

YOUR BIG SISTER'S GUIDE TO PUBERTY

**A Body-Positive Book
for Girls Ages 8–13+:
Body Changes, First Period
& Confidence—
Plus a Helpful Guide
for Parents**



Ava Briarrell

Copyright © 2026 All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, distributed, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means — electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise — without prior written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations used in reviews or educational references.

This publication is protected under international copyright laws.

Table of Contents

To Parents & Caregivers (The Book's Purpose, Uniqueness & Structure Overview) 4

PART 1: UNDERSTANDING THE CHANGES.....11

- ☐ Chapter 1: What Is Puberty and Why Does It Happen? 11
- ☐ Chapter 2: "What's Normal?" – The Diversity Gallery.....16
- ☐ Chapter 3. First Changes You Might Notice 22

PART 2: TAKING CARE OF YOUR BODY 30

- ☐ Chapter 4. Breasts and Your First Bra 30
- ☐ Chapter 5. Hygiene Without Shame: Hair, Skin, Freshness 37
- ☐ Chapter 6. Changes "Down There": What's Normal 43

PART 3: MENSTRUATION – YOUR NEW EXPERIENCE 51

- ☐ Chapter 7. Periods: A Clear Explanation 51
- ☐ Chapter 8. Getting Ready Ahead of Time: Your Action Plan 58
- ☐ Chapter 9. When It Starts: Step by Step (Period Logistics) 65

PART 4: EMOTIONS AND CONFIDENCE.....73

- ☐ Chapter 10. Emotions: Why They Change and How to Handle Them 73
- ☐ Chapter 11. Confidence and Body Image: Being Kind to Yourself 79

PART 5: FRIENDSHIP, FAMILY, BOUNDARIES 88

- ☐ Chapter 12. Friendships Change – And That's Okay 88
- ☐ Chapter 13. Family and Safe Adults: Who to Talk to 93
- ☐ Chapter 14. Your Body, Your Rules: Boundaries and the Online World 97

PART 6: A STRONG BODY AND YOUR FUTURE 104

- ☐ Chapter 15. Strong Body: Nutrition, Movement, Sleep
(No Diets, No Shame) 104
- ☐ Chapter 16. Mental Health: When You Need Help 111
- ☐ Chapter 17. Your Path to Growing Up: Goals and Dreams 115

CONCLUSION..... 119

PART B: FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS 121

- ☐ Appendix A. Practical Tools (Workbook) 125
- ☐ Appendix B. Quick Answers and Myth-Busting 127
- ☐ Appendix C. Glossary of Terms 130

SOURCES USED 132

To Parents & Caregivers

Dear Parents, Guardians, and Caring Adults,

Navigating your daughter's puberty is a journey of its own. You want to provide support, information, and reassurance, but it can be challenging to find the right words or resources that resonate with her world.

That's why this book exists.

Our Unique Approach

This is not a clinical manual or a one-way lecture. It is designed as a **trusted, interactive companion** for your daughter, written in the empathetic, straight-talking voice of an older sister. We focus not just on what is happening to her body, but on how she feels about it—building her emotional literacy, confidence, and self-advocacy skills from the inside out.

What Makes This Guide Different:

- **Dual Audience:** It speaks directly to your daughter in a voice she can trust, while providing you with a dedicated section (Part B), containing scripts, modern concerns (like social media safety), and practical advice to guide your conversations.
- **Beyond Biology:** We cover the essential physical changes with clarity and compassion, but we give equal weight to the emotional and social transformation—managing friendships, setting boundaries, understanding online life, and fostering a positive self-image.
- **Action-Oriented & Interactive:** Each chapter includes practical exercises, worksheets, conversation scripts, and Q&As based on real girls' questions. It's built for engagement, not just passive reading.
- **Inclusive by Design:** The language and examples intentionally include diverse family setups, body types, and life experiences, so every girl feels recognized and accepted.

A Quick Overview of the Journey

The book is structured to guide her progressively from understanding to confidence:

1. **Understanding Changes:** The science of puberty, celebrating body diversity, recognizing early signs.
2. **Taking Care of Her Body:** Practical, shame-free guidance on bras, hygiene, and intimate health.
3. **Menstruation:** A comprehensive, reassuring, and logistical guide to her first period and beyond.
4. **Emotions & Confidence:** Tools for emotional intelligence, body image resilience, and inner strength.
5. **Relationships & Boundaries:** Navigating changing friendships, family conversations, and personal safety (online and offline).
6. **A Strong Future:** Holistic health (mind and body), goal-setting, and recognizing when to seek help.

Our aim is to give her knowledge and gentle guidance, easing fear and encouraging honest communication. Consider this book a helpful companion, turning a period of uncertainty into one of learning and connection.

Thank you for trusting us to be part of this important chapter in her life.

A Letter from Your “Big Sis”

Hey there,

So, you’re holding this book. Maybe you picked it up yourself. Maybe someone who loves you gave it to you—a parent, a grandparent, a foster mom, an aunt. However, it found you, I’m so glad it did.

Let’s get one thing straight right away: you are not alone. Not even a little bit. Every single feeling you have—the curiosity, the excitement, the worry, the “um, what is happening?!”—is a feeling that millions of girls before you have had too. I had them. Your best friend will have them. It’s all part of the map of growing up.

This book is like a trusted backpack for the journey. Think of me as your trail guide—your big sis—cheering you on from the page. I’m not here to give you a bunch of strict rules. I’m here to give you information, confidence, and a space to figure things out for yourself.

And just like our feelings, our families come in all kinds of wonderful shapes. You might live with a mom and dad, a single parent, your grandparents, adoptive or foster parents, or an amazing blend of people who make up your home. Whoever is in your corner, cheering you on and packing your lunches, they’re your team. And this book is here for you, no matter what your family table looks like.

Your body is about to do some pretty amazing things. Some might seem strange at first, but they’re all signs that you are healthy, strong, and transforming into the incredible young woman you’re meant to be. Whether you develop early or late, your journey is yours, and it is perfect.

You’ve got this. And I’m right here with you.

With a big sisterly high-five,

Your Big Sis

Before we dive into chapters and facts, I want you to know something: **this book was written with you in mind.** Every page whispers, “You are not alone.”

Puberty can feel like you’re on a rollercoaster in the dark—lots of twists, drops, and “what’s coming next?!” moments. You might look around and wonder if anyone else feels just as confused, excited, or worried as you do. I promise you, they do. Every friend, every classmate, every woman you admire has been on a version of this ride. The feelings are real, and they are shared.

This is also a time when you might feel a new distance from your parents or caregivers, even as you need them more than ever. That’s normal, too. This book can be a bridge. It gives you the words for what’s happening so you can share it with them in your own way. It’s here to help you understand your changing self, so you can confidently let the important people in your life understand you, too.

Consider this your personal guidebook, written by a big sister who’s been there. We’ll talk about everything—from body changes and periods to friendships, big feelings, and setting boundaries—with zero judgment, only support. Your journey is unique, but you don’t have to map it out by yourself.

We’re in this together.

Your Big Sis

How to Use This Book

This is **your** book. Dog-ear the pages, scribble in the margins, skip ahead, and circle what matters to you. There’s no test at the end—just more of you.

Journal Pages (for your thoughts)

You’ll see pages with lines, questions, and space to write. Use them! Writing down your questions or how you feel can make things clearer and less scary. No one else has to see it.

Quizzes and Checklists

These aren’t for grades—they’re for you. They help you check in with yourself, learn what you prefer, and feel prepared. They’re like little games to play as you learn about yourself.

When to Read with Parents, When to Read Solo

- **Solo:** This book is for **your** eyes. Read it in your room, under the covers, wherever you feel private. It’s your personal guide.
- **With a Grown-Up:** Some chapters have a symbol (👤👤👤) that means it might be a great one to read **with** a parent, caregiver, or older sibling. It can help start a conversation. You can say, “I read something interesting in my book. Can we talk about it?”

Visual Guide

Your Journey Through This Book

(Imagine a fun, winding path or a tree with branches)

- **The Roots (Chapters 1–3):** The basics of **What, Why, and How** puberty happens.
- **The Trunk (Chapters 4–6):** Strong support on **Feelings, Friends, and Family**.
- **The Branches (Chapters 7–9):** Reaching out into the world: **Safety, Social Media, and Your Future Self**.
- **Your Leaves & Fruit (Appendices):** Your personal tools, checklists, and quick answers!

Age Markers — Your Compass

You don't have to read this book in order! Use these color guides to find what's most helpful for you **right now**.

○ AGES 8–10: The Basics

- What is puberty?
- First body changes (growth spurts, body hair, breast buds).
- Simple hygiene (washing, using deodorant).
- It's all normal!

○ AGES 12–13+: Going Deeper

- Your body, your rules: setting boundaries.
- Navigating social media and online safety.
- Thinking about your future and your values.
- More complex questions about health.

○ AGES 10–12: Getting Ready

- All about periods—what to expect and what to do.
- Bigger emotions and how to handle them.
- Changing friendships.
- Practical kits and plans.

○ Q&A — “Is it normal if...?”

- Quick, honest answers to the questions you might be too shy to ask out loud.

○ IMPORTANT — Safety First

- Red flags for your health (body and mind).
- How to ask for help from a trusted adult.
- Understanding privacy and consent.

○ PRACTICE — Your Toolkit

- Checklists, journal prompts, and exercises to make knowledge feel like power.

Think of this book like a map for your adventure. You don't have to walk it in a straight line! Start where you need to, skip around, and come back anytime. Use the colors and symbols to find your way.

VIRTUALIBRY

VIRTUALIBRY

VIRTUALIBRY

VIRTUALIBRY

VIRTUALIBRY

VIRTUALIBRY

VIRTUALIBRY

VIRTUALIBRY

VIRTUALIBRY

VIRTUALIBRY

VIRTUALIBRY

VIRTUALIBRY

Quick Find: “What Do I Do If...?”

Panic button moments happen. Take a deep breath and find your answer here.

1. **...I get my period at school and don't have a pad?** → Go to the nurse's office or ask a trusted teacher or friend.
2. **...I leak through my clothes?** → Tie a sweatshirt around your waist, and don't stress—it happens to everyone.
3. **...my stomach cramps really, really hurt?** → Try a hot water bottle, gentle stretches, and talk to a grown-up about pain relief options.
4. **...someone is teasing me about my body?** → Use a boundary statement: “That's not okay,” and tell an adult.
5. **...I feel sad or angry all the time?** → Talk about it. Write it down. This is a sign to reach out to a parent, counselor, or doctor.
6. **...I see something online that makes me uncomfortable?** → Close it, don't respond, and tell a trusted adult immediately.
7. **...I don't know how to ask my dad (or other caregiver) for period products?** → Send a text or a picture of the box. It's okay!
8. **...my friend told me a secret that worries me?** → It's okay to encourage them to talk to a safe adult. You can offer to go with them.
9. **...I'm developing much faster or slower than my friends?** → Your timeline is your own. It's 100% normal.
10. **...I have a question but feel awkward asking my family?** → Write it in your book's question pages, or find the answer in the Q&A section first.
11. **...I feel overwhelmed by all the changes?** → Try the Body Gratitude challenge. It helps to focus on what your body can do.

💖 **Remember:** No question is too small, and no problem is too silly. Flipping here is the first smart step.

PART 1: UNDERSTANDING THE CHANGES

Chapter 1: What Is Puberty and Why Does It Happen?

Hey there!

Welcome to the very first chapter. Think of this as a cozy chat with your big sis. You might have heard the word **“puberty”** at school, from friends, or at home. Maybe it sounds a little exciting, a little confusing, or a mix of both.

That’s totally okay!

This chapter is here to answer the biggest question of all: **What is this rollercoaster ride called puberty, and why is it even happening?** Let’s break it down together, in simple words.

Remember, this is a **completely normal** part of growing up. Every single person you know has gone through it or will go through it. You are not alone, and you’ve got this!

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: “Okay, so... what IS it? It sounds like a big deal.”

Big Sis: “It is a big deal, but in a good way! It’s just your body’s way of growing up. Think of it like your body has a secret, super-smart instruction manual. Right now, it’s flipping to a new chapter that says, ‘Time to become a teenager!’ Things will start to change, both on the outside and the inside.”

Little Sis: “Will it hurt?”

Big Sis: “Most of it doesn’t hurt at all! Sometimes you might feel new things, like your body growing (which can feel achy) or your feelings getting bigger. But it’s not like being sick. It’s a sign you’re healthy and strong. And I’m here to explain everything as we go.”

In Simple Words: Your Amazing Body

Puberty is when your body begins its journey from being a kid to becoming an adult. It’s like your body is a beautiful butterfly getting ready to leave its cocoon. For a while, the biggest changes happen on the inside, where you can’t see them. But soon, you’ll start to notice them too!

Here’s what it’s all about:

- **You’ll grow taller and stronger.** (Get ready for a **growth spurt!**)
- **Your shape might slowly change.**
- **New hair will grow** in new places.
- **Your skin and hair might become oilier** (hello, washing your face!).
- **Your feelings might feel bigger.** You might feel super happy one minute and need quiet time the next. That’s normal!
- **Your body gets ready** so that one day, far in the future, you could have a baby if you choose to. This is when you get your first period (we have a whole chapter on that!).

💖 Big Sis Tip:

This isn’t a race. Everyone starts and finishes at their own perfect time. Whether you see changes sooner or later, your timeline is just right for **YOU**.

Hormones — Your Invisible Helpers

So, who's in charge of all these amazing changes? Meet your **hormones**—your body's invisible messengers and helpers!

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: "Invisible helpers? Like tiny fairies in my body?"

Big Sis: "Kind of like that! They're not magic, but they are super powerful chemicals that zoom through your blood, delivering special messages from one part of your body to another. They're the bosses of the whole growing-up operation."

Little Sis: "Who's the main boss?"

Big Sis: "Great question! Your brain is the super-smart command center. A tiny part called the **pituitary gland** is like the captain. When it's the right time for YOU, it sends the first message."

The Hormone Team at Work

Think of it like this:

1. **Your Brain (The Captain):** The captain sends a text message (a special hormone!) down to your ovaries—two small, powerful organs in your lower belly.
2. **The Text Message:** "Hey Ovaries! It's go time. Start the plan!"
3. **Your Ovaries (The Project Managers):** They get the text and reply by releasing their own powerful hormone called estrogen.
4. **Estrogen (The Head Helper):** This is the MVP! **Estrogen** is the main helper that gets the work done. It travels everywhere in your body, delivering the instructions to:
 - Start growing breasts.
 - Help you have a growth spurt.
 - Get your body ready for your first period one day.
 - And so much more!

💡 Helpful Fact: Feelings are Messages, Too!

Hormones don't just send messages about your body—they send messages to your **brain**, too! This is a big reason why you might suddenly feel super excited, extra sensitive, or need to cry for a minute. It's not "just in your head." It's **biology**! Your helpers are talking to your feelings, and that's perfectly normal.

Big Sis Reminder:

These hormones are not your enemies. They are your **invisible helpers**, following a wise, ancient plan that's unique to you. Sometimes their work can feel a little messy (hello, wanting to laugh and cry at the same time!), but they're just doing their very important job: helping wonderful **YOU** grow up.

Stages of Puberty: Everyone Has Their Own Timeline

Puberty doesn't happen all at once, like flipping a switch. It happens in stages, like climbing a ladder or walking down a path over several wonderful years.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: "So it happens little by little? What are the stages?"

