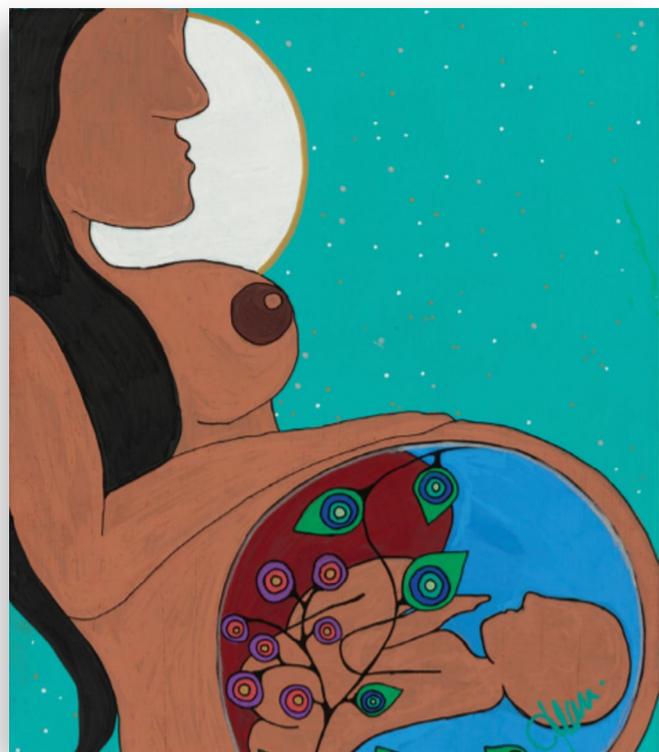


Image Credit: Matriarchal Wisdom, Jennifer Leason, 2021

camp, swim, and pick berries (and pinecones) in July to August and would sell the berries to buyers who would randomly show up on my great-grandmother's and auntie Lena's doorstep. As we got older, we picked bottles and pinecones, but as a child, I specifically remember the berries. I would sit in one spot and pick as far as I could reach, fighting off mosquitoes and no-see-ums as they crawled up my



nose and into my eyes while I shoved handfuls of berries into my mouth. Berry (and pinecone) picking with my family and friends is a reminder of the good times, meals, memories, connection to land and place, as well as the instilled values of relationship, sharing, reciprocity, and persistence.

“The aunts, Elders, Knowledge Keepers and teachers that I have met along my journey tell us that we women, like the berries and pinecones, carry seeds inside us. These seeds are gifts from the Creator. Each and every one of us are gifted with the seeds of creation and that those seeds are a spark of the greater spirit. They taught me that because these seeds are a gift of creation, that they must be respected, honoured, and most importantly, protected. While sitting beside the women in my life and picking and cleaning berries or pinecones, and preparing and participating in ceremonies, berry tea, berry feasts, fasts, and stories, I listened and learned. The stories, and teachings of berries were my introduction to education on sexual and reproductive health, our rights, and our responsibilities to our families. They instilled in me the foundation and power to be grounded and connected to a matriarchal tradition and an inherent wisdom and knowledge. The Traditional wisdom and Knowledge from the berries and land is our oldest and greatest teacher. This is a strength we can build upon.

“As First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, we have a responsibility to protect, educate, support, and empower the next generation of women and girls. This includes connecting to stories, ceremonies, and traditions as a way of building connections and empowering women and girls through traditional matriarchal wisdom. By empowering, educating, and informing women and girls, they will then be armed with knowledge, skills, and voice to defend their rights and stand up for others. As aunties, grandmothers, families, and communities, we also have a responsibility to provide support, mentorship, and guidance to ensure women and girls do not feel alone, disconnected, or filled with doubt. You are beautiful; you are a spark of the greater spirit.”

# STARTING THE CONVERSATION

In modern day, children can learn a lot about puberty, sex, and relationships through the internet and TV. Regardless, talking to your child about puberty is important since not all the information they consume online is reliable or complete. Do not wait for your child to ask you about their changing body; they might not, or they may not know that they can speak to you about this sensitive topic. This section summarizes information about puberty in girls that will help you navigate your conversation with your child regarding this important stage in their life.



## THE POWER YOU HOLD

The most celebrated life stage in an Indigenous child's life is coming-of-age, also known as puberty. Puberty is an empowering rite of passage from childhood to adulthood, and it plays a pivotal role in a girl's life. In Indigenous culture, menstruation (sometimes called moon time), which happens at puberty, is considered sacred and powerful. This is particularly true during the first menstrual cycle, also known as moon time or period. During this time, girls are believed to be so powerful that they can trump any male's energy. Puberty also emphasizes a woman's ability to bear children. Giving birth to the future generations of the Indigenous culture is an aspect of womanhood that Indigenous women take pride in, as it enables the passing down of beliefs to their children. All this illustrates the importance of women and girls in Indigenous culture, as well as how sacred and spiritual puberty is.<sup>5</sup>

To recognize the transition from childhood to adulthood, most cultures have coming-of-age ceremonies or naming ceremonies. The traditions and protocol at these ceremonies are different for each nation and some families may have their own traditions as well. To learn more about your nation's ceremonies, speak to your Elders and your family, (Native Youth Sexual Health Network, 2011, p.53).

## WHAT IS PUBERTY?

No matter who you are, everyone goes through puberty. It is a stage in development where your body begins to develop and change very quickly. Other than when you were an infant, puberty is the fastest your body grows and changes.

For girls, puberty typically starts sometime between age seven and 13, and lasts about two to three years. Some people may enter puberty a little earlier or later—after all, everyone is different, so everyone begins and navigates through puberty on their body's own timeline.



Image Credit: Jennifer Leason, 2021

Puberty is caused by the release of special chemicals from your brain called hormones. These puberty hormones, known as luteinizing hormone (LH) and follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH), work on different parts of the body depending on whether you are a male or female. In girls, these hormones target the ovaries, which contain eggs. The hormones matures the body and prepares it for the ability to become pregnant.

## WHAT DOES PUBERTY LOOK LIKE FOR GIRLS?

During puberty, not only will you grow taller, but your body will also change in other ways. You will gain weight on your hips, your breasts will develop, and your body can develop curves. It is important to keep in mind that some weight gain is a completely normal part of developing into a woman. Resisting these changes by going on a diet to counteract this natural process is unhealthy. If you have any questions or concerns about weight gain, please chat about it with your doctor.

