



## Body Changes & Hygiene: Pimples, Puberty & Privacy

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This Information Sheet addresses physiological and emotional changes that teens with ASD and other related disorders encounter during puberty and presents considerations for supporting the teen during this period of development.

### Puberty

Puberty generally refers to the condition of being or the period of becoming first capable of reproducing sexually marked by maturing of the genital organs and development of secondary sex characteristics. Emotional development during puberty involves the emergence of new thoughts, feelings, emotions and behavior. For teens, it generally includes the development of self and social awareness with respect to sexuality and relationships. However, for teens with ASD, development in these areas can be uneven and delayed making it hard for them to identify, communicate, and manage their thoughts, feelings and behaviors. This can lead to anxiety, depression, behavioral regression, making the teen years difficult for child, parent, and the professionals educating/caring for them.

Supporting the teen and providing information and instruction during this stage of development is extremely important.

Here are some things to consider:

- It is important for the pre-teen/teen to be routinely monitored for any changes in his/her physical appearance, mood, behavior, or functioning as this may indicate he/she is beginning to enter puberty.
- By increasing their understanding of puberty, the teen is in a much better position to understand his/her body changes and emotional experiences and can begin to learn necessary skills and ways to problem-solve any difficulties. Provide the pre-teen/teen with information about what is occurring at the various stages of body changes and development, its symptoms and its effect on his/her functioning, particularly if this has not yet been offered. Often teens with ASD will need to be taught directly some of the hygiene and related social skills as well as how to cope and problem-solve. Consultation with a professional experienced in ASD can be helpful in developing these skills.
- Teens should learn how to initiate and complete everyday activities needed for hygiene and self-care. They will also need to learn about related concepts as well as social rules & expectations. Some may need structure and motivation to do this, so creating specific teaching opportunities each day and a system of reinforcement should be a priority. Areas to consider include:
  - o Self-Care Routines (e.g., bathing; brushing teeth; grooming hair and nails; dressing/undressing; toileting; and menstrual & nocturnal emissions care etc.);
  - o Social Awareness (public vs. private, what to do & not do in certain situations, with whom & what topics can be discussed etc.)

To make learning the activity easier, consider breaking down routine tasks and skills into a few steps based on the teen's motor sequencing and working memory abilities. To improve their ability to complete the routine independently, you can include an activity schedule. If they are not yet reading, consider using simple pictures in the schedule that shows each step of the routine. If they are reading, simply write down each step to be completed. Consider selecting one or two routines to teach first to help the teen become familiarized with the structured learning and increased demand, particularly if this is at home and they have not had to perform these routines independently. Then, you can add additional routines as the teen becomes more independent in completing the selected routines. Video modeling and use of technology can also be effective in teaching the skills and increasing independence. Written stories, videos and activities should be used to teach the social rules and concepts related to social expectations.

# Find Out More

## Informational Products

RRCASD Spring & Fall 2013 [Newsletters](#). This 2-part series focuses on emotional and behavior disorders in teens with ASD and provides considerations for difficulties in these areas.

RRCASD Spring/Summer 2015 [Information Sheet](#) on Teenagers with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Health Transitions Part II

## Books/Curriculum

*Healthy Bodies: A Parent's Guide on Puberty for Girls/Boys with Disabilities*. Materials and toolkits available at: <http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/HealthyBodies/>

*Hygiene and Related Behaviors for Children and Adolescents with Autism Spectrum and Related Disorders: A Fun Curriculum with a Focus on Social Understanding* <http://www.amazon.com/Behaviors-Children-Adolescents-Spectrum-Disorders/dp/1934575429>

*Social Skills Stories: Functional Picture Stories for Readers and Nonreaders K-12 A.M. Johnson & J.L. Susnik, Mayer-Johnson* .(e.g., teaching appropriate proximity when interacting with others "Tad too Close") [www.mayer-johnson.com/social-skills](http://www.mayer-johnson.com/social-skills)

*More Social Skills Stories: Very Personal Picture Stories for Readers and Nonreaders K-12 A.M. Johnson, Mayer-Johnson*. (e.g., social issues such as nose picking) [www.mayer-johnson.com/social-skills](http://www.mayer-johnson.com/social-skills)

## Training DVD/ Videos

The RRCASD [self-guided training DVD](#) on *Daily Visual Schedule* can be used to help you set up schedules for the routines you want to teach your child. The self-study guide contains a step-by-step process that shows you how to break routines down into steps, develop a schedule and the strategies you can use to teach your child the routine. The RRCASD [self-guided training DVD](#) on *Social Skills Using Direct Instruction* can be used to help you teach the teen social skills. The self-study guide contains a step-by-step process for assessing, selecting, and teaching needed social skills.

*Teaching Nose-Blowing to a Child or Adult with Autism*, Dr. Mary Barbera, You-tube video with step instruction <http://marybarbera.com/>

## Websites

Social Skills Stories-Books, Games & Multimedia/Mayer-Johnson [www.mayer-johnson.com/social-skills](http://www.mayer-johnson.com/social-skills)

Free visual sequences: [www.visualaidsforlearning.com](http://www.visualaidsforlearning.com)

Autism Speaks provides information on considerations for supporting your child in learning important life skills: <https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/community-connections/teaching-important-life-skills>

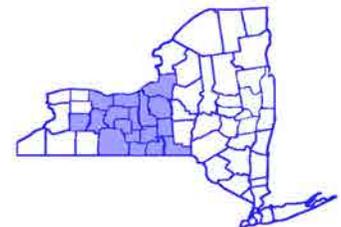
## Rochester Regional Center for Autism Spectrum Disorder (RRCASD)

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**Website:** [www.golisano.urmc.edu/rrcasd-nyautism](http://www.golisano.urmc.edu/rrcasd-nyautism)

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