Big Sis: "Exactly! Think of it like three main parts of the path. Doctors have cool names for them, but we can just call them: *The Starting Line*, *The Big Changes*, and *The Finish Line*."

Little Sis: "What if I'm on a different step than my friends?"

Big Sis: "Then you're completely normal! I promise. Let's look at the map, but remember—everyone walks their own hike."

The Map of Changes

Here's a general map of the puberty path. The ages are just a common guide—**your starting point might be different, and that's great!**

1. The Starting Line ○

(Usually between ages 8–11)

Your brain has sent the first "go!" signal to your hormone helpers. You might notice:

- **Breast buds:** Small, tender bumps under your nipples. One side might start before the other!
- **Fine hair:** A little soft, light hair may appear on your vulva (the private area between your legs).

How you might feel: Curious, excited, or not notice much at all!

2. The Big Changes ○

(Usually between ages 11–14)

This is when many changes become clearer!

- **Breasts** continue to grow and become fuller.
- **Pubic hair** gets darker, coarser, and curlier.
- **Growth spurt!** You might shoot up in height quickly.
- **Your body shape** may change (like your hips getting a bit wider).
- **First period:** Most girls get their first period during this stage.

How you might feel: Proud, awkward, strong, confused... sometimes all in one day!

3. The Finish Line ○

(Usually between ages 15–18)

Changes slow down and settle into your amazing, grown-up self.

- **Breasts** reach their adult size.
- You reach your **adult height**.
- **Periods** become more regular.
- **Pubic hair** fills in.

How you might feel: More confident, more like you, and comfortable in your own skin.

○ The #1 Rule of the Timeline:

YOUR PATH IS THE RIGHT PATH.

- It is **perfectly normal** to see your first changes at age 8 or at age 13.
- It is **perfectly normal** if your best friend gets her period years before or after you do.
- **Puberty is not a race.** There is no prize for starting first or last. Your body knows the perfect, one-of-a-kind schedule for YOU.

Q&A: “Questions Girls Often Ask”

Here are honest answers to questions that are on almost every girl’s mind. If you’ve ever wondered these things, take a deep breath. You are so not alone. We all have these questions.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *“Some of this stuff feels weird to even think about, let alone ask.”*

Big Sis: *“I know, sweetie. That’s why we’re putting it right here in this book. No question is too silly or embarrassing. Let’s tackle some of the big ones together.”*

Your Questions, Answered

Q: “Am I ‘behind’ if my friend started and I haven’t?”

A: Nope! This is the #1 worry, and the answer is always the same: **No way.** Remember your unique timeline? Think about your friends—some are taller, some have different hair, some got their adult teeth earlier. Bodies have their own clocks. One friend might bloom at 10, another at 13. Both are right on time... their time. You are not behind. You are perfectly on **your** schedule.

★ **Big Sis Tip:** Compare less, wonder more! Instead of “Am I like her?”, try “I wonder what cool change I’ll notice next?”

Q: “Why am I getting annoyed more easily?”

A: Those invisible hormone helpers are construction workers in your body AND your brain! It’s like they’re remodeling your feelings room, and sometimes it gets loud. Your emotions might feel bigger, faster, or stronger. This is **totally normal**. It’s not you being “bad,” it’s your body doing its job. When this happens, try:

- Taking 5 deep breaths.
- Finding a quiet spot for 10 minutes.
- Saying, “I need a little space right now.”
- Squeezing a stress ball or scribbling in a journal.

Q: “Is it normal to want more privacy?”

A: Absolutely, 100%, without a doubt YES. As your body changes, it’s natural to feel more private about it. Wanting to:

- Lock the bathroom door.
- Change clothes by yourself.
- Have time alone in your room.

...is a **healthy and normal** part of growing up. It’s a sign you’re becoming your own independent person. It’s okay to ask for that privacy nicely.

Q: “What if my birth parents aren’t the ones raising me? Who do I go to with this stuff?”

A: Girl, I get it. Family can look all kinds of ways, and what matters most is who shows up for you *now*. Your person is the trusted adult who’s in your corner every day—the one making your lunches, asking about your day, and giving you hugs. That might be:

- Your super-cool grandma or grandpa.
- Your foster mom or dad (they signed up for all of this, including the awkward talks!).
- An auntie or uncle who's basically your second parent.
- Your one-and-only amazing single parent.
- Your adoptive parents, who are your family, chosen with love.

Those are your people. They want to guide you through this, just like they guide you through everything else. If you're ever curious about things like family health history, you can ask your caregiver if they can help find out. But here's the big sister secret: **Your body knows its own schedule.** It's going to do its thing in its own perfect time, no matter what. You've got this.

Q: "Who can I ask if I'm too embarrassed to talk about it?"

A: First, know there is no such thing as a silly or embarrassing question about your own body. It's smart to ask! Trusted adults want to help. Think of:

- A parent, grandparent, aunt, or older cousin.
- An older sister or a trusted friend's big sister.
- Your school nurse or a favorite teacher.
- Your doctor (they've heard it all, I promise!).

If talking face-to-face feels too hard:

- **Write it down.** Slip a note to someone you trust.
- **Point to it in this book.** You can say, "I was reading this part and had a question..."
- **Use trusted books or websites** from real doctors or health groups.

♥ **Remember:** Asking for help or information is a sign of strength, not weakness. You've got this.

Chapter 2: “What’s Normal?” – The Diversity Gallery

Welcome to the Gallery!

This chapter is like a special art exhibit, but instead of paintings, we’re celebrating the amazing diversity of real bodies. As your body changes, you might look in the mirror and think, “Is this okay? Does this look right?” The answer, almost always, is a huge **YES**.

There is no one way for a body to look. “Normal” is a huge, beautiful, and varied gallery. Let’s take a tour and see just how wide “normal” really is. Remember: **Variety is the rule, not the exception.**

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: “But what if my body looks different from the pictures I see or from my friends?”

Big Sis: “That’s exactly what this gallery is for! Think of it like a garden. If every flower looked the same, it would be boring. A daisy, a tulip, a rose, and a sunflower are beautiful precisely because they’re different. Your body is your own unique bloom.”

Little Sis: “So comparing is a bit useless?”

Big Sis: “It really is. It’s like comparing apples and oranges. Both are awesome! This chapter will show you the wonderful range of ‘normal’ so you can feel confident that **YOU** belong right in the middle of it.”

Gallery Stop 1: Breasts Come in Pairs (But Not Twins!)

One of the first things you might notice is breast buds growing. Here’s a totally normal secret: **It’s extremely common for one breast to start growing before the other, or for one to always be slightly larger.** They’re sisters, not twins!

- **What you might see:** One side might be a little bigger, a little rounder, or sit a bit higher than the other.
- **The Big Sis Verdict: Completely, 100% normal.** They will often even out over time, but it’s also perfectly fine if they don’t. Most people have some asymmetry!

Gallery Stop 2: Nipples Are Like Snowflakes

Look at your fingertips—see how everyone’s fingerprints are unique? Nipples and the darker area around them (called the areola) are just as unique!

- **What you might see:** Areolas can be large, small, round, or oval. They can be pink, light brown, dark brown, or purplish. Nipples can point out, point in (this is called inverted, and it’s normal!), or be flat.
- **The Big Sis Verdict:** All these variations are **healthy and normal**. There is no “right” look.

Gallery Stop 3: Body Hair — Location, Texture, Color

New hair growing under your arms and on your vulva is a sure sign your hormones are doing their job.

- **What you might see:** The hair can be straight, wavy, or very curly. It can be sparse and thin at first, then become thicker. It can be blonde, light brown, dark brown, black, or even reddish.
- **The Big Sis Verdict:** The amount, texture, and color are determined by your own family genetics. **All types are normal.**

Big Sis Tip: The “Underwear Check”

A little bit of white or yellowish discharge (dampness) in your underwear is a **normal and healthy** sign that your body is cleaning itself and your hormones are working. It might look like a creamy lotion or dry, like a faint white powder. If it has a strong, bad smell, causes itching, or is green, tell a trusted adult to see a doctor. But the everyday kind? Totally fine!

Gallery Stop 4: Bodies Themselves — The Grand Finale

Just like faces, adult female bodies come in endless, wonderful shapes.

- **What you might see:** Some bodies are naturally curvy with wider hips and a defined waist. Some are straight up and down with a more athletic build. Some are a mix! Some gain weight more easily on their stomach, others on their hips and thighs.
- **The Big Sis Verdict: Your natural body type is a gift from your family.** It's the strong, amazing vessel that carries you through life. Healthy bodies come in every single shape and size.

The Takeaway from the Gallery:

If you take only one thing from this chapter, let it be this: **There is no “perfect” body. There is only YOUR body, which is perfectly designed to be yours.** When you look in the mirror, you're looking at a one-of-a-kind masterpiece. Let's keep learning how to take care of it and love it.

Why You're Unique – And That's Beautiful

Now that we've seen the beautiful diversity in the gallery, let's talk about you. Your journey is one-of-a-kind, and some of the things that might feel confusing are actually the most normal signs of all.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: "What if I notice something about my body that seems... weird or different?"

Big Sis: "Let's play a game: 'Myth or Fact?' I bet the thing you're thinking of is a super common fact of growing up. Let's clear up some big myths right now."

Little Sis: "Okay, I'm listening."

Important: Myth vs. Fact

Let's bust some myths and replace them with empowering facts!

MYTH: "Gaining some weight means I'm getting fat."

FACT: Your body is getting ready for a growth spurt!

Think of it like this: Before you can shoot up in height, your body needs to build up energy and supplies. It's like packing a backpack before a big hike—you need fuel for the journey! A little extra softness on your belly, hips, and thighs is your body's wise way of preparing to grow taller and stronger. This is **normal, healthy, and temporary**.

 **Big Sis Tip:** Your body is smart. Trust it. Instead of worrying about the scale, focus on fueling your amazing body with good food, moving in ways that feel fun, and getting enough sleep. You're building a skyscraper—you need a strong foundation!

MYTH: "My breasts should be exactly the same size."

FACT: For 8 out of 10 girls, one breast is a little bigger than the other!

That's right—**80%** of people! It's so common that it's practically a rule. They might start growing at different times, or one might always be slightly larger. They're sisters, not twins!

What Makes YOU, You?

Your unique blueprint comes from two special places:

1. **Your Family Map (Genetics):** Look at your family members. Your height, your build, your hair texture, even when you start puberty—these are often gifts from your parents, grandparents, and ancestors. You're a wonderful mix of the people who came before you.
2. **Your Own Personal Clock:** Remember, your body has its own perfect schedule. Comparing your Chapter 2 to someone else's Chapter 5 will only confuse you. You are right on time for your story.

The Bottom Line:

The things that make you wonder, "Is this normal?" are very often the very things that prove you are growing exactly as you should. Your body isn't trying to look like a magazine or your best friend. It's trying to become the strongest, healthiest, most wonderful version of YOU.

Q&A: "But What If I...?"

These are the "what if" questions that can pop up when you're getting to know your changing body. If these thoughts have crossed your mind, you're doing exactly what you should be doing—paying attention and caring for yourself. Let's calm those worries with some facts.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"Sometimes I have questions that feel too specific or embarrassing for the big list."*

Big Sis: *"Those are my favorite kind! Those 'what if...' questions mean you're really thinking about your own body. That's smart. Let's get specific together."*

Your "What If?" Questions, Answered

Q: "What if hair grows in a 'weird' place? Is that normal?"

A: First, let's retire the word "weird" when it comes to your body! During puberty, hair grows where it's supposed to grow for an adult body. This mainly means under your arms and in your pubic area (on your vulva). Sometimes, you might also see a few fine, soft hairs around your nipples, on your belly, or even above your lip.

The Big Sis Verdict: A little hair in these places is totally normal and part of your unique genetic blueprint. It's just your body following its adult instructions.

Q: "What if I gained a little weight before my growth spurt? Is that bad?"

A: No, it is not bad. It is brilliant! Your body is incredibly smart. Think of it like a car getting ready for a long road trip—you have to fill up the gas tank first! Your body needs to store up energy and nutrients to fuel your upcoming growth spurt in height. This healthy, natural padding is your body's fuel reserve.

🌟 **Big Sis Tip:** Your job is not to worry about this weight. Your job is to thank your body for being so wise by feeding it nutritious foods, drinking water, staying active, and getting good sleep. You are building a strong, tall, healthy body, and that takes materials!

Q: "What if I compare myself to photos online or in ads and feel bad?"

A: This is one of the most important questions you could ask. Here's the secret: **Most of those photos are not real.** They are often edited with filters, special lighting, and computer programs to look a certain way. They are showing one single, airbrushed idea of a body, not the wonderful, diverse reality.

What to do instead:

1. **Be a Detective:** Ask yourself, "Is this photo trying to sell me something?" If yes, remember it's an ad, not a reality.
2. **Curate Your Feed:** Follow accounts that show real people with real bodies—artists, scientists, athletes, nature photographers.
3. **Look Around You:** Look at the real, amazing women and girls in your life—your friends, a teacher you admire, your mom, an aunt, a grandma, a foster mom, or an older cousin. See how many different, beautiful, strong, and healthy shapes there are. Real life is the best gallery of all.
4. **Practice Kindness:** Talk to yourself like you'd talk to your best friend. You wouldn't say, "Your thighs are weird." You'd say, "Your legs are so strong for running and dancing!"

💖 **Remember:** Your body's purpose is to carry you—your thoughts, your laughs, your dreams—through this amazing life. Its value is not in how it looks in a photo, but in all the incredible things it allows you to do and be.

When to Check with an Adult

Knowing your body also means knowing when to ask for help. Most changes are perfectly normal, but a few signs are like your body's way of raising a little flag to say, "Hey, let's get a check-up!" This isn't about scaring you—it's about empowering you to take great care of yourself.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: "So, when should I actually tell someone something is wrong? I don't want to overreact."

Big Sis: "That's a really responsible question. Think of it like being the captain of a ship. Most of the time, the sea is calm. But if you see a specific warning light flash on your control panel, you'd tell your co-captain, right? It's not panic; it's good leadership."

Little Sis: "What are the warning lights?"

Practice: Your "Time to Check-In?" Checklist

Sometimes, you or your grown-up might wonder, "Is this normal, or is it time to call the doctor?" It's a smart question! Use this simple checklist if you're unsure. Think of it as your body's way of asking for a little extra support.

If you notice any of the following, it's a good idea to talk to a trusted adult about scheduling a doctor's visit:

- ☐ **Early Start:** Signs of puberty (like breast buds or pubic hair) appear **before age 8**.
- ☐ **Later Start:** No signs of puberty (like a growth spurt or breast buds) by **age 13**.
- ☐ **Period Timing:** Your first period hasn't started by **age 15**.
- ☐ **Severe Periods:** Your periods are so heavy you soak through a pad/tampon **every 1–2 hours**, or so painful you **can't do normal activities**.
- ☐ **Persistent Pain:** You have severe pain in your belly or pelvis that doesn't go away.
- ☐ **Unusual Symptoms:** You have a **persistent rash, intense itching, or unusual discharge** in your private area.
- ☐ **Ongoing Sadness/Anxiety:** Feelings of sadness, anxiety, or hopelessness **last most of the day, for more than two weeks**.

♥ **Remember:** Checking a box doesn't mean something is seriously wrong. It means your body might need a professional tune-up! Talking to a doctor is a powerful way to take care of yourself—it's not about panic, it's about being proactive and smart with your health. Share this list with your adult, and make a plan together.