As puberty continues, girls will get their first menstrual period, or moon time. Periods usually occur once a month and last from five to seven days. This is when extra blood, and tissue lining the uterus—used to protect and nourish a fertilized egg into a baby—leaves the body through the vagina. This happens because the body has not become impregnated and therefore, the tissue lining the uterus is unused and released from the body.

Hair will also begin growing at the armpit and pubic areas (i.e., on and around the genitals). Hair will start sparse and light and then become longer, thicker, and darker. Acne, or pimples, are likely to appear on the face, back, and upper chest areas, also as a result of heightened hormones during puberty.

Women are the first environment. We are privileged to be the doorway to life. At the breast of women, the generations are nourished and sustained. From the bodies of women flow the relationship of those generations both to society and to the natural world. In this way is the earth our mother, the old people said. In this way, we as women are earth, (Katsi Cook, traditional Mohawk midwife).

## WHAT CAN PUBERTY FEEL LIKE?

Alongside body changes, your mind is also adjusting to new hormones being produced. During puberty, it is normal to feel strong emotions on a level that you have not experienced before. For example: New insecurities about our bodies might arise. It is also common to feel significantly more sensitive or easily upset. It can be difficult to deal with these new emotions—and that is okay. As parents and caregivers, it is important to be kind and patient to children or youth going through these changes. While the change can be challenging in the beginning, it will become easier. It often helps to talk to someone—like a trusted friend, parent, older sibling, or adult who has gone through puberty—to share thoughts and emotions together.

This process may bring new and confusing feelings about the act of sex. It is common to feel embarrassed when talking about sex, but it is important to provide open and accurate information about this topic. Having open conversations with parents or guardians, an Elder, family doctor or healthcare provider, school nurse, teacher, school counselor, or another trusted adult, can provide comfort, knowledge, and clarity while you maneuver these changes.

## BODY POSITIVITY

As a parent or caregiver, it's important to keep in mind that children hear and see the way we view our own bodies, which teaches them how to view their bodies. Many people are critical of their bodies. Many make negative comments about their bodies, often without even realizing they are doing so. Just as we should avoid doing this in general, it is especially important not to in front of children.

It is also important not to make negative comments about our children's bodies. We should speak about ourselves, and our bodies, in positive ways—mirroring how we would want our children to speak about themselves and their bodies. Many Indigenous communities have teachings that show our bodies as sacred, and this is the kind of messaging we should model for our children.

Women are the life-givers, but women are not going to be life-givers without men. So, that's a balance in life. Our Two-Spirited people bring that balance again, of masculine and femininity. Our lives are not about our sexuality or even our gender identity, it's about us being a human being. It's about us following those teachings that our ancestors put in place for us, those teachings of kindness and respect, truth, honesty, humility, love, wisdom, about living those ways of life. Trying to look at each other as a valuable portion of a community, what gifts does that person have to bring to the table, so that we can become a very rich table, right? (Elder Laureen Waters Gaudio, 2019).

Many people have insecurities about their bodies. Technology, social media, and society have contributed to these insecurities. It is important to remember that people come in different shapes, sizes, colours, and personalities—and that it is **never** acceptable to comment on someone else’s body.

Taking pride in your body is an important focus of self-growth and self-love. This is especially important during difficult times, when a person’s body and mind may be experiencing many changes.

**Communicate** by having meaningful conversations about self-confidence and self-worth. Explain how these do not come from appearances.

**Understand** that people have may have insecurities that may contribute to how they see themselves and how they interact with other people.

**Encourage**

conversations and allow children to ask questions about their bodies. This will help to normalize insecurities and differences, as well as encourage self-expression of individuality.

**Model** positive reinforcements and kind words when talking about bodies and insecurities.



Image Credit: Na Shai Alexander, 2021

## GENDER DIVERSITY & SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Following hormonal changes caused by puberty, it is common for people to start developing a stronger sense of self. Some individuals explore their gender and sexual orientation to better understand themselves and who they are. These changes involve the mind and body, and can result in strong feelings, confusion, and overwhelm. During this phase, youth are learning how to identify themselves and how that fits into their worlds and relationships. At this stage, people are beginning to learn what it means to be romantically, and physically, attracted to others. Through this, they begin to recognize their sexual orientation. Although this process begins typically as a child or in youth, the journey of gender diversity and sexual orientation can be a lifelong process. Many Indigenous communities have teachings about the importance of acceptance. These teachings include 2SLGBTQQAI+ peoples. The acronym 2SLGBTQQAI+ stands for: Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Questioning, Asexual, and Intersex; while the + includes all other gender identities and sexualities not captured by the acronym.

"It is widely believed that a child will reveal who they are to the parents. The parents do not need to impose a specific identity onto their child," (National Aboriginal Council of Midwives, 2017).



We live in a society that assumes, and privileges, heterosexuality (male and female relationships) with strict gender norms (male identity and female identity) as natural and acceptable. It is very important to understand

that sexual orientation and gender are different aspects of one's identity and vary from person to person.

## GENDER & SEXUALITY 101

To better understand what is meant by the terms: Gender, gender expression, sex, and sexual orientation, it is important to know what each word means.

**Gender:** Gender is based on the expectations and stereotypes regarding behaviours, actions, and roles commonly referred to being a “man” or “woman” within a particular culture or society.

**Gender expression:** How a person publicly expresses or presents their gender.

**Sex:** Sex is assigned at birth and is based on an assessment of a person’s reproductive systems, hormones, chromosomes, and other physical characteristics.

**Sexual orientation:** The direction of one’s sexual interest or attraction.

The following charts are examples of gender identities and sexual orientations (this is not an exhaustive list):

Gender Identity	Description
Male	Individuals that identify as being male. He/Him pronouns.
Female	Individuals that identify as being female. She/Her pronouns.
Intersex	Individuals born with genitalia of ‘female’ and ‘male.’
Non-Binary/ Non-gendered	Individuals who do not identify, or align, with having a gender.
Trans	Individuals whose identity, and/or gender, does not align with their sex assigned at birth.
Gender-Fluid	Individuals whose gender identity is not still or concrete, or whose gender identity is ever-changing.
Gender-Variance/ Gender Nonconforming	A term used to acknowledge that gender identity, gender expression, and sex do not correspond with each other. There are some who cannot, or chose to not, conform to societal gender norms associated with their assigned sex at birth.

Sexual Orientation	Description
Heterosexual	Attraction to members of the opposite sex. Also known as “straight.”
Homosexual (gay or lesbian)	Attraction to members of the same sex. Also known as “gay.”
Bisexual	Attraction to members of both sexes or other sexes.
Pansexual	Attraction irrespective of sex or gender identity.
Demisexual	Attraction only if there is a strong emotional connection:
Asexual	No sexual attraction to others.