Your Body's "Check Engine" Lights: When to Tell a Trusted Adult

If you notice any of the following, it's a good idea to calmly tell a trusted adult—like a parent, guardian, grandparent, foster parent, or a school nurse. They can help you see a doctor to make sure everything is okay. **Doctors have seen it all, and they are there to help, not judge!**

1. **Pain that doesn't make sense:** Sharp pain in your belly or pelvis (lower abdomen) that's very strong, happens often, or doesn't go away with rest.
2. **Itchy or painful skin changes:** A rash, soreness, or intense itching in your private areas (vulva, vagina).
3. **Unusual discharge:** Vaginal discharge that is green, gray, or chunky like cottage cheese, or has a very strong, bad smell (different from the normal mild, musky scent).
4. **Severe period symptoms (if you've started):** Cramps so painful they make you miss school or activities, or bleeding so heavy you need to change a pad or tampon more than every 1–2 hours.
5. **Mental health feels heavy:** Feeling sad, anxious, or angry almost all the time for two weeks or more, especially if it affects your sleep, eating, or interest in friends and hobbies.
6. **No signs at all by age 13–14:** If you haven't noticed any body changes (like breast buds or a little pubic hair) by your mid-teens, it's a good idea for a doctor to just make sure your timeline is on track.



Big Sis Tip: How to Start the Conversation

You don't need to have one big, scary talk. You can start simple. Try a line like:

- "Hey [Mom/Dad/Grandma/Guardian's name], I read something in my book about when to ask for help, and I have a question about my body."
- "I haven't been feeling right, and I think I should see the doctor."
- Even a note works: "Can we make a doctor's appointment soon? I have a personal question."



The Most Important Thing:

Your health and comfort matter. Asking for help is a sign of **strength and smarts**, not weakness. You are the expert on your own body, and trusted adults are your support team.

Chapter 3. First Changes You Might Notice

Ready, Set, Grow!

One of the very first signs of puberty is a **growth spurt**. This means your body starts getting taller—fast! It's exciting, but it can also feel a little strange. If your pants are suddenly too short, your socks don't fit, and you feel a bit clumsy, welcome to the club! This chapter is all about those first clues that your amazing transformation is underway.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"I tripped over my own feet yesterday! And my favorite jeans look like capris. What's happening?"*

Big Sis: *"Sounds like you're having a growth spurt! It's like your bones are getting a head start on the rest of you. Your arms and legs are growing so fast that your brain and your muscles need a minute to catch up and relearn where everything is. That's why you might feel a bit like a wobbly baby giraffe for a little while—it's totally normal!"*

Little Sis: *"Will I ever stop tripping?"*

Big Sis: *"Absolutely! Your coordination will catch up, I promise. In the meantime, think of it as your body's funny way of telling you it's building something brand new."*

Growth Spurts: Why Everything Feels "Off"

A growth spurt is just that—a spurt of growth. It's not slow and steady. It's a burst of activity where you might grow several inches in just a few months! Here's why it can make you feel a little "off":

- **The Clumsy Phase:** Your arms and legs are new lengths! Your brain has to remap your movements. Don't worry if you bump into things or drop stuff more often. It's temporary.
- **The Always-Hungry Phase:** Your body needs fuel to build all this new height! It's normal to feel hungrier and to need healthy snacks. Listen to your body.
- **The Achy Phase (Growing Pains):** Sometimes at night, you might feel a dull ache in your legs or arms. This isn't from an injury; it's your bones and muscles stretching. A warm bath or gentle stretching can help.
- **The Tired Phase:** Building a whole new taller you is hard work! You might need more sleep. That's okay. Rest is part of the job.

★ **Big Sis Tip:** Growth isn't just about height. Your feet and hands often grow first! So if you suddenly need new shoes or your hands seem too big for your wrists, you're right on schedule.

Where Does Your Growth Come From?

Your growth spurt is guided by your own unique **genetic blueprint**. This blueprint is like a recipe that comes from your biological family.

- You might notice you're growing to be a similar height or build as your birth parents, a grandparent, an aunt, or an uncle.
- **In all kinds of families:** If you are adopted, in a foster family, or live with other loving guardians, you might not see your growth pattern reflected in the people you live with. That's perfectly okay! Your blueprint is still uniquely yours, and the adults who care for you are there to support you on your journey, no matter what. You can always ask them to help you learn about your health history.

The Takeaway:

The growth spurt is your body's grand opening act for puberty. The clumsiness, hunger, and tiredness are just signs of the incredible construction project happening inside you. Be patient with your amazing, stretching, growing self!

Body Odor and Sweat: Totally Normal

Your hormones are busy helpers, and one of their new jobs is to wake up your sweat glands. You've always sweated a little, but now you might notice it more, especially under your arms. This is 100% normal and a sign your body is working perfectly!

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"I feel like I smell different after I play outside or at PE. Is that bad?"*

Big Sis: *"Not bad at all! It's just new. When you were little, your sweat was mostly water. Now, your new 'puberty sweat' mixes with bacteria on your skin (everyone has them—they're normal too!), and that creates body odor, or BO. It's just a new signal that it's time for a little extra cleaning."*

Little Sis: *"So what do I do?"*

Big Sis: *"It's an easy fix! It just means adding one or two new steps to your daily routine. It's like learning to brush your teeth—once you know how, it's just a normal part of taking care of yourself."*

Your New Hygiene Helpers

Think of this as your personal toolkit for feeling fresh. You can ask a trusted adult in your family to help you get what you need.

1. The Daily Shower/Bath: Washing with a gentle soap or body wash, especially focusing on your underarms and pubic area, washes away sweat and bacteria.

2. Deodorant or Antiperspirant:

- **Deodorant** helps control the smell.
- **Antiperspirant** helps control both smell and wetness.
- **How to Choose:** You can ask a parent, guardian, older sibling, or the adult who helps you shop. They can help you pick one that's right for your body. Some are sprays, some are sticks, some are roll-ons—it's all about what feels best for you!

3. Clean Clothes: Putting on clean underwear, socks, and shirts each day makes a huge difference.

 **Big Sis Tip:** If you notice the smell halfway through the day, don't stress! You can keep a travel-sized deodorant in your backpack or ask the school nurse if they have some. A quick splash of water on your underarms in the bathroom can help in a pinch, too.

Whoever's in Your Corner

Learning about body care is a normal part of growing up, and **every family helps in their own way.**

- You might ask your mom, dad, grandparent, foster parent, or aunt to take you shopping.
- An older cousin, sister, or even a trusted friend's parent can give you advice.
- If you feel shy asking, you could say: *"My book says I might need deodorant soon. Can we look for some?"* It's a great way to start the conversation.

The Bottom Line:

Body odor isn't dirty or bad—it's **biological**. Managing it is a simple, empowering skill. It's just one way you're learning to take great care of your incredible, changing body.



Important: A Signal, Not a Shame

Think of your new body odor like a friendly notification from your body.

It's **not** a message that says, "You are dirty or gross."

It is a message that says, "Hello! I'm growing up. Time to add a new self-care step."

Just like you feel thirsty as a signal to drink water, body odor is simply a biological signal to wash up or apply deodorant. It's a normal part of your body's communication system—nothing more.

In every family—whether you live with biological parents, adoptive parents, grandparents, or other loving guardians—learning to respond to this signal is a normal step. You can ask any trusted adult for help getting what you need. It's a sign you're becoming responsible, not that you've done anything wrong.

Breasts: When the First “Buds” Appear

One of the most common first signs is **breast development**. It starts with something called **breast buds**. This might sound like a flower bud—and that’s a perfect way to think of it! It’s the very beginning of a beautiful, natural change.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: “What does a ‘breast bud’ even feel like?”

Big Sis: “Good question! It often starts as a small, tender, or firm little bump under your nipple. Sometimes it feels a bit achy, like a light bruise. One side might start before the other, which is totally normal. They’re just little seeds starting to grow.”

Little Sis: “What if I don’t want anyone to notice?”

Big Sis: “That’s a really common feeling. Wearing a soft camisole, tank top, or training bra can feel cozy and give you a bit more privacy. You can ask a trusted adult to help you find one that feels comfortable for you.”

What to Expect:

What to Expect:

- **Tenderness:** It’s normal for them to feel sensitive or sore, especially if you bump them.
- **Asymmetry:** Remember, one bud may appear first or grow faster. They usually even out over time.
- **Itching:** As the skin stretches, it might itch a little. A gentle, fragrance-free lotion can help.

🌟 **Big Sis Tip:** This is a private change for you. You don’t have to share this with anyone unless you want to. If someone points it out or teases you (which they shouldn’t!), you can simply say, “That’s private,” or “My body is my business.”

Whoever’s in Your Corner: If you need advice or help finding a comfortable first bra or cami, you can ask any trusted adult in your life—a mom, dad, aunt, grandparent, foster parent, or older sibling. They’re there to support you.

Hair in New Places

Around the same time, you might notice new hair growing. This isn't the hair on your head! This is soft, new hair in your pubic area (between your legs, on your vulva) and under your arms.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: "Hair there? Is that okay?"

Big Sis: "It's more than okay—it's a sign your body is right on track! This hair is part of your body's adult blueprint. Everyone gets it."

Little Sis: "What's it for?"

Big Sis: "It's thought to provide a little cushion and protection, and it's also part of your body's unique scent system. It's a natural part of being human."

What to Expect:

- **It starts soft and light**, and may become darker, thicker, and curlier over time.
- **The amount and color** are determined by your genetics. You might look at the hair color of the adults in your biological family to get an idea.
- **In all families:** If you are adopted or don't know your biological family, your hair pattern is uniquely yours! The adults who care for you can help you with any questions about grooming, if and when you choose to do that.

Important: Shaving or Not?

This is a **personal choice** that you don't need to make right away. Some girls choose to leave it, some choose to trim it, and some choose to shave it when they're older. There is no right or wrong. It's your body. If you're curious about shaving, it's a good idea to talk with a trusted adult first to learn how to do it safely.

💖 The Big Picture:

Breast buds and new hair are like your body's way of sending you a welcome postcard: "Greetings from Puberty! Your journey has officially begun." These changes are proof that you are growing and developing exactly as you should.

Q&A: “Ask Yourself / Ask an Adult”

Now that you know about the first changes, some new questions might pop up. That's a great sign! It means you're paying attention. Here are answers to some common ones.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: “I have some questions I'm not sure are for the book or for a person.”

Big Sis: “Perfect! That's exactly what this section is for. Some questions you can answer by checking in with yourself. For others, it's a great idea to bring in a trusted adult from your team. Let's sort them out.”

Your Questions, Answered

Q: “Why am I sweating more than before?”

A: This is one of the first and most common changes! Your **apocrine sweat glands** (a special kind just in your armpits and groin) have been activated by your hormones. They produce a different kind of sweat that bacteria on your skin break down, causing body odor. It's a totally normal sign of development.

Ask Yourself: “Did I just get active, or am I noticing this even when I'm calm?”

Ask an Adult: “Can we look at getting a gentle deodorant?” (You can ask any adult who helps you shop—a parent, grandparent, aunt, or foster parent.)

Q: “If someone teases me about my body—what do I say?”

A: First, know that **their behavior is wrong, not your body**. You have a right to feel safe and respected. It's okay to feel hurt, but you are not the problem.

Short & Strong Responses: You can practice saying things like:

- “That's not okay to say.”
- “My body is my business.”
- “Please stop.” (Then walk away.)

Ask an Adult: **Always tell a trusted adult** if someone is teasing or bullying you about your body. This is especially important. They can help you handle the situation. The adults in your life—whether they are your parents, grandparents, foster parents, teachers, or counselors—are there to protect and support you.

Q: “Which changes happen suddenly, and which are gradual?”

A: This is a smart thing to notice! It helps you know what to expect.

More Sudden/Surprising:

- **Body odor** can seem to appear almost overnight.
- **A growth spurt** can make you shoot up in height quickly.
- **Mood swings** can feel like they come out of nowhere.

More Slow/Gradual:

- **Breast development** happens in stages over the years.
- **Body hair** starts fine and light and slowly becomes darker/thicker.
- **Hip widening** and body shape changes are very gradual.

🌟 **Big Sis Tip:** No matter the speed, all changes are normal. If a sudden change worries you (like intense pain), that's a perfect time to ask an adult. If a gradual change makes you curious (like breast growth), that's a great time to check in with yourself and practice patience and kindness.

💖 **Remember:** Your body is having a conversation with you. Learning to listen to it—and knowing when to bring in a trusted adult from your family or community to help translate—is a superpower.

Practice: Check-In on First Changes

Let's check in with yourself! This isn't a test—it's just a quiet moment to see how you're feeling about all this new information. There are no right or wrong answers, only your honest feelings.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: "A check-in? Like at the doctor?"

Big Sis: "Kind of, but you're the doctor! It's like looking at your own map and asking, 'Where am I on this journey? How do I feel about the road so far?'"

Little Sis: "Oh, okay. That sounds better than a test."

Big Sis: "It's way better. It's all about you."

Your Personal Check-In

1. After reading about first changes (like growth spurts, sweat, and breast buds), how do you feel? (Circle one)

- **A little nervous?** (That's completely understandable! New things can feel big.)
- **Relieved to have information?** (Great! Knowledge is like a flashlight in the dark.)
- **Excited to notice your own changes?** (Awesome! It's like watching your own superpowers develop.)
- **Just fine and ready to keep reading?** (Perfect! Let's go! 🚀)

2. Which of these sound like helpful things to remember? (Circle all that feel true!)

- Body odor is a signal to care for myself, not to feel ashamed.
- Breast buds can be tender and might start on one side first.
- I should compare my body to my friends' bodies to make sure I'm normal.
- If someone teases me, it's always best to tell a trusted adult.
- My unique growth comes from my own genetic blueprint.

3. True or False?

Finding a few soft, new hairs on your body is a strange and unusual thing.

• **TRUE**

• **FALSE!** ☒ (It's a totally normal and common first sign!)

4. Draw Your Change

In the box below, draw a simple symbol or emoji for ONE of the first changes you read about (like a growing arrow for a growth spurt, a tiny flower for a breast bud, or a raincloud for sweat). It's just for you!

5. My Go-To Adult

Thinking about your own family or support network—who is one person you feel you could go to if you had a body question or needed help getting something like deodorant or a soft bra?

It could be a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, foster parent, older sibling, or even a trusted family friend.

Name or relation: _____



Big Sis Closing Note:

YOU ARE DOING SO WELL. Just by reading, thinking, and checking in with yourself, you are becoming the expert on your own amazing body. That's a huge accomplishment! Give yourself a pat on the back.

In the next chapters, we'll explore even more about your changing body and emotions. Remember, every step of this journey is normal, and you are never alone in it.

**This is your book and your journey.
Fold this page, doodle on it, or keep it private. It's yours.**

PART 2: TAKING CARE OF YOUR BODY

Chapter 4. Breasts and Your First Bra

Welcome to Part 2!

Now that we've talked about what changes to expect, this part of the book is all about how to **care** for and **feel confident** in your amazing, changing body. First up: breasts! Let's talk about how they grow and what you might want to know about bras.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"My chest feels different. It's tender. Is it really starting?"*

Big Sis: *"It sounds like it might be! Breast development is one of the biggest signs. It doesn't happen all at once—it's a journey with a few stops along the way. Let's look at the map together so nothing surprises you."*

Little Sis: *"Will they look like... those... in magazines?"*

Big Sis: *"They will look like YOURS. And 'yours' comes in more shapes and sizes than you can imagine, all of them normal and beautiful. The magazines don't show the real variety."*

How Breasts Grow: A Journey in Stages

Think of breast growth like climbing a small ladder with four main steps. You'll spend some time on each step.

Stage 1: The Starting Point (Before Puberty)

The chest is flat. There's just the nipple and a small, flat areola.

Stage 2: The "Bud" Stage

This is often the **first sign!** A small, tender bump (the bud) forms under the nipple. The areola (the darker circle) may get a bit wider. **It's totally normal for one bud to appear before the other!** They're not twins.

Stage 3: Growing and Shaping

The breast and areola continue to grow. They start to look more rounded. They might feel achy or itchy as the skin stretches—that's normal.

Stage 4: Nearing Adult Shape

The breast becomes fuller and more rounded. The nipple and areola form a separate mound from the rest of the breast. This stage can last through your teen years.

The Beautiful Facts of Variety

- **Symmetry?** Almost no one has two breasts that are exactly identical in size or shape. One is usually a little larger. This is **so common**.
- **Shape & Size:** Breasts can be round, teardrop-shaped, wide-set, or close together. They can be small, large, or anywhere in between. Your final size and shape are part of your unique genetic gift.
- **Nipples:** They can point out, in (inverted), or be flat. All are normal.



☆ **Big Sis Tip:** If your breasts feel tender, a soft, supportive sports bra or camisole can feel comforting, especially during exercise. You don't need a bra for health reasons—it's all about your comfort.

Whoever's in Your Corner: If you're curious about bras or need help finding a comfortable fit, you can ask for help from any trusted adult in your life—a mom, dad, aunt, grandparent, foster parent, or older sibling. It's a normal part of growing up, and they are there to support you.

♡ **The Takeaway:** Your breasts are a natural part of your body. Their development is a sign of health and growth. However, they develop; they are a normal and beautiful part of you.

Why Wear a Bra and When to Start

Now, let's talk about bras. You might see friends wearing them, see them in stores, or just be curious. The most important thing to know is this: Wearing a bra is a personal choice, not a rule. It's all about what makes you feel comfortable.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"Do I HAVE to wear one?"*

Big Sis: *"Nope! It's not like shoes, where you need them to go outside. It's more like a hat—some people love them for comfort or style, some people rarely wear them. It's up to you."*

Little Sis: *"Then why do people wear them?"*

Big Sis: *"A few reasons! Some girls like the light support during sports or running. Some like the soft layer of fabric if their breasts feel tender. And sometimes, a tank top or shirt might feel more comfortable with one*

underneath. It's about how you feel, not how you look."

Reasons You *Might* Choose to Wear a Bra:

- **For Comfort:** A soft, stretchy bra or cami can feel cozy and protective, especially if your breasts are tender.
- **For Support:** When you're running, jumping, or playing sports, a supportive sports bra can help things feel more secure and comfortable.
- **For Privacy:** Some girls like that a bra adds a layer under thinner or lighter-colored shirts.
- **Just Because You Want To:** Maybe you think they're pretty or fun! That's a great reason too.

When to Start?

There's no magic age or stage. It's time when you feel like you want one. That might be when:

- You feel some tenderness or bouncing during activity.
- You feel like you'd like an extra layer under your clothes.
- You're just curious and want to try one!

★ **Big Sis Tip:** Your first bra doesn't need to be fancy! It can be a simple, soft **training bra**, **sports bra**, or a **camisole with a built-in shelf**. The goal is comfort. You can ask a trusted adult to help you find one that feels good.

Whoever's in Your Corner: Shopping for a first bra is a normal step. If you want to try one, you can ask for help from any trusted adult in your life—a mom, dad, aunt, grandparent, foster parent, or older sibling. You can say, "I think I might like to try a soft bra for comfort." They can help you figure out sizes and styles without any fuss.

💖 The Bottom Line:

Your body, your choice. Whether you choose to wear a bra every day, only for sports, or not at all, the decision is yours. What matters most is that you feel comfortable and confident in your own skin (and in whatever you decide to wear over it!).

How to Choose “The One” — Your First Bra

If you’ve decided you’d like to try a bra, that’s great! The most important thing is finding one that feels comfortable. Let’s talk about how to find “The One” that feels just right for you.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: “How do I even know what size to get? The tags look confusing.”

Big Sis: “That’s what a trusted adult is for! They can help you figure it out. The truth is, for your very first bras, you probably don’t need an exact size yet. We often start with something stretchy and simple that comes in sizes like Small, Medium, or Large.”

Little Sis: “What if it doesn’t fit right?”

Big Sis: “That’s the whole point of trying! We check for comfort. It shouldn’t pinch, dig in, or slide around. Think of it like finding the perfect cozy sweatshirt.”

Your Simple Fitting Guide

Forget complicated numbers for now. Here’s your comfort checklist:

The Band (The part that goes around your rib cage):

- It should feel **snug but not tight**.
- You should be able to slide two fingers underneath it comfortably.
- It should stay level in the back, not ride up.

The Cups (The part that holds your breasts):

- They should hold everything gently without **gaping** (extra empty space) or **spilling** over the top or sides.
- If you have breast buds, a soft, stretchy cup is perfect.

The Straps:

- They should stay on your shoulders without digging in.
- You should be able to adjust them so they’re comfortable.

🌟 Big Sis Tip: Start Simple!

Look for these easy, comfy options first:

- **Training Bras:** Soft, stretchy, and often without hooks. Sizes like XS, S, M.
- **Sports Bras:** Made of soft, stretchy fabric. Great for active days and often very comfortable for everyday too.
- **Camisoles with a Shelf:** A tank top with a little built-in bra layer. Super discreet and comfy.

How to Get Help:

This is a perfect time to ask a trusted adult for help! You can ask:

- “Can you help me find a soft, comfy first bra?”
- “I’m not sure what size to try on.”
- “Does this feel like it fits right?”

💡 **Remember:** It’s okay to need help. The adult you ask—whether it’s a mom, dad, aunt, grandparent, foster parent, or older sibling—is there to support you. They might not know your exact size either, and that’s okay! You can figure it out together by trying on a few different soft styles.

💡 The Comfort Rule:

If you forget everything else, just remember this: A good bra is one you **forget you’re wearing**. It doesn’t itch, pinch, or bother you. It just feels like a soft, comfortable part of your outfit. That’s “The One.”

"Bras: Uncomfortable, Awkward, Confusing — What Now?"

It's totally normal to have some questions—and maybe a little frustration—when you're trying something new like a bra. Here are answers to some common "what now?" moments.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: "Ugh, this strap keeps slipping! Is that normal?"

Big Sis: "That's a perfect 'what now' question! It's super common. Sometimes it means we need to adjust it, and sometimes it means that particular bra might not be the best fit for your shoulders. It's a clue, not a failure."

Little Sis: "So it's okay if my first try isn't perfect?"

Big Sis: "It's more than okay—it's expected! Finding comfy clothes of any kind takes a little trial and error."

Your Questions, Answered

Q: "My bra rubs or feels itchy. Does that mean I picked the wrong one?"

A: Not necessarily! It might just mean this fabric or tag doesn't agree with your skin, or it's not adjusted right.

- **Check This:** Are the straps or band too tight? Is there a scratchy tag you can cut out (ask an adult first!)? Is the fabric stiff? A soft, seamless cotton bra might feel better.
- **Ask an Adult:** "This one feels itchy. Can we look for one made of a softer fabric?"

Q: "Do I need a sports bra?"

A: You don't need any specific type of bra. But a sports bra can be a great first bra choice for many girls!

- **Why?** They're usually made of super soft, stretchy fabric. They're designed for comfort and movement, so they're often perfect for everyday wear, not just sports. They give a little gentle support without any complicated hooks or wires.
- **Ask Yourself:** "Do I feel more bouncing or tenderness when I run or play?" If yes, a sports bra might feel really good.

Q: "Can I just start with a crop top or soft bra?"

A: Absolutely, yes! In fact, that's what most girls start with. These are often called training bras. They're like a soft, stretchy crop top. They give a light layer of comfort and coverage without feeling like a "real" bra. It's a perfect, low-pressure way to begin.

★ **Big Sis Tip:** Think of your first bras like socks. You try on a few pairs to find the ones that don't slip, don't itch, and feel good all day. It's the same process! The goal is to forget you're even wearing it.

Whoever's in Your Corner: Figuring out clothes is a normal part of growing up. If something doesn't feel right, you can ask any trusted adult in your life for help. You can say, "This isn't comfortable," or "Can we try a different style?" The adult you ask—a parent, aunt, grandparent, or foster parent—is on your team and wants you to feel comfortable.

♡ **Remember:** Discomfort is a message, not a mistake. It's your body's way of saying, "Let's try something a little different." Listening to that feeling is how you find what works for you.

Practice: Worksheet “My First Bra Shopping Plan”

If you think you might want to try a bra soon, this worksheet is like making a game plan! It's not a test—it's just for you to think about what you might like, so you feel confident and prepared. There are no wrong answers here.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: “A shopping plan? Like a treasure map?”

Big Sis: “Exactly! It's a map that leads to ‘Comfort Island.’ This just helps you figure out what to look for so the trip is easy and fun, not stressful.”

Little Sis: “What if I don't know the answers yet?”

Big Sis: “That's the best part! You can write ‘I'm not sure’ or even draw a question mark. This is just your first draft.”

Your Personal Shopping Plan

1. My Comfort Goal:

I'm thinking about a bra mostly because... (circle or check any that fit)

- I'd like a soft layer under my shirts.
- My chest feels tender sometimes.
- I want to feel more comfortable when I run or play sports.
- I'm just curious to see what it's like!
- Other: _____

2. My Style Ideas:

Which of these sounds most comfortable to try first? (You can circle more than one!)

- Soft Sports Bra (like a comfy, stretchy crop top)
- Training Bra (a simple, soft bra often without hooks)
- Cami with a Shelf (a tank top with a little built-in layer)
- Other: _____

3. My Fitting Checklist:

When I try one on, I'll remember to check for...

(Imagine yourself doing a little jump or reaching your arms up!)

- The Band: Feels snug, but I can breathe easily. Doesn't ride up.
- The Straps: Stay put without digging into my shoulders.
- The Feel: No itchy spots, pinching, or scratchy tags.
- The Move Test: I can move, stretch, and jump comfortably.

4. My Support Squad:

The trusted adult I feel most comfortable asking to take me shopping or help me look is:

(Think about who you'd feel totally relaxed with—your mom, dad, grandparent, aunt, uncle, foster parent, stepparent, or an older sibling you trust. This is your team, so you get to pick your teammate!)

5. My Brave Statement to Remember:

If something doesn't feel right in the store, it's okay to say:

"This one isn't comfortable. Can we try a different style or size?"

That is a smart and strong thing to say.

★ Big Sis Closing Note:

You are being so thoughtful and responsible by planning ahead! Whether you use this plan next week or next year, you're already ahead of the game. The most important thing is that you feel comfortable and confident in your own skin—with or without a bra.

You've got this!

**This is your private plan.
Tuck it in a drawer, or bring it with you when you're ready to shop!**

Chapter 5. Hygiene Without Shame: Hair, Skin, Freshness

Hair Under Arms and in the Bikini Area

Welcome to the hygiene chapter! This isn't about being "clean" or "dirty"—it's about simple, kind ways to care for your changing body so you feel fresh and confident. First up, let's talk about the new hair growing in new places.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"The hair under my arms and down there... what's it even for?"*

Big Sis: *"Good question! It's a natural part of your body's adult design. It's thought to provide a tiny bit of cushion and protection, and it's part of your unique scent system. Think of it like your eyebrows or eyelashes—it's just hair that grows where it's meant to be."*

Little Sis: *"But it's different from the hair on my head."*

Big Sis: *"It is! It's often curlier or coarser. That's because it's a different type of hair, called 'terminal hair.' It's completely normal and healthy."*

Why It Grows

This hair is a **primary sign** that your puberty hormones are working. It's your body's way of maturing. The amount, color, and texture are part of your unique **genetic blueprint**.

- You might notice it's a similar color to the hair on your head or your eyebrows.
- **In all families:** If you are adopted or don't know your biological family, your hair pattern is uniquely yours! The adults who care for you are there to help you with grooming choices if and when you make them.

To Shave or Not — Your Choice

This is one of the most important messages: **What you do with this hair is 100% YOUR PERSONAL CHOICE.**

- **Option 1: Leave It.** This is a perfect, healthy choice. Many people choose this.
- **Option 2: Trim It.** You can use small, safe scissors (with a trusted adult's help/supervision at first) to neatly trim the hair shorter.
- **Option 3: Shave It.** Some people prefer the feeling of smooth skin. **This is also a fine choice, but it's a skill that takes practice and safety.**

★ **Big Sis Tip:** There is no right or wrong answer. It's about what makes **you** feel most comfortable in your own body. You never have to do something just because a friend does it or you see it in an ad.

Important: If You Choose to Shave (Safe Instructions)

Always talk to a trusted adult first before you try shaving for the first time. They can show you how and help you get the right tools. Here's the safe way:

1. **Wait Until You're Ready:** There's no rush. Most girls wait until there's enough hair to shave easily.
2. **Use the Right Tools:** A clean, new razor with a moisturizing strip is best. Never use a rusty or old razor.
3. **Use Shaving Gel or Cream:** Never shave dry skin! Apply a gentle shaving gel or cream to protect your skin.
4. **Go Gently:** Shave in the direction the hair grows (usually downward) using light, short strokes. Don't press hard.
5. **Rinse and Moisturize:** Rinse the area well with cool water and pat dry. Apply a gentle, alcohol-free moisturizer to keep your skin happy.
6. **Care for Your Razor:** Rinse it well and let it air dry. Replace the blade often.

 **The Takeaway:** Your body hair is normal. What you do with it is your business. Whether you leave it, trim it, or shave it, the goal is for you to feel good about your own choices.

Pimples: Why They Happen and How to Care for Skin

If you notice your skin getting a little oilier or see a pimple, take a deep breath. This is incredibly common during puberty. Almost everyone goes through this. Let's explore what's happening and how to treat your skin with care.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: "Ugh, I got my first pimple. Why?!"

Big Sis: "Welcome to the club! It's a sign those hormones are working. They tell your skin's oil glands to get more active. Sometimes that extra oil, along with dead skin cells, can clog a tiny pore in your skin—and that's what becomes a pimple."

Little Sis: "But it's right on my nose!"

Big Sis: "They love the T-zone: your forehead, nose, and chin. But they can show up in other places too, like your back or chest. Wherever it is, it's normal."

Types of Pimples and Where They Show Up

Pimples are just clogged pores. They can look a few different ways:

- **Whiteheads:** A clogged pore that's closed at the top. It looks like a small, white bump.
- **Blackheads:** A clogged pore that's open at the top. The oil and skin cells react with air and turn dark (it's not dirt!).
- **Red, Inflamed Pimples:** When bacteria get into a clogged pore, it can become red, swollen, and sometimes tender.

They most often appear where you have more oil glands: your face (especially the T-zone), upper back, and chest.

Basic Face Care

The goal is **gentle care**, not harsh scrubbing! A simple routine helps manage oil and keep pores clear.

1. **Wash Gently:** Wash your face 1–2 times a day (like in the morning and before bed) with a gentle, non-soap cleanser and warm water. Use your clean fingertips—not a rough washcloth.
2. **Moisturize (Yes, really!):** Even oily skin needs a light, oil-free moisturizer. This helps keep your skin balanced so it doesn't make extra oil to make up for dryness.
3. **Don't Pick or Pop:** I know it's tempting, but this can push bacteria deeper, cause scars, and make it take longer to heal. Try your best to leave them alone.
4. **Keep Hands & Hair Off:** Try not to rest your chin or cheeks on your hands. Keep your hair clean and off your face if it's oily.