The term **cisgender** refers to people who feel their gender identity aligns with their assigned sex at birth. For example: A cisgender woman is a woman who was born biologically female, and identifies her gender as a female. When someone’s gender identity does not align with their assigned sex at birth, they may identify as transgender. They may or may not choose to undergo gender confirming surgeries. Cisgender people can participate in gender affirming surgeries as well. Any gender can have any sexual orientation, including heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

## TWO-SPRIT



Image credit: Two Soft Things, Two Hard Things

Two-Spirit—a translation of the Anishinaabemowin term, *niizh manidoowag*—is used by some Indigenous peoples to describe gender, spiritual, and sexual identity. It is a term that combines Indigenous views of gender, sexual orientation, and

encompasses cultural and spiritual identity. It may be used among some Indigenous communities and/or people—rather than, or in addition to—identifying as LGBTQ+.

However, not all sexual and gender diverse Indigenous people consider themselves to be Two-spirit. Due to cultural and spiritual context, the term Two-spirit should only be used for Indigenous people and is a Nation-specific term.

The diverse understandings of being Two-Spirit are also reflected in language. The Lakota's *wintike*, or the Diné's *nàdleehé*, both refer to men who fill social roles associated with women; while the Mi'kmaq phrase: *Geenumu Gessalagee*, translates to "he loves men," and refers only to sexuality. Although Two Spirit is a relatively new term, there are over 130 terms in Indigenous languages to describe people who do not fit into the western gender norms, including:

**Aayahkwew**

Cree term, which roughly translates to "neither man nor woman."

**Okitcitakwe/Ogokwe**

Ojibwe terms for "warrior woman" and "warrior man."

**Winkte**

Dakota/Lakota term, which translates to "double woman."

**Sipiniq**

Inuit term, meaning "infant whose sex changes at birth."

**Geenumu Gessalagee**

Mi'kmaq term, refers only to sexuality, and translates to "he loves men."

**Onón:wat**

Mohawk term, which translates to "I have the pattern of two spirits inside my body."

In some Indigenous communities, different terms were used to describe a man who took on the roles of a woman; or a woman who took on the roles of a man. These culturally accepted categories were third and fourth genders, in addition to male and female genders (Roscoe, 1998). There is no set definition on the characteristics of third or fourth gender individuals. Some would dress like, and perform the work of, the "opposite sex," and some would combine the roles of men and women (Roscoe, 1998, p. 8). Similarly, some might have sexual relationships, but others might not. In general Two-Spirited people, and those of third or fourth genders, were respected and often became medicine people or Healers, holding important roles in many ceremonies.

When approaching a conversation about gender and/or sexuality, it is important to remember to:

**Communicate:** Be honest and ask questions—but with kindness and acceptance.

**Understanding:** Exploring gender and sexuality can be a very hard process. Support and love are needed for the journey.

**Encouragement:** Allow them to express their own gender or sexual orientation. This is who they are.

**Model:** Although you may not understand, it is important to acknowledge and celebrate that everyone is different. Each person's uniqueness is important to their identity.



# SEXUALIZATION OF BODIES

Television, media, and society often mis-portray bodies, particularly female bodies. Doing so provides harmful messaging, particularly for girls, that focuses on physical appearances. This imaging is often unattainable and an unhealthy representation of bodies. The media promotes sexuality, stereotypes, and negative body imaging, which is unhealthy for young people. In fact, research finds that sexualization in the media negatively impacts girls in a variety of ways, such as their perception, sexuality, physical health, mental health, attitude, behaviour, and beliefs. Young people are particularly sensitive since they are still developing their sense of self, critical thinking abilities, sexual attitudes, sexual behaviours, and ideas of gender roles.

## WHAT IS SEXUALIZATION?

Sexualization occurs when any of the following is present:

- An individual's value is derived from their sexual appeal or behaviour.
- An individual is held to a standard of physical attractiveness aligning with being sexy.
- An individual is sexually objectified (i.e., perceived as purely for the use of others' sexual benefit).
- Sexuality is inappropriately imposed on an individual.

## WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

Although sexualization in the media sends harmful messages to young people, as a parent you are powerful too. You can teach your child to value themselves for who they are, rather than for their physical appearance.

### COMMUNICATE

If possible, watch TV with your child and browse their websites. Ask questions, such as:

- "Why is there pressure on girls to look a certain way?"
- "What is your favourite thing about girls you want to spend time with?"
- "Are these qualities more important than their looks?"

Listen to how your child responds. Remind your child everyone is unique and it is inappropriate to judge someone based on what they look like.

If your child is watching something with harmful

messaging, choosing to have a conversation with them about it is more effective than simply telling them not to watch it. Explain to your child why what they are watching is inappropriate and use it as an opportunity to start a healthy conversation regarding body imaging.



## **UNDERSTAND**

Young people often feel pressured to stay up to date on popular trends, leading them to watch shows that their friends or peers enjoy. Help your child make smart choices and offer trendy alternatives. Remind your child that who they are, and emphasize their potential beyond their physical appearance.

## **ENCOURAGE**

Extracurricular activities such, such as sports, build talents and abilities. Encourage your child to follow their interests by participating in a sport, activity, or hobby. This helps your child prioritize building character and skills over physical appearance.

## **MODEL**

Sexualization in the media can also influence adults. Be careful about what you buy and watch. Lead by example.

## BODY BOUNDARIES

A body boundary can be understood as the limits you set between yourself and others, as they relate to your body. These are boundaries you do not want to go beyond, or that others are not welcomed to go surpass. It's important to talk to children starting at a young age about their boundaries. They have the right to decide who and what touches their body, and when. It is important for children and youth to establish what is a safe touch versus an unsafe touch. Safe touch usually feels comfortable, such as a hug from a friend. Unsafe touching usually feels uncomfortable, harmful, or confusing. They are the boss of their own body and have the right to decide, and distinguish between, appropriate touch boundaries for themselves. It is also important for your children to understand that they hold the power to change their boundaries if ever, or whenever, they choose. Children and youth need to understand that no one has the right to touch their private body parts, and no one should touch them without consent.