🌟 **Big Sis Tip:** If you want to try an acne treatment product, ask a trusted adult to help you choose one with benzoyl peroxide or salicylic acid. Start slowly (a few times a week) to see how your skin reacts.

When to See a Dermatologist

Most pimples can be managed with gentle care at home. But sometimes, it's a good idea to ask a parent or guardian about seeing a **dermatologist** (a skin doctor).

Consider asking an adult if:

- Your pimples are large, painful, or leave dark marks/scars.
- You feel very upset or embarrassed by your skin.
- The basic care tips aren't helping after several weeks.

Whoever's in Your Corner: Needing help with skin care is normal. The adult who helps you with doctor appointments—whether it's a parent, grandparent, or foster parent—can make an appointment. There's no shame in asking for help to feel more confident.

💖 **The Bottom Line:** Pimples are a temporary, common side effect of your amazing, changing body. Be patient and kind to your skin. Your worth is not in a clear face; it's in the wonderful person you are.

Important: Myth vs. Fact

Let's clear up two of the biggest myths about skin and hair care. Knowing the facts helps you make smart choices without worry!

MYTH: "If I wash my face a lot, I'll get fewer pimples."

FACT: Washing your face gently 1–2 times a day is perfect. Washing too often (like 4 or 5 times) can actually irritate your skin and make it produce more oil. Gentleness is the key!

MYTH: "If I shave my hair, it will grow back thicker and darker."

FACT: Shaving does not change your hair's thickness or color. It might feel coarser for a day or two because you've cut off the soft, thin tip. But the new hair growing in is the same as it always was. Your genetics decide your hair, not your razor.

Sweat and Odor: How to Stay Fresh

We talked a bit about body odor earlier. Now let's get into the simple, daily habits that help you feel fresh and confident all day long. Think of this as your freshness toolkit!

• A Quick Sis Chat

• **Little Sis:** "There are so many different deodorants at the store. What's the difference?"

• **Big Sis:** "It can be confusing! Let's break it down. The main goal is to help you feel comfortable. Some products help with wetness, some help with smell, and some do both. It's all about what works for your body."

• **Little Sis:** "Is it just about the product?"

• **Big Sis:** "Great question! The product helps, but what you wear and how you care for your clothes is a huge part of feeling fresh, too. It's a team effort!"

Deodorant vs. Antiperspirant

- **Deodorant:** Helps control the *odor* (the smell) by making the skin less friendly to odor-causing bacteria. It usually doesn't stop wetness.
- **Antiperspirant:** Helps control both the *odor* and the *wetness*. It has special ingredients that gently reduce how much you sweat.

- **Which One?** You can ask a trusted adult to help you choose. Many products are a combination of both! A gentle, teen-friendly formula is a great place to start.

Underarm Care

1. **Wash Daily:** Use soap and water to wash your underarms during your bath or shower. This washes away sweat and bacteria.
2. **Apply Product to Clean, Dry Skin:** Put on deodorant or antiperspirant after you're clean and dry. It works best this way.
3. **Give It a Minute:** Let it dry for a few seconds before putting your shirt on.
4. **Be Gentle:** If you shave under your arms, apply deodorant later in the day, or use a very gentle formula to avoid stinging.

☀️ **Big Sis Tip:** If you notice odor during the day, don't stress! You can keep a travel-sized deodorant in your backpack or gym bag. A quick bathroom trip to pat your underarms dry with a paper towel can also help a lot.

Clothes, Shoes, Laundry: Practical Tips

What you wear plays a big role in freshness!

- **Wear Clean Clothes:** Put on a clean shirt, underwear, and socks every day. This is one of the easiest ways to feel fresh.
- **Let Clothes Air Out:** After you wear something, don't just throw it in a heap. Hang it up or put it in a laundry basket so it can air out.
- **Natural Fabrics:** Clothes made of cotton, bamboo, or linen let your skin breathe better than some synthetic fabrics, especially on hot days or during sports.
- **Shoe Care:** Feet sweat too! Let your shoes air out for a day between wears. Wear socks to help absorb moisture.
- **Laundry Help:** If you're not sure how to do laundry yet, ask a trusted adult in your home to teach you. It's a great life skill! They can show you how much detergent to use and which settings are best.

Whoever's in Your Corner: Learning to manage laundry and personal care are normal growing-up skills. The adult you live with—whether it's a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or foster parent—is the perfect person to ask for a quick lesson. You can say, "Can you show me how to use the washing machine?" or "Can we pick out a deodorant for me?"

💖 **The Bottom Line:** Staying fresh is about a few simple, daily habits. It's not about being perfect—it's about feeling good. You've got this!



Practice: Checklist “My Daily Hygiene Routine”

This isn't a test—it's a helpful tool! Making a routine can help you feel organized and confident as you take care of your changing body. You can use this checklist to build your own personal plan.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: “Do I have to do all these things every single day? It sounds like a lot.”

Big Sis: “Not at all! This is like a menu of good options. You pick what applies to you and what makes you feel good. Some days you might do everything, other days just the basics. The goal is to feel fresh and take kind care of yourself, not to be perfect.”

Little Sis: “Okay, that makes sense. Can we make a simple one?”

Big Sis: “Absolutely! Let's start with a 'Minimum Routine' to build from.”

My Personal Hygiene Checklist

Read through the list below. You can put a checkmark ☒ next to the things you already do, a star ☆ next to things you'd like to try, or leave it blank for things you don't need right now. **This is YOUR plan.**

Hair Care:

- Wash hair as needed (every day, every other day, etc.)
- Brush hair gently
- Style as desired

Body Care:

- Shower or bath (focus on underarms, private areas, feet)
- Apply deodorant/antiperspirant
- Apply body lotion if skin feels dry

Oral Care:

- Brush teeth in the morning
- Brush teeth before bed
- Floss (ask for help to learn how!)

Face Care:

- Wash your face gently in the morning
- Wash your face gently before bed
- Apply a light moisturizer
- Apply spot treatment if needed (with adult help)

Clothing Care:

- Put on clean underwear and socks
- Put on a clean top
- Hang up or put yesterday's clothes in the laundry
- Let shoes air out between wears

💖 **Big Sis Reminder:** This routine is a gift to yourself, not a chore. On busy or tired days, just do the basics. What matters is that you feel good.

Whoever's in Your Corner:

Needing reminders or a little help with a new routine is totally normal. The grown-ups in your home—whoever helps you with your daily schedule, like your mom, dad, grandparent, or foster parent—are there to support you. You can even ask them, “Can we put this checklist on my wall to help me remember?”

★ Your Closing Note:

Look at you, building great habits! Taking care of your body is a way of saying, “I respect myself.” Whether you follow this checklist closely or just use it as a guide, you're doing a wonderful job.

Minimum Routine (morning/evening)

Time of Day	Basic Tasks for a Fresh Start & a Fresh Finish
Morning	• Wash face & apply moisturizer • Brush teeth & hair • Apply deodorant • Put on clean clothes
Evening	• Wash face & apply moisturizer • Brush (& floss!) teeth • Shower/bath if needed • Put dirty clothes in the hamper

Chapter 6. Changes “Down There”: What’s Normal

Some of the most important changes during puberty happen in your private area. It’s completely normal to have questions about this part of your body. Let’s talk about it clearly and kindly, using the correct words so you can understand your body with confidence.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: “I hear words like ‘vagina,’ but I’m not totally sure what they all mean. It feels a little awkward.”

Big Sis: “It’s okay to feel that way. Knowing the correct names for your body parts is powerful. It helps you understand what’s happening, talk to a doctor clearly, and respect your own body. Think of it like learning the parts of a bicycle—it’s just useful information.”

Little Sis: “Okay, that makes sense. Can we just look at a map?”

Big Sis: “Absolutely. Let’s start with the basics.”

Basic Facts & Your Body’s Map

First, an important word: **Vulva**. This is the correct name for all the external parts you can see. The **vagina** is the internal canal that leads to your uterus. It’s helpful to know the difference!

- **Mons Pubis:** The soft area covered by pubic hair.
- **Outer Lips (Labia Majora):** The outer folds of skin.
- **Inner Lips (Labia Minora):** The inner folds of skin (everyone’s look different, and that’s normal!).
- **Clitoris:** A small, sensitive spot at the top (important for feeling pleasure).
- **Urethra:** The tiny opening where pee comes out (not connected to your period).
- **Vaginal Opening:** The opening to the vagina.
- **Anus:** The opening where poop comes out.

The Big Sis Verdict: Every single vulva looks a little different—size, shape, and color of the lips. Yours is perfectly normal.

White Discharge: What It Is and Why It Happens

You might start to see a white or creamy, sometimes yellowish, wetness in your underwear. This is called **vaginal discharge**.

- **What it is:** It’s a mix of mucus and cells from your vagina and cervix. Think of it as your body’s natural self-cleaning system! It keeps your vagina healthy by washing away germs.
- **What’s normal:** It can be thin and watery or thick and sticky, depending on the time of the month. It might have a mild, musky scent (but not a strong, bad smell). A little bit of this on your underwear is a **sign of a healthy, working body**.

When It's a Sign Your Period Is Coming Soon

About 6 months to a year before your very first period, you might notice your discharge change.

- **The Clue:** It may become more noticeable, clear, and stretchy—almost like raw egg whites. This is a sign that your hormones are ramping up and your body is getting ready to ovulate (release an egg) for the first time.
- **What to do:** This is a great time to be prepared! You could talk to a trusted adult about getting some period supplies (like pads) to keep in your backpack or bathroom, just in case. You're not sick—your body is just giving you a heads-up.

★ **Big Sis Tip:** Discharge is normal. **Tell a trusted adult if:** it causes itching, a strong bad smell, or is green/gray/chunky. This could mean an infection, which a doctor can easily treat.

Whoever's in Your Corner: Understanding these changes is key. If you have questions, the adult who helps you with health stuff—a parent, guardian, aunt, or older sibling—is a great person to ask. You can say, "I read about discharge in my book. Is it okay if I ask you a question about it?"

♥ **The Bottom Line:** Your body is intelligent. These changes, from new hair to discharge, are its way of preparing for adulthood. There's no need for shame—only for understanding.

Practice: “How to Ask a Trusted Adult About Discharge”

Sometimes, the hardest part isn't knowing the facts—it's figuring out how to start the conversation. If you've noticed discharge and have a question or want to double-check that it's normal, here's a simple, low-stress way to bring it up with an adult you trust.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *“I think my discharge is normal, but what if I want to be sure? How do I even say that?”*

Big Sis: *“That's a smart thing to want to check! It can feel awkward, but adults expect these questions. Having a simple ‘script’ in your head can make it way easier. The goal is just to start the talk.”*

Little Sis: *“A script? Like for a play?”*

Big Sis: *“Exactly! You don't have to memorize it word-for-word. It just gives you a way to start so you're not standing there wondering what to say.”*

Your Conversation Starter Kit

Step 1: Pick Your Person & Moment.

Choose a private, calm time. This could be your mom, dad, grandma, aunt, foster mom, or any adult who helps you with health stuff.

Step 2: Use a Simple Starter.

You can say one of these lines. Pick the one that feels most like you:

Option 1 (Direct & Clear):

- **You:** *“Hey [Mom/Dad/Grandma/etc.], I was reading my puberty book, and it talked about vaginal discharge. I have a question about it. Is now a good time to talk?”*

Option 2 (Using the Book as a Helper):

- **You:** *(Bring the book with you) “Can I show you something in my book? I was reading this part about discharge and wanted to make sure I understood it right.”*

Option 3 (Quick Check-In):

- **You:** *“I learned that discharge is normal, but I just wanted to let you know I've noticed it starting, in case I need to get any supplies or anything.”*

Option 4 (For Any Grown-Up in Your Corner):

- **You:** *“Hey, I was reading my guidebook, and it explained that discharge is a normal sign your body is getting ready. I just wanted to let you know I've noticed it, so I'm not worried. Could we make sure we have a few pads on hand, just in case things change?”*

Why it works: You're sharing a fact, not asking a scary question. This shows you're paying attention and being responsible, and it gives your caregiver a clear, calm heads-up to help you feel prepared. It turns a personal moment into a practical, team-planning one.



Step 3: Know What Might Happen Next.

The adult will probably:

1. Thank you for asking.
2. Ask if you have any specific questions (like about color, amount, or smell).
3. Reassure you that it's normal.
4. Maybe suggest getting panty liners if the wetness bothers you.

🌟 **Big Sis Tip:** It's okay to be nervous. The adult might have been nervous to bring it up too! By starting the conversation, you're helping both of you. Taking a deep breath before you speak can help.

Remember:

- Your body is doing a normal, healthy thing.
- Asking a question is a sign of being responsible and smart about your health.
- The adult you ask is on your team.

You've got this!

Intimate Area Hygiene: Simple and Safe

Now that you know about the changes happening, let's talk about how to care for your intimate area. The key thing to remember is this: your vagina cleans itself naturally and works very well on its own. You only need to gently care for the outer area—the vulva.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: "I see so many products in the store like 'feminine washes' and sprays. Do I need that stuff?"

Big Sis: "Great question! The short answer is: No, you don't. In fact, many of those products can do more harm than good. Your body's natural system is perfectly designed. We just need to support it with simple, gentle habits."

Little Sis: "So what should I actually do?"

Big Sis: "Think 'external, gentle, and simple.' Let's break it down."

The Simple Care Rules

1. Clean the Outside Only.

- **Do:** Use your hand and warm water to gently wash the external folds of your vulva (the outer lips) during your regular shower or bath.
- **Don't:** Never put soap, body wash, or any product **inside** your vagina. This can upset its healthy, natural balance and cause irritation or infections.

2. Choose a Gentle Cleanser (Optional).

- If you want to use a little soap on the **outside** (on the pubic hair and outer lips), choose a **gentle, fragrance-free, pH-balanced** bar or wash. Avoid harsh, heavily scented soaps or body washes. But many doctors say warm water is all you really need. Your vagina is self-cleaning!

3. Wipe Front to Back.

- This is a golden rule! **Always wipe from front (your vulva) to back (your anus)** after using the toilet. This helps prevent bacteria from your bottom from getting near your vaginal opening, which can cause infections.

4. Let It Breathe.

- Choose cotton underwear most of the time—it's breathable and absorbs moisture.
- Change out of wet swimsuits or sweaty workout clothes as soon as you can.

5. Normal Discharge is Your Friend.

- Remember that white or clear discharge is your body's natural cleaning system. A little bit on your underwear is normal. Just change into clean underwear daily.

★ Big Sis Tip: What's a "pH-balanced" wash?

This just means the cleanser is formulated to match the natural, slightly acidic environment of your vulva, so it's less likely to cause irritation. You can ask a trusted adult to help you find one if you're interested.

Whoever's in Your Corner: Learning about body care is an important life skill. If you have questions about products or notice something that doesn't seem right (like bad odor, itching, or unusual discharge), the adult who helps you with healthcare—whether it's a parent, guardian, aunt, or older sibling—is the perfect person to talk to. They can help you figure out if you need to see a doctor.

💖 **The Bottom Line:** Less is more. Trust your body's amazing design. Gentle, external cleaning with water is often all you need to stay fresh, healthy, and comfortable.