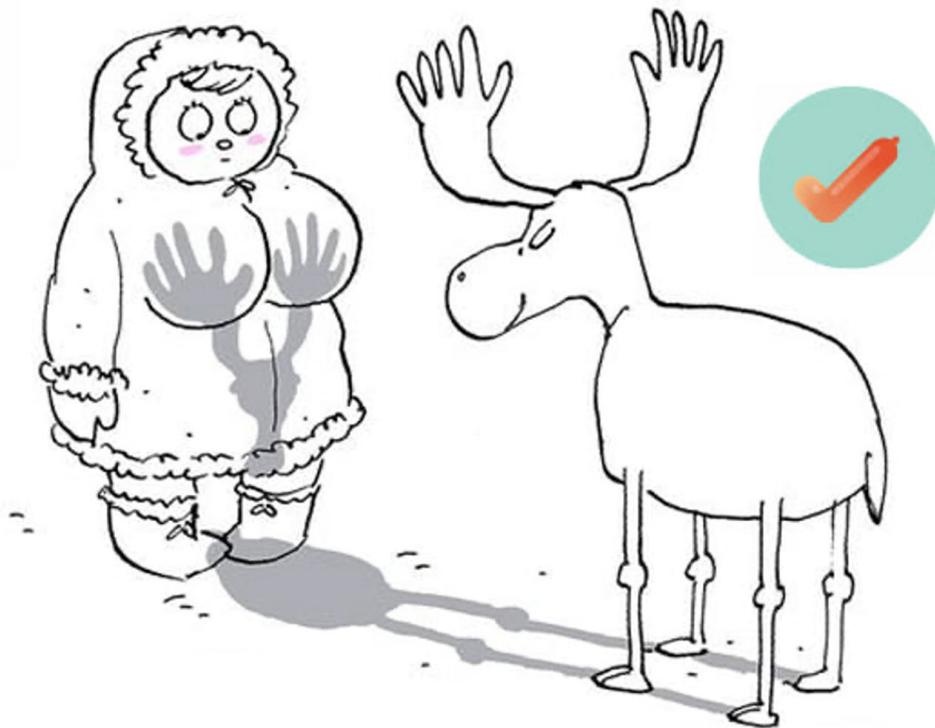


Image Credit: Facebook CheckUp Project



# CONSENT

Consent is an extremely important concept all children should learn at an early age. It will act as a major foundation for them to establish, and maintain, healthy relationships. This section details key points to explain to your child when discussing consent.

## SEXUAL CONSENT

Sexual consent is the voluntary agreement to engage in any sexual activity. This can include kissing, sexual or genital touching, or sexual intercourse (i.e., oral, vaginal, and anal sex). Before participating in sexual activity with someone, you **must** confirm if they want to be sexual with you, too. It is key to be honest with your partner about what you want and don't want. Set clear and healthy boundaries. Consenting, and asking for consent, requires setting your own boundaries and respecting those of your partner. It is essential to check in to see if these boundaries are not clear, or have changed. Consent must be given by all individuals involved for every sexual activity, every single time.<sup>10</sup> All sexual activity without consent is sexual assault and/or rape: Which is a criminal offense.

In Canada, an individual must be **at least 16 years of age to legally agree** to sexual activity.

Here are some other key ideas to understand regarding sexual consent.

### CONSENT IS:

- Informed
- Clear
- Freely given
- Coherent
- Ongoing
- Sober
- Enthusiastic
- Specific
- Comfortable
- Active
- All parties in agreement.

### CONSENT IS NOT:

- Flirting, smiling, laughing
- Silence, or words such as "maybe" or "I don't know"
- Dressing 'sexy'
- The absence of the word 'no'
- Being in a relationship
- Accepting a ride, drink or gift
- If the person needs to be convinced.
- Having had sex with them before
- Saying yes under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Giving in because of pressure or fear to refuse

# ONLINE SAFETY

The internet can be a valuable resource for young people by providing information and access to communities, but it also comes with risks. Some adults, known as 'online predators' use websites children use to lure them to disclose personal information or build inappropriate relationships. Children and youth can also be lured into seeing, or participating in, online sexual encounters, known as online child sexual exploitation. These encounters can be the sharing of inappropriate pictures, videos, prompting, and messages. Online child sexual exploitation is a serious public safety issue that is happening right now. It can include the following:

- Grooming and luring.
- Child pornography (including writing, audios, videos, and images).
- Self-generated sexual materials.
- Sexting.
- Sextortion (i.e., threats to extort child sexual exploitation images and/or videos).

Online child sexual exploitation is a growing issue in Canada. You should be aware of your child's online activity, particularly who they meet and what they share about themselves, as well as teach them responsible online behaviour.

## **Basic online safety guidelines to discuss with your child:**

- Be cautious posting or sharing personal photos.
- Always turn your location settings off.
- Never share personal information (e.g., address, phone number, school name).
- Never share passwords with anyone except with parents or guardians.
- Never agree to meet in-person with anyone met online unaccompanied, and never without parental approval.
- Never respond to a threatening email, post, or message.
- Always tell a parent, or trusted adult, about any upsetting communication online.

### **Basic parental supervision guidelines:**

- Spend time online together to teach children appropriate online behaviour.
- Limit computer and screen time use to a common area where you can watch and monitor its use.
- Monitor time spent on tablets or smartphones.
- Be aware of any unfamiliar account charges on your credit card or phone bills.
- Take your children seriously if they mention an uncomfortable online exchange.

### **Warning signs your child is being targeted, may include:**

- Spending long hours online, particularly at night.
- Receiving phone calls from individuals you don't know.
- Receiving unsolicited gifts in the mail.
- Turning off the computer, phone, or tablet, when you walk in the room.
- Withdrawing from family.
- Hesitant to discuss their online activity.



### **How You Can Take Action:**

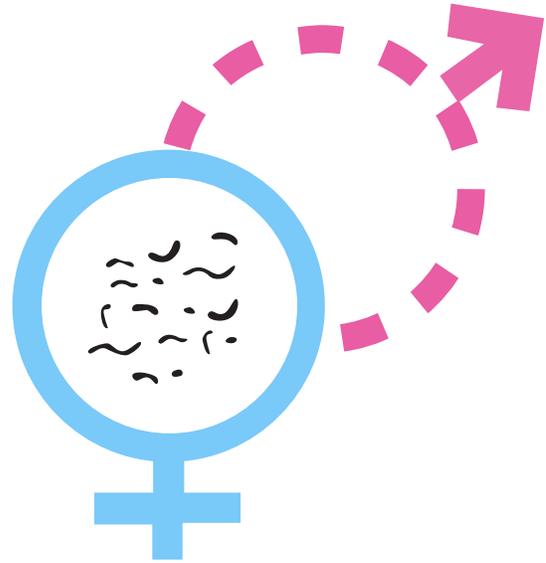
- 1) Be aware that online child sexual exploitation is a problem.
- 2) Talk to your kids openly and regularly. Help them feel comfortable turning to you if they experience issues online.
- 3) Look for warning signs (described above).
- 4) Get help if needed. Resources include:
  - a) [Cybertip.ca](http://Cybertip.ca)
  - b) [Kidshelpphone.ca](http://Kidshelpphone.ca)
  - c) [Needhelpnow.ca](http://Needhelpnow.ca)

# WHAT ARE STBBIs?

Sexually Transmitted and Blood-Borne Infections (STBBIS) are infections that can be transmitted from one person to another through sexual contact (such as through an exchange of semen, vaginal fluid, blood, or other fluids) or by contact with contaminated blood. Some infections, such as HIV, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C, may be transmitted through both sexual encounters and blood exchange routes.

The following are some examples of common STBBIs:

- Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).
- Chlamydia.
- Gonorrhea.
- Syphilis.
- Hepatitis A, B, and C.
- Genital Herpes (HSV).
- Human papillomavirus (HPV).
- Pubic Lice and Scabies.



## HOW CAN YOU GET STBBIs?

STBBIs are mainly spread through the exchange of bodily fluids (e.g., semen, vaginal fluid, rectal fluid) during vaginal, oral, or anal sex, from someone who has an STBBI to someone who doesn't. STBBIs can also possibly be spread through breast milk from mother to baby and blood-to-blood contact, such as when sharing needles. STBBIs can be spread by individuals that are 'asymptomatic,' these people do not experience symptoms.<sup>4</sup> This is why it's so important to get tested – it's the only way to know for sure whether you have an STBBI.

# STBBI PREVENTION

**Using a condom during sex** is the **best** form of protection against STBBIs. You can also protect yourself by making sure both you and your partner agree to only have sexual contact with each other and no one else. In this case, you are both protected against STBBIs if you have both been tested and know you are not infected. Moreover, ensuring you have received vital vaccinations against STBBIs is also important. Ask your doctor about getting vaccinated for Hepatitis A, B, and HPV.

Before you can speak to your child about STBBI prevention, you must first be educated about how to prevent and get tested for STBBIs. This section provides you with a basic understanding of what you and your child should know.

Most STBBIs are not transmitted through kissing, you should not kiss anyone with visible sores around the mouth and nose. Cold sores are a type of Herpes that can be spread through kissing someone who is infected.

## When Should You Get Tested?

People can have a STBBI without showing any symptoms. There are risks for getting infected through any form of sexual contact. Consider getting tested every time you have sex with a new partner—or prior to sexual contact with a new partner—as well as at regular checkups with your physician. If you are experiencing any symptoms, such as pain during sex, bleeding after sex, abnormal discharge, etc.<sup>14</sup> notify your doctor.

## WHY GET TESTED?

Testing is a confidential and easy way to determine if you have an STBBI. It is important to be tested frequently because STBBI's do not always present symptoms. In fact, in many cases, people do not show any symptoms and are unaware of having STBBIs, since they can be passed on, and acquired, unknowingly. Testing for STBBIs is the only way to confirm whether someone is infected. Testing allows people that have contracted a STBBI to be treated and avoid further complications. Getting tested is the only way to keep ourselves, our partners, and our communities, safe.

## HOW TO GET TESTED

Several health care settings offer STBBI testing services, such as family medicine clinics, sexual health clinics, family planning clinics, and youth clinics. Ask your health professional to obtain the contact information for an appropriate resource that offers STBBI testing near you, or visit [www.stbbi.nwac.ca](http://www.stbbi.nwac.ca).

### Testing is as easy as 1, 2, 3:

1) Book an appointment or go to a walk-in clinic	2) Go to your appointment or a walk-in clinic	3) Follow up
Testing is confidential. Testing is free. You do not need your parent or guardian's permission.	Ask for an STI test. Be ready to answer questions and pee in a cup, and/or get a blood test or swab. Confirm your contact information to get your results.	Call the clinic if you do not hear back in one to two weeks. If you test positive, take the treatment before having sex again (your partner should get tested too). Finish all required medications.

## NORMALIZE TESTING

For many people, getting tested for STBBIs can be stressful and nerve-racking. This is often due to a lack of information: People fear what they don't know, such as how testing is done and what treatment looks like. Some people are so afraid of having an STBBI that they would rather not get tested. Therefore, it's important to talk openly with our kids and reinforce positive messages such as, Testing is as Easy as 1, 2, 3 (see table above).

Our bodies are sacred. We can learn from ceremonial and spiritual teachings on the importance of keeping our bodies healthy and safe. STBBI testing can be one of the many ways we maintain this.



## HIV (HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS)

### WHAT IS IT?

Human Immunodeficiency Virus, or HIV, is a virus that attacks the immune system. If left untreated, HIV can lead to Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, or AIDS. There is no cure for HIV, but with treatment people with HIV can lead long and healthy lives.

### HOW CAN YOU GET IT?

You can get HIV through vaginal or anal sex with a partner who has HIV—if your vagina or anus comes into contact with your partner’s sexual fluids. Sexual fluids include ejaculate, vaginal fluid, and anal fluid. You can contract get HIV through non-sexual activities that put you in contact with someone else’s. This can be done by sharing needles such as injection drug equipment or tattooing needles. HIV can also be spread from mother to child during pregnancy, labour, birth, or through breastfeeding. If the mother is being treated for HIV, the chance of passing HIV onto the child is very low. Although rare, it is also possible to acquire HIV from mouth sores if they are open wounds.

### HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE IT?

Many people with HIV do not show signs initially after infection. Sometimes it can take years for the body to show signs of infection. To know for sure if you have it, you need to get tested. Some symptoms can include: fever, headaches, chills, rapid weight loss, and loss of appetite.

### TESTING

Testing for HIV happens through a blood test. This is done by drawing blood from an arm, or by pricking a finger to get a few drops of blood. Tests that use the finger-prick method are called rapid HIV tests and can provide results within minutes of being tested.

### TREATMENT

Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) is used to treat HIV. It usually includes taking a combination of three antiretroviral drugs daily. There is no cure for HIV, but people living with HIV with ART medication can live long and healthy lives.

## CHLAMYDIA



### WHAT IS IT?

Chlamydia is a bacterial infection that can cause pain, burning, or itching in the penis, vagina, or anus. It can also cause unusual liquids (discharge) to come out of the penis, vagina, or anus.