Q&A + When to Ask a Doctor

Now that we've covered a lot of ground, here are answers to a few final, important questions about this part of your body and your health.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"Why do we have to use the real words like 'vulva' and 'vagina'? It feels kind of clinical."*

Big Sis: *"That's a great point. Using the correct words is actually a superpower. It takes away shame and confusion. It helps you understand your body better, explain concerns to a doctor more clearly, and treat yourself with respect. It's simply knowledge—like knowing the difference between your elbow and your knee."*

Little Sis: *"Okay, that makes sense. Knowledge is power, right?"*

Big Sis: *"Exactly! And part of that power is knowing when to ask for help from a professional."*

Your Questions, Answered

Q: "Why do I have to know the words 'vulva' and 'vagina'? Can't I just say 'down there'?"

A: You can, with friends or in casual talk. But knowing the precise words is important for three big reasons:

1. **Clarity:** You'll always know exactly what part you or someone else is talking about.
2. **Health:** If something feels wrong (like pain or itching), you can tell a doctor exactly where it is so they can help you faster and better.
3. **Respect:** Using the real names shows your body deserves to be spoken about accurately, not with secret code words that can sometimes make it seem mysterious or shameful.

Q: "Is it normal for my inner lips (labia) to stick out more than the outer ones?"

A: Yes, this is completely normal and common. Just like ears or noses, labia come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. Some inner lips are tucked inside; some are longer or more visible. There is no **"right" way** for them to look. Your unique shape is part of what makes your body yours.

Q: "What if I'm worried about how my vulva looks?"

A: First, remember that what you see in medical diagrams is just one example. Real vulvas have an incredible variety. If you're looking at images online, be very careful—many are photoshopped or show surgical results, not reality. If this worry is really bothering you, that's a perfect thing to talk about with a **trusted adult or a doctor**. They can reassure you about what's normal.



When to Ask a Doctor

Most changes are perfectly healthy. But it's smart to know when to ask a parent or guardian to make a doctor's appointment. Tell them if you notice:

- **Severe pain** in your pelvic area or when you pee.
- **Itching, burning, or a rash** that doesn't go away.
- **Unusual discharge** that is green, gray, chunky (like cottage cheese), or has a very strong, bad smell.
- **Any sore, lump, or growth** that appears.
- Bleeding (that's not your period) from your vaginal area.

How to Talk to the Doctor: This is where knowing the correct words helps! You can say, "I've been having itching on my vulva," or "My vaginal discharge has changed." Doctors are trained professionals—they've heard it all and are there to help, not to judge.

Whoever's in Your Corner: The adult who takes you to doctor appointments is your partner in health. You can always tell them, "I have a private question for the doctor," and they can make sure you get a moment to talk one-on-one. This is a normal part of growing up.

♡ **Remember:** Your body is wise, and you are becoming the expert on it. Knowing how it works and when to seek help are both signs of strength and self-care.

Practice: Journal “What I’ve Noticed and My Questions”

This is your private space. A journal is a powerful tool—it lets you sort out your thoughts, track your unique journey, and remember what you want to ask. There are no right or wrong answers here, only your truth.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: “A journal? What if someone reads it?”

Big Sis: “That’s a real concern. This is for your eyes only. You can keep it super private—write in code, use a lock, or even just think about these questions in your head. The point is to give yourself a safe space to reflect, without any pressure.”

Little Sis: “What should I write about?”

Big Sis: “Anything you’ve noticed, wondered, or felt. It’s like being a scientist observing the amazing experiment that is YOU.”

Your Private Reflection

1. My Body Check-In:

What’s one change in this area that you’ve noticed recently? (It could be discharge, new hair, or just a new feeling of awareness).

• *Example:* “I saw a little whitish stuff in my underwear this week.”

• **My note:** _____

2. My Knowledge Check-In:

What’s one thing you learned in this chapter that made you think, “Oh, that’s good to know” or “That makes sense”?

• *Example:* “Learning that the vagina is self-cleaning and I don’t need special soap.”

• **My note:** _____

3. My Question Check-In:

Is there a question you still have? Writing it down can make it feel less overwhelming. You can decide later if you want to ask someone.

• *Example:* “What does ‘pH-balanced’ really mean?” or “Is my normal?”

• **My question:** _____

4. My Feeling Check-In:

How are you feeling about all this now? Circle a few words or add your own.

- | | |
|------------|--------------------------------|
| • Curious | • A little anxious |
| • Informed | • Proud of myself for learning |

• Neutral

• Other: _____

5. My Future Prep:

Is there one thing you want to remember or do after reading this chapter?

- Practice using the words “vulva” and “vagina” to feel more comfortable.
- Talk to _____ (person) about getting panty liners.
- Just keep observing and not worry.
- Other: _____

★ **Big Sis Closing Note:** You are doing such important work by learning about your body and paying attention to your thoughts. This self-awareness is a superpower that will help you for your whole life. Whether you wrote a lot or a little, you took time to understand yourself better. That is something to be truly proud of.

PART 3: MENSTRUATION – YOUR NEW EXPERIENCE

Chapter 7. Periods: A Clear Explanation

Welcome to Part 3! This section is all about one of the biggest puberty milestones: your period. If the word “period” makes you feel curious, nervous, or a mix of both, that’s totally normal. By the end of this chapter, you’ll understand what’s happening in your body and know that you can handle it.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: “Okay, so what *IS* a period, really? Blood? Where’s it even coming from?”

Big Sis: “Let’s break it down. It’s not like a cut or an injury. It’s your body’s way of practicing for a possibility far in the future: pregnancy. Each month, your body prepares a soft, blood-rich lining in your uterus (your womb) just in case an egg gets fertilized. If there’s no pregnancy, your body just cleans house—it sheds that lining, and that’s your period.”

Little Sis: “So it’s more like a monthly reset button than something being wrong?”

Big Sis: “Exactly! It’s a sign that your reproductive system is online, healthy, and working. It’s your body’s natural rhythm.”

What Are Menstruation and the Cycle?

Menstruation (your “period”) is a part of a larger, repeating process called your **menstrual cycle**. Think of it like a monthly calendar or a loop that your body goes through.

Here’s the simplified cycle in four key phases:

1. Menstrual Phase (Your Period): Days 1–5(ish)

What happens: The built-up lining of your uterus sheds. This leaves your body through your vagina as a mix of blood, tissue, and fluid. This is your period. It usually lasts 3–7 days.

2. Follicular Phase: Days 6–13(ish)

What happens: Your brain signals your ovaries. One ovary starts preparing a tiny **egg** (called an ovum) for release. Your uterus begins building a fresh, new lining.

3. Ovulation: Sometime in the Middle (It’s Different for Everyone!)

What happens: Your ovary releases its prepared egg—this is ovulation. The egg then travels down the fallopian tube. This is the part of your cycle when pregnancy is possible if sperm is present.

Here’s the Big Sis Note: People used to say ovulation always happens on “Day 14,” but that’s only a textbook example for a perfect 28-day cycle. In real life—**especially yours right now**—cycles can be all sorts of lengths (think 21 days, 35 days, or anywhere in between!). So, ovulation usually happens roughly in the middle of whatever your unique cycle length is. If your cycle is still finding its rhythm (totally normal!), you likely won’t feel or notice this phase at all, and that’s perfectly okay. Your body is doing its thing on its own schedule.



4. Luteal Phase: Days 15–28(ish)

What happens: Your body waits to see if the egg gets fertilized. The uterus keeps its lining soft and thick, ready just in case. If the egg isn't fertilized, hormone levels drop, signaling the uterus to shed its lining... and the cycle starts over with Day 1: your next period.

🌟 **Big Sis Tip:** The word “cycle” means it repeats. Day 1 is always the first day of your period. The entire cycle lasts about **21 to 35 days** for most people, with 28 days being an average. It can be irregular at first, and that's okay!

Whoever's in Your Corner: This biological process is the same for everyone. The adults in your life, whether they are biological relatives, adoptive parents, or other guardians, can support you by helping you get supplies and understand your own unique cycle as it starts.

💖 **The Takeaway:** Your period is a normal, healthy sign of a powerful system inside you. It's not an illness or a curse—it's a natural part of being female and a testament to your body's incredible ability to renew itself.

Myths vs. Truth (Busting the Fears)

Periods come with a lot of stories and misinformation. These myths can make you feel scared, confused, or ashamed. Let's replace those fears with clear, truthful facts. Knowledge is your best tool for confidence!

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: "I've heard weird things, like you can't take a bath or that everyone can tell when you have it. Is any of that true?"

Big Sis: "Almost none of it is true! Those are exactly the kinds of myths we need to bust. Periods are a normal body function, just like digesting food or breathing. Let's clear the air so you know what to really expect."

Myth → Truth Table

Myth	Truth
Myth: Having your period means you're "unclean" or dirty.	Truth: Menstrual blood is not dirty blood. It's a natural, healthy mix of blood and tissue from your uterus. You are not unclean.
Myth: Everyone can smell when you're on your period.	Truth: With normal hygiene (changing your pad/tampon regularly and washing), there is no noticeable odor that others can smell.
Myth: You shouldn't take a bath, swim, or wash your hair during your period.	Truth: You can and should do all your normal activities! Bathing is hygienic. Water pressure stops the flow in a bath, and tampons or menstrual cups allow you to swim.
Myth: Your period blood is always bright red.	Truth: Color can vary! It may be bright red, dark red, or even brownish, especially at the start or end. This is all normal.
Myth: You can't get pregnant during your period.	Truth: While less likely, it is possible, especially if you have a short cycle. Sperm can live inside the body for several days.
Myth: Periods are always super painful, and you'll be miserable.	Truth: Some cramping is common, but severity varies widely. Many people have mild symptoms. If pain is severe, a doctor can help.
Myth: You should hide your period products so no one sees them.	Truth: Pads and tampons are healthcare items, like bandaids or toothpaste. There's no need to hide them in shame, though you might choose to be discreet for privacy.
Myth: Talking about your period is gross or taboo.	Truth: It's a normal biological process. Talking about it openly with trusted people (family, doctor, close friends) removes stigma and helps you get support.
Myth: Your period will always be like clockwork from the start.	Truth: It's very common for periods to be irregular for the first year or two as your body establishes its cycle.



Big Sis Tip: If you hear a “rule” about periods that makes you feel limited, scared, or ashamed, it’s probably a myth. Check with a trusted adult or a reliable source (like this book or a doctor) to find the truth.

Whoever’s in Your Corner: Different families and cultures have different ways of talking about periods. The adults in your home are your best resource for navigating this within your family context. You can ask them, “What’s true about this thing I heard?” to start a helpful conversation.



The Bottom Line: Your period is a normal sign of a healthy body. You have the right to clear information, to manage it without shame, and to live your life fully, every day of the month.

Signs Your First Period Is Coming Soon

Your body usually sends a few “heads-up” signals in the months before your first period (called menarche). Knowing these signs can help you feel prepared instead of surprised.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: “Will I just wake up one day and it’s there? Or are there warning signs?”

Big Sis: “There are often clues! It’s like your body sending you a text message saying, ‘Get ready, the main event is coming soon!’ Not everyone gets all the signs, but many people notice one or two.”

Little Sis: “What should I look for?”

Common Signals from Your Body:

- **Vaginal Discharge:** This is often the #1 sign. Around 6–12 months before your first period, you may notice more clear, white, or slightly yellow discharge in your underwear. This is your body’s natural way of cleaning and getting ready.
- **Breast Development:** Your first period usually arrives about 1–2 years after your breast buds first appear.
- **Growth Spurt:** You’re often at the tail end of your biggest growth spurt when your period starts.
- **Body Hair:** Pubic hair and underarm hair are usually present.
- **Mood Swings & Cramps:** You might feel more emotional or even have mild, crampy aches in your lower belly or back before the bleeding even starts.
- **A Feeling of “Fullness”:** Some girls just feel a bit bloated or different in their lower abdomen.

🌟 **Big Sis Tip:** This is the perfect time to **be prepared**. Talk to a trusted adult about having a small kit ready with a few pads, clean underwear, and a plastic bag (for used products) in your backpack or locker. This isn’t being paranoid—it’s being smart and empowered!

Tracking Your Cycle: Why and How

Once your period starts, keeping a simple record is one of the best things you can do. It turns mystery into knowledge and helps you feel in control.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"Tracking? Like marking a calendar? Why would I do that?"*

Big Sis: *"It's a superpower! It helps you predict when your next period might come, notice if your cycle is regular, and understand how your body feels at different times. It's like being the scientist of your own body."*

Little Sis: *"What if it's not regular? I heard it can be all over the place at first."*

Big Sis: *"That's exactly why tracking is helpful! You'll see your own unique pattern, even if 'irregular' is your pattern for now. There's no pressure for it to be perfect."*

How to Track — Keep It Simple!

You don't need anything fancy. A small calendar, a notes app, or a period-tracking app (with a parent's permission) all work.

What to Write Down:

1. **Day 1:** Circle the date your period starts. This is **Cycle Day 1**.
2. **The Flow:** Note how many days it lasts (e.g., "Oct 10–Oct 14").
3. **How It Feels:** Just a word or two! (e.g., "light cramps," "tired," "fine," "heavy flow").
4. **Other Notes:** Any other clues your body gives you mid-cycle, like ovulation pain (a quick pinch on one side) or changes in discharge.

Why It's Helpful:

- **Predicts:** After a few months, you might see a pattern (e.g., every 28–32 days) and can anticipate your next period.
- **Informs:** You can plan ahead for trips, sleepovers, or gym class.
- **Empowers:** You have concrete information to share with a doctor or parent if you have concerns about severe pain or very irregular cycles.

Whoever's in Your Corner: The adult who helps you manage appointments and health can be a great partner in this. You can say, "I started my period. Can we mark it on the calendar/get a tracking app?" This opens a supportive dialogue.

💖 **The Takeaway:** Your menstrual cycle is a vital sign, just like your heart rate or temperature. Tracking it is a simple, powerful act of self-care that helps you understand and work *with* your body, not against it.

Q&A: "Is It Normal If...?"

These are the "is it normal" questions that pop up right when you need answers the most. If you're wondering these things, you're thinking ahead and being responsible. Let's tackle them with clear facts.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"I think I'm about to start, but I have a million little 'what ifs' buzzing in my head."*

Big Sis: *"That's the perfect time to ask! Let's quiet those buzzing worries by replacing them with solid answers. No question is too small when it comes to feeling ready."*

Your "Is It Normal If...?" Questions, Answered

Q: "If my cycle is irregular at first—is that okay?"

A: It is not just okay—it is expected and completely normal. For the first year or two, your body is learning this new rhythm. Your periods might not come like clockwork. You might have a 28-day cycle, then a 35-day cycle, then skip a month. This is your body's way of figuring things out. It usually settles into a more predictable pattern with time.

Q: "I'm scared of seeing blood—what do I do?"

A: That's a very common feeling. Remember, this isn't like blood from a cut. It's usually not a huge amount all at once, and it's mixed with other fluids, so it might not look like the blood you're imagining.

- **Start Simple:** Use pads at first. You don't have to see much; you just change the pad.
- **Focus on Care:** Think of it as tending to your body, like putting on a bandage. It's a practical task, not a scary event.
- **Talk About It:** Tell a trusted adult, "The idea of seeing blood makes me nervous." They can help you through the first time.

Q: "Can I go to school/play sports during my period?"

A: Absolutely, yes! Your period is not an illness. You can—and should—do all your normal activities.

- **School:** No problem at all. Just keep supplies in your backpack and use the bathroom between classes if needed.
- **Sports & Swimming:** 100% yes. In fact, exercise can help ease cramps! Use a tampon, menstrual cup, or period swimwear if you want to swim. No one will know.
- **The Bottom Line:** Your period might require a little extra planning (like having supplies handy), but it doesn't stop you from living your life.

★ **Big Sis Tip:** The unknown is often scarier than reality. Once your period starts, you'll realize it's a manageable part of your life. The first time is the biggest step; after that, it just becomes a new normal.

Whoever's in Your Corner: The adult who is your main support person is there to help you navigate these firsts—whether it's buying the right supplies, writing a note for school if cramps are bad, or just listening to your concerns. You can say, "I'm nervous about my period starting at school. Can we make a plan?"

♡ **Remember:** Millions of people go to school, play sports, create art, and live their full lives while on their period every single day. You've got this. With a little knowledge and preparation, you will too.

Chapter 8. Getting Ready Ahead of Time: Your Action Plan

The best way to face your first period is with a plan. Being prepared takes the fear out of the unknown and turns it into a sense of readiness. This chapter is your guide to building that confidence.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"I think it's getting close. I just have this feeling. What should I actually DO?"*

Big Sis: *"That's your intuition talking—listen to it! Now is the perfect time to switch from learning to doing. Let's make your personal action plan, so you feel like a boss, no matter when it happens."*

Signs That "It" Is About to Happen

Your body gives you final clues in the days or hours before your first period starts. Keep an eye out for:

- **Cramping:** A dull ache or squeezing feeling in your lower belly or back.
- **Bloating:** Your tummy might feel full or puffy.
- **Mood Shifts:** Feeling extra emotional, sensitive, or tired.
- **Breakouts:** Some people get a pimple or two.
- **Spotting:** You might see a tiny bit of brownish or pinkish discharge on your underwear first.
- **That "Just Knowing" Feeling:** Trust your gut! If you feel like something is different, it's a good cue to be prepared.

★ **Big Sis Tip:** These signs are normal, but not everyone gets them. If your period arrives as a complete surprise, that's normal too! The plan is what matters.



Building Your “First Aid Kit” (Period Survival Kit)

Think of this as your personal preparedness kit. It's not for emergencies—it's for empowerment!

What to Put Inside:

- **2–3 pads** of different absorbencies (like “regular” and “super”).
- **A clean pair of underwear** (folded up).
- **A small plastic bag** (like a ziplock) for discreetly wrapping used pads.
- **A few pain relief tablets** (like ibuprofen or acetaminophen, with parent permission/knowledge).
- **A couple of moist wipes** (individually wrapped, unscented).
- **A small note of encouragement** to yourself! (You got this!)

Where to Keep It:

- **In your backpack/purse:** Always have it with you.
- **In your school locker:** A backup stash.
- **In your bathroom at home:** Your main supply.

How to Refresh It:

- **Monthly Check:** Pick a day (like the 1st of the month) to open your kit. Replace anything you used and check that pads are still sealed.
- **Seasonal Swap:** Change out the underwear for a fresh pair every few months.

DIY Activity: Decorate Your Kit!

Make your kit feel truly yours! This isn't just a supply bag—it's a symbol of your readiness.

You'll Need: Your kit bag (a small pencil case, makeup bag, or cloth pouch works perfectly!), stickers, fabric markers, patches, or glitter glue.

Make It Your Own:

1. **Choose a Theme:** What makes you feel strong? Space? Animals? Funny quotes? Pretty patterns?
2. **Decorate!** Cover your plain bag with stickers. Use fabric markers to write your name or a power word like "READY" or "BRAVE."
3. **Make It Private (Optional):** If you want it to be discreet, decorate the inside of the bag instead! Only you will know the secret design.

Why This Matters: When you decorate it, you're claiming this experience. You're saying, "This is a normal part of my life, and I'm prepared to handle it with style." It turns a practical item into a personal token of confidence.

💖 **The Takeaway:** Preparation is power. With your signs to watch for, your stocked kit, and your personalized bag, you're not waiting nervously—you're waiting confidently. You are ready.

Practice: How to Tell Someone (Conversation Scripts)

Sometimes the hardest part is just saying the words out loud. It can feel awkward, but remember—this is normal, and the adult you tell wants to help. Here are a few simple scripts you can use or adapt. You've got this!

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: "What do I even SAY? Do I just blurt it out?"

Big Sis: "Having a few words ready in your head can make it so much easier. It's like having a key to unlock the conversation. The other person will take it from there. Let's practice."

Your Conversation Starters

Pick the person you feel most comfortable with and choose the script that feels most like you.

Script 1: For a Parent/Guardian at Home

(Wait for a quiet, private moment.)

You: "Hey [Mom/Dad/Guardian's name], can I talk to you about something? I think I just got my first period."

Why it works: It's direct, clear, and lets them know immediately what you need.

Script 2: For a Teacher or School Nurse at School

(Go up to them privately at their desk or ask to speak in the hall.)

You: "Excuse me, [Teacher's name/Nurse]. I need some help. I've started my period, and I need to go to the restroom/call home."

Why it works: It's respectful, states your need, and any trusted adult at school will know exactly how to help you.

Script 3: The "I'm Prepared, But..." Script

(This is great if you used your kit but need to tell someone.)

You: "I just wanted to let you know that my period started. I used my kit, so I'm okay, but I thought you should know."

Why it works: It shows you're responsible and in control, while still keeping them in the loop.

🌟 Mini-Story from Maya, Age 11

"I was at my locker when I felt this weird cramp. An hour later, I saw a little spot in my underwear. My heart started pounding! I remembered the scripts from my book. I went to my science teacher, Mrs. Lee, after class and whispered, 'I need some help. I think I started my period.' You know what? She just smiled kindly and said, 'Okay, let's get you to the nurse. She has everything you need.' The nurse was so nice and gave me a pad. She even called my dad so he could bring me fresh clothes. It wasn't a big, dramatic deal at all. Telling someone was the scariest part, but once I did, it was just... handled."

Your Turn: Plan Your Words

Who would you tell first? _____

Circle the script above that feels best, or write your own starter sentence here: _____

💖 **Remember:** The person you tell has almost certainly been through this themselves or helped someone else through it. They are on your team. Taking a deep breath and saying the words is the bravest step.

Q&A: "I'm Too Shy to Tell an Adult"

Feeling too shy, embarrassed, or awkward to talk about your period is one of the most common feelings of all. If your heart pounds at the thought of saying the words out loud, this page is for you. You are not alone, and there are ways around this.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"The scripts are great, but my mouth just freezes up. I can't imagine actually saying it."*

Big Sis: *"That's completely okay. Your feelings are valid. The good news is, talking isn't the only way to communicate. Sometimes, you just need a different way to get the message across until you feel more comfortable."*

Little Sis: *"Like what?"*

Your Questions, Answered

Q: "What if I'm just too shy or embarrassed to say the words out loud?"

A: This is incredibly normal. The important thing is that you get the help or supplies you need. **You do not have to have a face-to-face conversation** if you can't. Here are powerful alternatives:

- **The Note Method:** Write it down. You can slip a note to a parent, put it on their pillow, or leave it on the kitchen counter.
Example Note: "Mom/Dad, I got my period today. Can we get more pads? Thanks."
- **The Text Message:** If your parent is at work or in another room, a simple text works perfectly.
- **The Signal:** Have a pre-arranged signal with a trusted adult. For example, you could text just a period emoji (💧) or leave a specific item (like this book!) open on their desk.
- **Ask a Different Adult:** Is there someone you feel less shy with? An aunt, an older cousin, a friend's mom, or the school nurse? You can go to them first.

★ **Big Sis Tip:** The goal is to communicate your need, not to give a perfect speech. Any method that gets the message across is a successful method. The adult will handle the rest—they will likely be proud of you for finding a way to tell them.

Q: "What if I start at school and I'm too scared to tell the teacher?"

A: First, use your kit. Then, remember that **school nurses and counselors are trained for this**. You can:

1. Ask to go to the bathroom.
2. From the bathroom, go straight to the nurse's office.
3. You can simply say, "I need to see the nurse, please." Most teachers won't ask why. Once there, you can whisper it to the nurse or even write it down for her.

♡ **Remember:** Shyness is a feeling, not a permanent roadblock. It's okay to feel it. The brave thing is finding your way through it, using the tools that work for you. Every adult you might tell has felt shy about something in their life—they will understand.

Worksheet: "My First-Day Plan"

This is your personal roadmap. By filling this out now, you'll have a clear, calm plan for that special (and totally normal) day. Keep this page private, in your kit, or tucked in this book. Remember: A plan brings peace of mind.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: "A plan for the actual day? But I don't know when it will be!"

Big Sis: "That's the whole point! We prepare the plan ahead of time so you don't have to figure everything out in the moment. It's like an emergency guide—you may never need it, but it's reassuring to know it's there."

Little Sis: "Oh, okay. So I just fill in the blanks?"

Big Sis: "Exactly. Your answers will make this plan perfect for YOU."

My First-Day Plan

1. My Preparedness Kit Location:

My kit will always be in my: _____

(Backpack? Locker? Bedroom drawer? List its home!)

2. If It Happens at Home:

The first person I will tell is: _____

(Think of the grown-up or big sibling in your home you feel closest to—your mom, dad, grandparent, aunt, uncle, foster parent, stepparent, or anyone you trust.)

My method of telling them will be (circle or write):

- Say it out loud
- Write a note
- Send a text
- Our special signal is: _____

3. If It Happens at School:

- I will get my kit from my: _____
- I will go to the: _____

(Bathroom? Nurse's office?)

- The adult at school I feel okay telling is: _____

(Teacher's name? Nurse? Counselor?)

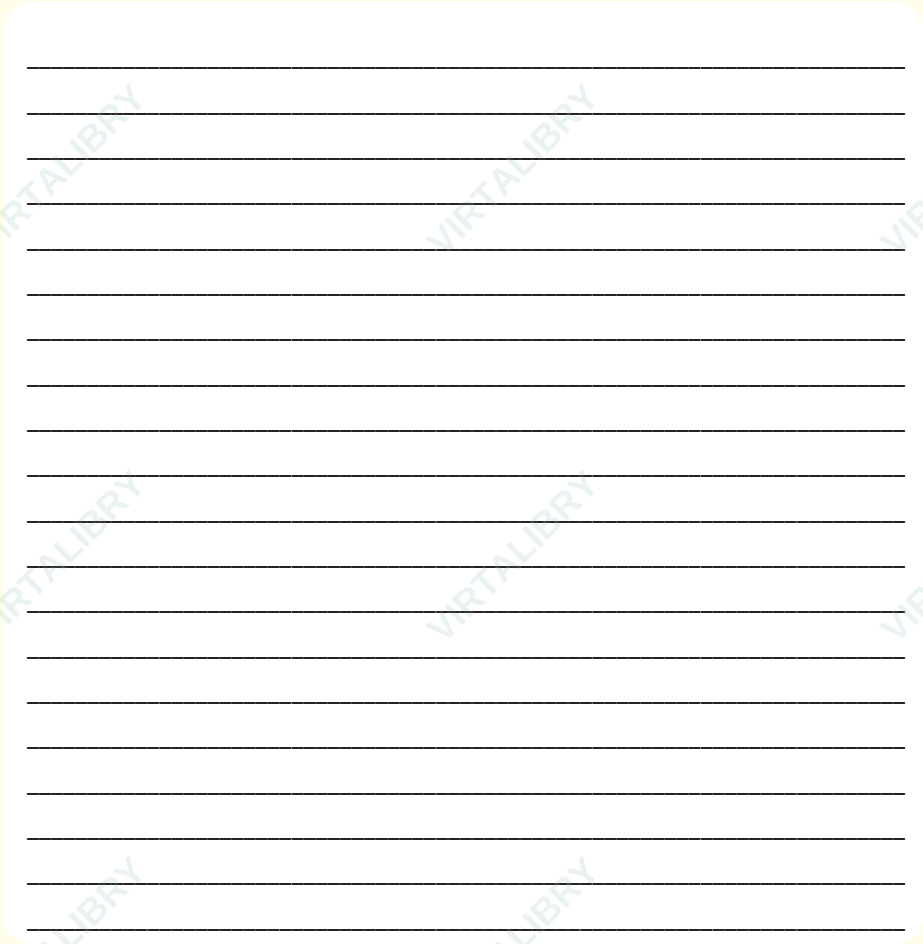
4. My Comfort Items:

Besides pads, what's one thing that would make me feel better?

- A cozy hoodie
- A favorite snack
- A hot water bottle for cramps
- My favorite playlist
- Other: _____

5. My Reminder to Myself:

In the box below, write one kind, brave, or true thing you want to remember on that day. (Examples: "This is normal." "I am prepared." "I can handle this.")



Give yourself a high-five! 🖐️

Chapter 9. When It Starts: Step by Step (Period Logistics)

Now let's get into the practical stuff. Knowing exactly what to do makes everything feel more manageable. We'll start with pads, which are often the easiest and most common choice for your first period. Think of this as your friendly how-to manual.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"Okay, I have a pad. But... how does it actually work? How do I put it on right?"*

Big Sis: *"It's super simple once you see it. Let's break it down step-by-step. It's like learning to tie your shoes—a little practice, and it'll be second nature."*

How to Use a Pad

1. **Wash Your Hands.**
2. **Unwrap It.** Take the pad out of its plastic wrapper.
3. **Peel the Strip.** Remove the long, skinny paper strip from the back. This exposes the sticky adhesive.
4. **Place It.** Center the pad in your underwear, with the sticky side down. The wider, padded part should be towards the back of your underwear.
5. **Press It On.** Firmly press the pad's sticky backing onto the fabric of your underwear (not your skin!).
6. **Check the Fit.** Make sure the pad covers the gusset (the middle sewn part) of your underwear. The wings (if your pad has them) should wrap around and stick to the underside of your underwear.

Important: Common Mistake

**Stick the pad to your
UNDERWEAR, NOT to your skin
or body hair!**

The adhesive is designed for fabric. Sticking it to your skin can be painful to remove and cause irritation. If you feel the pad is moving around, try a different style with wings, or a different brand that's more adhesive.

Q&A: “The Little Details”

Q: “Where exactly do I stick it in my underwear?”

A: Right in the middle, lining up with the narrowest part (the gusset). Think of it like lining up a dartboard—you want the bullseye (the pad) centered in the target (your underwear).

Q: “How do I open the wrapper quietly at school?”

A: Great question! Practice at home first. Usually, the crinkly noise is from rushing. Go slowly. Many wrappers have a quiet, tear-open notch. You can also open it in your lap under a sweater, or just remember: **most people aren’t listening**, and if they hear something, they won’t know what it is.

What to Do If You Leak at School: Clear Protocol

Leaks happen to almost everyone at some point. Don’t panic! It’s a minor hiccup, not a disaster.

1. **Stay Calm.** Tie a sweatshirt or sweater around your waist to cover your back.
2. **Go to the Bathroom or Nurse.** Assess the situation privately.
3. **Clean Up.** Use toilet paper or a wet paper towel to dab at the stain on your clothes. Cold water works best.
4. **Change.** Put on your spare underwear from your kit and a fresh pad.
5. **Manage Clothes.** If the stain is small, the tied sweatshirt might cover it for the day. If you need a change, go to the nurse. They often have spare clothes or can call home for you.

☆ **Big Sis Tip:** Leaks are often a sign you need to change your pad more frequently, or use a higher absorbency for heavier days. It’s just feedback, not failure.