### HOW CAN YOU GET IT?

You can get chlamydia through vaginal or anal sex with a partner who has chlamydia. The infection is transmitted when your vagina or anus comes in contact with your partner's sexual fluids. Sexual fluids include ejaculate, vaginal fluid, and anal fluid. Chlamydia may also be spread through oral sex on a penis, though this is less common.

### HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE IT?

Many people do not show any signs of chlamydia. This is especially true if the infection is in the mouth, vagina, or anus. When you do show signs, they can include:

- New or unusual discharge from the vagina, penis, or anus.
- A burning feeling when peeing.
- Pain in your lower abdomen.
- Pain during sex.
- Bleeding from the vagina or anus after sex.

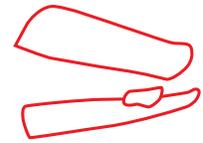
### TESTING

Testing for chlamydia involves peeing in a cup. Your urine will be sent to a lab for testing. If you have signs such as unusual discharge, your healthcare provider may also take a swab using a long Q-tip or tiny brush. Most tests give accurate results two weeks after sexual intercourse that may have exposed you to chlamydia.

### TREATMENT

Antibiotics cure the infection completely if taken properly. Be sure to take the medication as directed by your healthcare provider and finish the full prescription.

## GONORRHEA



### WHAT IS IT?

Gonorrhea is a bacterial infection that can cause pain, burning, or itching in the penis, vagina, or anus. It can also cause unusual liquids called discharge to come out of the penis, vagina, or anus.

### HOW CAN YOU GET IT?

You can get gonorrhea through oral, vaginal, or anal sex with a partner who has gonorrhea. The infection is transmitted when your mouth, vagina, or anus comes in contact with your partner's sexual fluids. Sexual fluids include ejaculate, vaginal fluid, and anal fluid.

### HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE IT?

Many people with gonorrhea do not show any signs. This is especially true if the infection is in the mouth, vagina, or anus. If you do have signs, they may include:

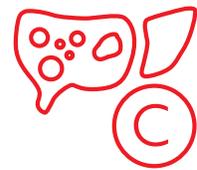
- New or unusual discharge from the vagina, penis, or anus.
- A burning feeling when peeing.
- Pain in your lower abdomen.
- Pain during sex.
- Bleeding from the vagina or anus after sex.

### TESTING

Testing for gonorrhea usually involves peeing in a cup. Your urine will be sent to a lab for testing. If you have signs such as unusual discharge, your healthcare provider may also take a swab using a long Q-tip or tiny brush. Most tests give accurate results seven days after sexual intercourse that may have exposed you to gonorrhea.

### TREATMENT

Antibiotics cure the infection completely if taken properly. Be sure to take the medication as directed by your healthcare provider and finish the full prescription.



## HEPATITIS C

### WHAT IS IT?

Hepatitis C is a viral infection of the liver. The liver is a body part that filters toxins from your blood. About 20 percent of people who get Hepatitis C are able to get rid of the virus without treatment. But for most people who become infected, Hepatitis C turns into a chronic infection, which means that the infection stays with you for life.

### HOW CAN YOU GET IT?

Hepatitis C can be spread through activities that put you into contact with someone else's blood who has Hepatitis C, such as sharing injection drug equipment, tattoo needles, piercings, toothbrushes, nail clippers, razors, or medical procedures with equipment that is not cleaned properly. A mother can also pass Hepatitis C onto a child through childbirth.

### HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE IT?

Many people do not show any signs of Hepatitis C. When you do show signs, they can include:

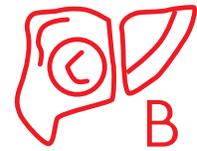
- Loss of appetite.
- Fever.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Headaches.
- Feeling very tired.
- Jaundice, which is when your eyes or skin take on a yellowish colour.

### TESTING

Hepatitis C is found for through a blood test. This is usually done by drawing blood from your arm. Test results can take anywhere from a few days to a few weeks to come back.

### TREATMENT

Hepatitis C can be cured in most people, with proper medication. For many people, treatment lasts three months. Be sure to take the medication as directed by your healthcare provider and finish the full prescription.



## HEPATITIS B

### WHAT IS IT?

Hepatitis B is a viral infection that affects your liver. The liver is a body part that filters toxins from your blood. Most of the time your body can fight off Hepatitis B by itself. If your body can't fight off the infection, you may develop chronic Hepatitis B, which means that the infection stays with you for life.

### HOW CAN YOU GET IT?

The main causes of Hepatitis B are sexual contact and injection drug use. The infection is spread when your mouth, vagina, or anus comes in contact with your partner's sexual fluids. Sexual fluids include sperm/semen, vaginal fluid, and anal fluid. Hepatitis B can also be spread through non-sexual activities that put you in contact with someone else's blood, such as sharing injection drug equipment, tattoo needles, piercings, toothbrushes, nail clippers, razors, or medical procedures with equipment that has not been cleaned properly. A mother can also pass Hepatitis B onto a child through childbirth.

### HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE IT?

Many people do not show any signs of Hepatitis B. If you do show signs, they can include:

- Loss of appetite.
- Fever.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Headaches.
- Fatigue.
- Jaundice, which is when your eyes or skin take on a yellowish colour.

### TESTING

Hepatitis B is tested for through a blood test. This is usually done by drawing blood from an arm. Tests for Hepatitis B are usually accurate one month after sexual intercourse that exposed you to Hepatitis B.

### TREATMENT

There is no cure for chronic Hepatitis B. However, there are medications that can help you manage the infection. The Hepatitis B vaccine is widely available and encouraged to prevent infection.

## SYPHILIS



### WHAT IS IT?

Syphilis is a bacterial infection that can cause sores on or in the genitals, anus, rectum, and/or lips and mouth. It can lead to other health complications.

### HOW CAN YOU GET IT?

You can get syphilis through oral, vaginal, or anal sex with a partner who has syphilis. The infection is transmitted when your mouth, vagina, or anus comes in contact with the syphilis sore on your partner's mouth, vagina, or anus. Transmission of syphilis from mouth-to-mouth contact, such as through kissing, is very rare.

### HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE IT?

**Many people with syphilis have no signs.** When signs of infection do happen, they usually take two to three weeks to appear. If left untreated, syphilis will go through different stages:

- 1) **Primary Stage:** A sore will appear where the infection entered your body. This is called a chancre. The chancre can be round, firm, painless, and sometimes wet. The chancre will disappear on its own, usually three to six weeks after it appears. Because many people do not see the sore, you may not even know that you have it.
- 2) **Secondary Stage:** A rash may appear on the chest, stomach, genitals, palms of your hands or soles of your feet, two weeks to three months after the infection. It may last two to six weeks. The rash usually does not itch and can be hard to see. You may also feel sick with flu-like symptoms.
- 3) **Late Stage:** If untreated, secondary syphilis turns into late syphilis (also called Latent or Tertiary syphilis). This can develop from two to 30 years after primary syphilis takes place. The infection may still not show any signs at this point but the bacteria harms important organs such as the eyes, skin, bones, liver, kidneys, and heart.

- 4) **Neurosyphilis:** At this stage, syphilis can affect the brain. When the brain is affected, changes in personality can occur, as well as problems with thinking clearly and memory. Neurosyphilis can occur at any stage of syphilis.



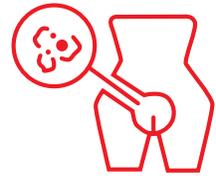
**The only way to know for sure if you have syphilis is to get tested.**

### TESTING

Usually, testing is done by taking a sample of blood, but if you have a sore, the medical practitioner might take a swab of the sore. A test for syphilis will not show up positive until three to four weeks after the bacteria has been transmitted.

### TREATMENT

Syphilis is very easy to treat using antibiotics during the early stages. Syphilis can be treated during the later stages as well using a different length and dosage of antibiotics. But remember, once syphilis starts causing problems with your organs, the damage that is done cannot be undone, so it's important to get tested regularly.



## GENITAL HERPES

### WHAT IS IT?

Genital herpes is a sexually transmitted infection with two transmissible types. HSV-1 most often causes infections of the mouth, known as cold sores or fever blisters. Symptoms are milder and you may have fewer outbreaks. HSV-2 is the type for genital herpes that may appear as small, red, open sores on your body and/or genitalia.

### HOW CAN YOU GET IT?

Genital herpes is spread from person to person by vaginal, oral, and anal sex through contact with open sores. It can also be transmitted through genital touching, childbirth (from mother to child) and breastfeeding (if the child comes in contact with an open sore). It is possible to still get infected if someone does not have symptoms or visible sores.

### HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU HAVE IT?

Most people with genital herpes do not know that they have it. First signs of symptoms show up two to 12 days after the sexual intercourse that might have exposed you. Symptoms can include: Sores (small red bumps) on your mouth or genitalia, feeling pressure in your abdomen, fever, itching, burning of genitalia, pain in you legs, buttocks or genitalia; swollen glands, and unusual discharge.

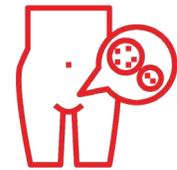
### TESTING

If you think you have genital herpes, contact your health care provider. Your health care provider will diagnose by either looking at the visible sores, using a Q-tip swab, or taking a fluid sample to send to a lab. Blood tests are used as well if symptoms are harder to detect.

### TREATMENT

There is no cure for Herpes but outbreaks can be prevented, or shortened, by antiviral medicines. These medicines can lower your chances of spreading the infection. During outbreaks, it is important to keep sores clean and dry. Do not touch the sores (or as minimally as possible and wash hands after each time you may have touched the sore) and avoid all sexual contact from when you first notice symptoms to when they are healed.

## HPV (HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS)



### WHAT IS IT?

HPV is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections. There are different types of HPV that have a possibility of developing into anogenital warts and genital cancers. It is possible to be infected by more than one type of HPV at one time.

### HOW CAN YOU GET IT?

HPV is passed from person to person from unprotected vaginal, oral, or anal sex with someone who is infected.

### HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU HAVE IT?

Many people that have HPV do not know that they have it. Anogenital warts are one sign of HPV. These warts can look like cauliflower but sometimes are only present on the inside of the body. In women, warts can appear on the vulva, thigh, anus, or rectum.

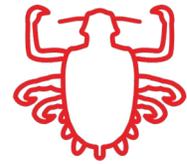
### TESTING

It is important that if you think you have HPV to get tested. Pap tests (Papanicolaou testing) are a useful tool to routinely check if have been exposed to HPV.

### TREATMENT

There is no cure for HPV but symptoms are treatable. Vaccines are available to prevent this infection.

## PUBIC LICE & SCABIES



### WHAT IS IT?

**Pubic Lice:** Also known as crabs, are parasites that attach to body hair in the pubic area. They can also be found on other parts of the body. They are extremely small and greyish brown in colour. They lay white or tan eggs in body hair.

**Scabies:** Mites that infest the skin but can not be seen with the naked eye.

### HOW CAN YOU GET IT?

Pubic Lice and Scabies can be transmitted during sexual activity or skin to skin contact. They can also be spread by sharing clothing, bedding, or towels with someone that has pubic lice or scabies.

### HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU HAVE IT?

Symptoms usually appear two to six weeks after exposure. Symptoms can feel like severe itching, redness, inflammation, small blue dots where you were bitten, or visible eggs or lice.

### TESTING

If you think you have Pubic Lice or Scabies, contact your healthcare provider. They will need to examine the area.

### TREATMENT

You can treat pubic lice and scabies with medications such as creams and shampoos that can be purchased at the pharmacy. All sexual partners, and anyone that may have had contact with the individual, should be examined and treated. Clothes, bedding etc., should be thoroughly cleaned.



# NEED MORE INFORMATION?

## **ACTION CANADA—SEX POSITIVE PARENTS:**

<https://www.actioncanadashr.org/resources/sexual-health-info/hub/become-sex-positive-parents-12-easy-steps>.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY CANADA—ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/campaigns/online-child-sexual-exploitation/ocse-resources-for-parents-and-caregivers.html>.

## **GOVERNMENT OF NUNAVUT—TALKING TO OUR CHILDREN ABOUT SEXUALITY**

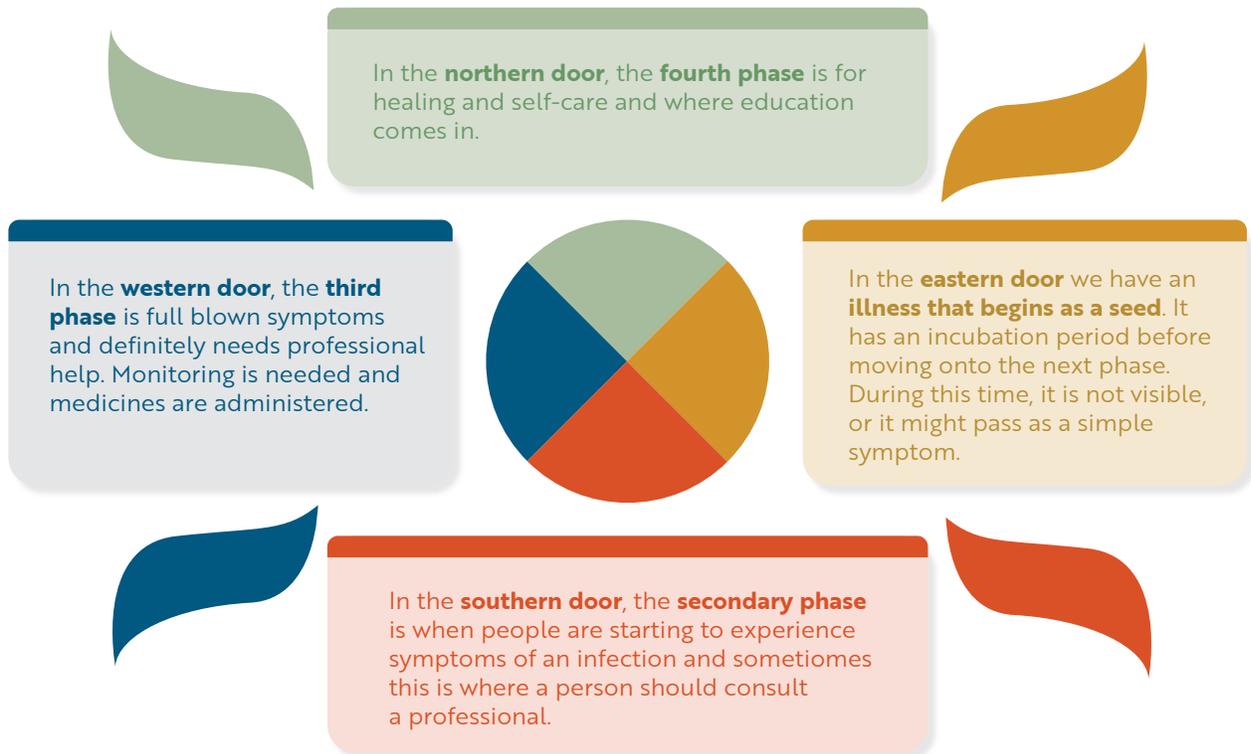
[https://www.irespectmyself.ca/sites/default/files/documents/talking\\_to\\_our\\_children\\_about\\_sexuality\\_-\\_english\\_1.pdf](https://www.irespectmyself.ca/sites/default/files/documents/talking_to_our_children_about_sexuality_-_english_1.pdf).

## **NATIVE YOUTH SEXUAL HEALTH NETWORK—FIRST NATIONS SEXUAL HEALTH TOOLKIT**

[General 5—Native Youth Sexual Health Network](#).

# ELDER ROSEANN'S FOUR DIRECTION TEACHING ON STTBIs

The medicine wheel is a valuable tool and I view everything as a part of the medicine wheels. In this exercise, I will use the medicine wheel as an example of how SBBIs evolve in the human body. As any disease it has a beginning and an end.



There are many STBBIs and our people need to be aware and practice safe sex practices. **Protection is the key word.**



Elder Roseann Martin was born in Listuguj Quebec on September 2, 1952, to Howard Metallic and Rebecca Wysote, Roseann is a Residential School survivor and a Mi'gmaq Grandmother and Elder, she is a pipe carrier, keeper and protector who likes to share her teachings. Roseann's journey has not been short of trauma, anger and substance use. However, through her strength and resiliency, she was able to overcome them and has over 25 years of sobriety and healing. Roseann likes to share her story for future generations to begin the healing process. Roseann sits on the Board of Directors for the Quebec Native Woman's Association and also works at the Native Women's Association of Canada.

# REVIEW QUIZ

**This quiz is an activity you can do with your child. It will test you and your child's knowledge on some of the content discussed in various sections of this toolkit.**

## **Part 1: True or False**

- 1) STBBIs are mainly spread through the exchange of bodily fluids during sex.
- 2) Someone who does not have symptoms cannot transmit STBBIs.
- 3) Puberty starts because your brain releases special hormones.
- 4) During puberty, some weight gain is normal.
- 5) Puberty can lead to new thoughts and feelings about sex.
- 6) Non-consensual sexual activity is not a criminal offense in Canada.
- 7) Testing for STBBIs is confidential.

## **Part 2: Multiple Choice**

- 1) Which of the following is an example of sexualization?
  - a) Someone's value is only derived from their sexual appeal or behaviour.
  - b) Someone is only believed to be physically attractive if they appear to be, "sexy."
  - c) Someone is sexually objectified.
  - d) All of the above.
- 2) Consent is the voluntary agreement to engage in sexual activity. This includes which of the following?
  - a) Kissing.
  - b) Sexual touching.
  - c) Sexual intercourse.
  - d) All of the above.
- 3) Which of the following is NOT consent?
  - a) Informed.
  - b) Enthusiastic.
  - c) Flirting.
  - d) Sober.



- 4) How can you avoid online sexual exploitation?
  - a) Avoid posting or sharing personal photos online.
  - b) Be careful when responding to a threatening message.
  - c) Always tell a parent or trusted adult about alarming communication.
  - d) Never expose personal information.

## QUIZ ANSWER KEY

### True or False:

- 1) **True:** STBBIs are mainly spread through bodily fluids, such as semen, vaginal fluid, and rectal fluid, during sex.
- 2) **False:** STBBIs can be transmitted even by individuals who do not experience symptoms.
- 3) **True:** Puberty is triggered by the brain's release of the luteinizing hormone (LH) and follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH).
- 4) **True:** Some weight gain is a normal part of developing into a woman. Going on a diet to counteract this is unhealthy.
- 5) **True:** Puberty can lead to new feelings about sex. You shouldn't feel embarrassed because it's completely normal.
- 6) **False:** All sexual activity without consent is sexual assault or rape (i.e., a criminal offense).
- 7) **True:** Testing is a confidential and easy way to determine if you have a STBBI.

### Multiple Choice

- 1) D
- 2) D
- 3) C
- 4) B

Treatment of STBBIs can only exist if you know you have one. Regular STBBI testing is a normal part of protecting your health if you are sexually active.



Treatment of STBBIs can only exist if you know you have one. Regular STBBI testing is a normal part of protecting your health if you are sexually actier.





Sexual health and wellness looks different to everyone and you should never be pressured into doing something that doesn't contribute to your wellness.

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