♥ **The Takeaway:** You’re learning a new skill. Be patient with yourself. With your kit and this knowledge, you have everything you need to handle your period confidently, one step at a time.

Practice: Card “What to Do Right Now”

This is a quick-reference guide for if you leak. It's designed to be clear and simple, so you can remember the steps even if you're feeling flustered. You can even cut this page out or copy the steps into your phone's notes.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: “If I leak, I think I’ll just freeze and forget everything!”

Big Sis: “That’s why we make a plan! It’s like a fire drill. When you know the steps by heart, your brain can follow them even if you’re nervous. Let’s make your personal ‘stay-calm’ card.”

Your “Stay Calm” Action Card

(Cut out along the dotted line or copy these steps)

💧 WHAT TO DO IF YOU LEAK 💧

Don’t Panic. You’ve got this. Just follow these steps.

1. COVER UP.

- Immediately tie a sweater, hoodie, or long shirt around your waist.

2. GO PRIVATELY.

- Walk calmly to the **bathroom** or the **nurse’s office**.

3. ASSESS & CLEAN.

- In a stall, check the spot.
- Use toilet paper or a wet paper towel (cold water is best) to dab the stain on your clothes.

4. CHANGE.

- Put on your **spare underwear** from your kit.
- Put on a **fresh pad**.

5. NEXT STEPS.

- If the stain is small, your tied sweater might cover it for the day.
- If you need new pants/skirt, go to the nurse. They can help!
- This is a sign to change pads more often or use a heavier absorbency next time.

REMEMBER: This has happened to almost everyone. It’s a minor, fixable thing. **You are okay.**

🌟 **Big Sis Tip:** Practice tying a sweater around your waist a few times at home. It’s your instant “I’m covered” move and buys you time to think.

Pads, Tampons, Cups, Period Underwear — What to Choose?

You have more choices than ever for managing your period! Let's look at the main options so you can find what feels most comfortable and convenient for your life. There's no single "best" choice—only what's best for you.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: "There are so many things in the aisle. How do I even know where to start?"

Big Sis: "It can be overwhelming! Let's break them down like a menu. You can try different things over time. Most people start with pads because they're simple, but it's good to know all your options."

Overview of Modern Products

Product	What It Is	Pros 👍	Cons 👎
Pads	Sticky strips that attach to underwear.	Easy to use, no insertion, good for first periods, come in many sizes.	Can feel bulky, may shift, not for swimming.
Tampons	Soft, absorbent cylinders inserted into the vagina.	Discreet, allows swimming & sports, no bulk.	Requires practice to insert, must be changed regularly (risk of TSS*).
Menstrual Cups	Small, flexible cups inserted to collect flow.	Eco-friendly, can be worn up to 12 hours, reusable.	Steeper learning curve, requires cleaning, insertion/removal can be messy.
Period Underwear	Absorbent underwear that looks/feels like regular underwear.	Super easy, no inserts to change, great for light days or backup.	Needs washing, may not be enough for heavy flow alone, can be expensive.

TSS = Toxic Shock Syndrome (a very rare but serious infection). We'll talk more about this next.

Tampons: Info for Active Girls

Tampons are a great choice if you're into sports, dance, or swimming, because they're worn internally and you can't feel them when they're in correctly.

Important Things to Know:

- **Start Small & Comfy:** Go for “slender,” “light,” or “teen” sizes to begin. A tampon with a smooth plastic applicator can be the easiest place to start.
- **Change is Key:** Never, ever wear a tampon for more than 8 hours. Changing it regularly is your #1 way to stay safe.
- **Know This Just in Case:** There's something very rare called Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS). This isn't meant to scare you—it's meant to help you feel more empowered. Know the signs: a sudden high fever (like over 102°F), feeling dizzy or like you might vomit, a rash that looks like sunburn, or serious muscle aches.
- **If you feel any of these while using a tampon:** Take it out **right away** and tell a trusted adult immediately. TSS is a medical emergency, but it's also super preventable and treatable when you know what to look for.
- **You Have Options:** If you're just not feeling tampons, that's totally okay! Period swimwear and menstrual cups (often preferred by older teens) can also be great options for swimming.

Q&A: “Choosing for Your Life”

Q: “What should I choose for sports or swimming?”

A: For **swimming**, you’ll need an internal option: a tampon, menstrual cup, or period swimwear. For **other sports**, any product works! Pads are fine, but some girls prefer tampons or period underwear to avoid feeling bulky while running or doing gymnastics. It’s about your personal comfort.

Q: “What if I leak? How do I not panic?”

A: First, remember: **Leaks are normal**. They’re just a sign that your product is full or not positioned correctly.

- **Don’t panic.** Stay calm.
- **Cover up** with a sweater.
- **Change** your product.
- **Learn from it.** Maybe try a heavier absorbency next time, or change more often. It’s just feedback for your body, not a failure.

★ **Big Sis Tip:** It’s okay to use a combination! Many people use tampons for swimming and pads at night, or a pad as a backup with a tampon. Your period, your rules.

Whoever’s in Your Corner: A trusted adult can help you shop for these products and learn how to use them safely. Don’t be afraid to ask, “Can you help me understand the different options?”

💖 **The Bottom Line:** You are in charge. Experiment to find what makes you feel most confident and comfortable during your period. There’s no rush to use anything you’re not ready for.

Staying Clean and Comfortable During Your Period

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: “Is it okay to shower? What do I do with used pads?”

Big Sis: “Absolutely, shower! Good hygiene is extra important now. And don’t worry about disposal—there’s a simple way to handle everything.”

Q&A: “Daily Life Details”

Q: “How do I dispose of pads/tampons properly?”

A: Never flush them (they clog toilets!). Wrap used products in toilet paper or the wrapper of the new one, and put them in the trash bin. Many public bathrooms have special small bins just for this.

Q: “Can I take showers and baths?”

A: Yes! Showering is great. For baths, you might prefer to wear a tampon or menstrual cup, or just take one at the end of your period when flow is lighter. Baths can actually help cramps!

Q: “What about underwear and sleeping?”

A: Wear comfortable, breathable cotton underwear. At night, use a longer, overnight pad or period underwear for extra coverage and peace of mind. Dark-colored sheets are a smart choice!

Cramps, Cravings, and “Weird Feelings”: How to Feel Better

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: “My lower belly just aches. Is that normal?”

Big Sis: “Very normal. Those are menstrual cramps—your uterus is just working hard. And weird moods or cravings? Your hormones are talking. Let’s learn how to listen and feel better.”

What Helps:

- **Heat:** A warm bath or a heating pad on your belly works wonders.
- **Gentle Movement:** A walk or light stretching can ease cramps.
- **Comfort Foods:** It’s okay to listen to your cravings in moderation.
- **Rest:** Your body is doing extra work. It’s okay to slow down.

Q&A: “When to Get Help”

Q: “If my stomach hurts—when do I tell an adult?”

A: Tell an adult if the pain is severe (makes you miss school or activities), isn’t helped by over-the-counter medicine (like ibuprofen, with permission), or if you have pain **plus** fever or vomiting. This could mean something else is going on.

Periods at School, Sports, and Travel

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: “What if I’m on a trip or at soccer practice?”

Big Sis: “With a little prep, your period doesn’t have to change your plans. It’s all about packing your confidence along with your supplies.”

Q&A: “On-the-Go”

Q: “What if my period starts away from home?”

A: This is why your **kit** is so important! If you’re caught without it, don’t be afraid to ask for help. Any trusted adult (a coach, friend’s parent, store clerk) can help you get what you need. Most public restrooms have vending machines.

When You Need a Doctor’s Help: “Red Flags”

Most period issues are normal. But see a doctor if you have:

- **Severe pain** that medication doesn’t help.
- **Very heavy bleeding** (soaking a pad/tampon in **less than 2 hours**).
- **Periods that last longer than 7 days**.
- **No period** by age 15, or if regular periods suddenly stop for 3+ months.
- **Symptoms of TSS** (high fever, rash, dizziness) while using tampons.

Top 5 Urgent Questions (Condensed)

1. **"I leaked at school!"** → Stay calm, cover up, go to the bathroom/nurse, change.
2. **"The cramps are unbearable!"** → Use heat, gentle meds (with permission), tell an adult if it's severe.
3. **"I don't have a pad/tampon!"** → Ask a friend, teacher, nurse, or use folded toilet paper temporarily.
4. **"Can I swim/play sports?"** → YES! Use a tampon, cup, or period swimwear.
5. **"Is this normal?"** → Probably! But if your gut says something's really wrong, always tell a trusted adult.

💖 **Final Big Sis Tip:** Your period is a sign of health. You are learning to care for your body in a new way. Be patient with yourself. You are capable, resilient, and never alone in this.

PART 4: EMOTIONS AND CONFIDENCE

Chapter 10. Emotions: Why They Change and How to Handle Them

Welcome to Part 4! This section is all about your inner world—your feelings and confidence. As your body changes, your emotions might change too, sometimes in surprising ways. That's completely normal. Let's explore why this happens and build your toolkit for feeling balanced.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: "One minute I'm fine, the next I'm crying at a commercial. What's wrong with me?"

Big Sis: "Nothing is wrong with you. Your emotions feel more intense because hormones are reshaping your brain while your body is changing. It's as if the emotional volume has been turned up for a while."

Little Sis: "So I'm not going crazy?"

Big Sis: "Not at all. You're going through puberty. Let's learn how to ride these emotional waves."

Why Emotions Bounce Like a Ball

Your feelings are powered by a team: your **hormones** and your developing **brain**.

Hormones
(Estrogen &
Progesterone)



Travel to
Your Brain



Affect the
"Emotion
Centers"



Your
Feelings!

- **What this means:** These hormones are like special messengers that can make the parts of your brain that handle feelings extra sensitive. This can lead to mood swings—feeling happy, then sad, then frustrated, all in one day.
- **It's temporary:** This adjustment period doesn't last forever. Your brain is learning to process these new, stronger signals.

★ **Big Sis Tip:** When you feel a sudden mood change, try saying to yourself: "This is my hormones talking. I feel this way right now, but the feeling will pass."

Emotional Intelligence: Recognizing and Naming Feelings

A superpower during puberty is **emotional intelligence**—knowing what you’re feeling and why. The first step is simply naming the emotion.

Try This: The Feelings Wheel

Look at the wheel below. Start at the center with a basic feeling (Mad, Sad, Scared, Happy, Disgusted, Surprised). Move outward to find a more specific word that fits exactly.

Why it helps: Saying “I feel overwhelmed” or “I feel left out” is more helpful than just “I feel bad.” It helps you understand yourself and communicate better with others.

Your “Calm Down Toolkit”

When emotions feel too big, you need tools to find your calm center again. Try these strategies and see what works for you.

Tool #1: Breathing Techniques

- **Box Breathing:** Breathe in for 4 counts, hold for 4, breathe out for 4, hold for 4. Repeat.
- **Why it works:** It calms your nervous system instantly.

Tool #2: Move Your Body

- **Shake it out:** Literally shake your hands and arms for 30 seconds.
- **Go for a walk:** Fresh air and movement can reset your mood.
- **Why it works:** It releases pent-up energy and stress chemicals.

Tool #3: Get Creative

- **Doodle or color** without any goal.
- **Write it out** in a private journal (no one ever has to see it!).
- **Why it works:** It lets feelings flow out of you in a safe way.

Tool #4: Talk It Out

- Talk to someone you trust—a friend, sibling, parent, counselor, or even a pet!
- **Why it works:** Sharing a feeling often makes it feel smaller and more manageable.

Whoever's in Your Corner: It's okay to say to the adult you live with, “I'm having really big feelings today, and I need some quiet time.” Good adults will understand and want to support you.

💖 **The Takeaway:** Your changing emotions are a normal part of your growth. By noticing them, naming them, and using your calm-down tools, you're building lifelong skills for resilience, self-awareness, and confidence. You are not your moods—you are the wise person learning to navigate them.

Q&A: “If I’m Overwhelmed Right Now — What Do I Do?”

Sometimes feelings hit hard and fast, and you need a plan right now. These are your go-to answers for when you’re feeling overwhelmed in the moment.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: “I just had a huge fight with my friend, and I feel like I’m going to explode. What can I do *THIS SECOND*?”

Big Sis: “In-the-moment tools are the most important ones. Let’s practice a quick rescue plan, so you always have a way to find your calm, no matter where you are.”

Your “Right Now” Questions, Answered

Q: “How can I calm down in 2 minutes or less?”

A: Use the **5–4–3–2–1 Grounding Technique**. It forces your brain to focus on your senses, not your stress.

- **Look for: 5** things you can see.
- **Notice: 4** things you can feel (your feet on the floor, your shirt sleeve).
- **Listen for: 3** things you can hear.
- **Sniff for: 2** things you can smell.
- **Find: 1** thing you can taste (or take a sip of water).

By the end, your heart rate will slow, and you’ll feel more present.

Q: “When should I tell an adult about my stress or sadness?”

A: It’s always okay to tell an adult you’re having a hard time. But you **SHOULD** tell one **right away** if:

- Your feelings are so strong or last so long that they stop you from doing normal things (like going to school, eating, or sleeping).
- You have thoughts of hurting yourself or someone else.
- You just feel like you can’t handle it alone anymore.

☆ **Big Sis Tip:** You don’t have to have a big, formal talk. You can say:

- “Can I talk to you? I’m feeling really overwhelmed.”
- “I’ve been feeling sad for a while, and I’m not sure why.”
- Text them: “I’m having a tough day.”

The adult you choose—a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, school counselor, or teacher—is there to help, not to judge.

♡ **Remember:** Asking for help with big feelings is a sign of incredible strength and maturity. It means you know yourself well enough to know when you need support. Everyone needs support sometimes.

Worksheet: "My Personal Emotional Toolkit"

Now it's your turn to build a toolkit that's as unique as you are. Think about what truly helps you feel better. Fill this out and keep it somewhere private as your personal guide.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: "The calm-down tools are cool, but which ones are for ME?"

Big Sis: "Exactly! Let's test drive them and see what fits. Your perfect toolkit might be totally different from your best friend's. This worksheet helps you figure that out."

Build Your Toolkit

For each category, check the tools you want to try or already love. Add your own ideas in the blanks!

✓ My Go-To Breathing:

- **4-7-8 Breathing:** Inhale 4 secs, hold 7, exhale 8.
- **Box Breathing** (in-4, hold-4, out-4, hold-4).
- **5-Finger Breathing:** Trace your finger up and down each finger while breathing.
- My own: _____

✓ My Move-It Strategies:

- Dance to one favorite song.
- Go for a quick walk/run.
- Stretch or do yoga poses.
- Jump rope or shoot hoops.
- My own: _____

✓ My Creative Outlets:

- Doodle or color.
- Write in a journal (or rip it up after!).
- Play music or listen to a specific playlist.
- Build or craft something.
- My own: _____

✓ My Comforting People & Things:

- Talk to: _____ (person)
- Hug a pet or stuffed animal.
- Wrap up in a cozy blanket.
- Drink warm tea or cool water.
- My own: _____

★ **My #1 Emergency Plan:** If I'm totally overwhelmed, the first thing I will do is:



Emotion Journal: “What Am I Feeling Today?”

A journal helps you spot patterns and understand your feelings better. You don’t have to write a lot—just a quick note each day for a week.

- **A Quick Sis Chat**
- **Little Sis:** “A whole week? What if I forget?”
- **Big Sis:** “No pressure! Even doing it for two days helps. It’s just a snapshot. You can use emojis, one word, or a quick sentence.”

My 7-Day Check-In

Week of: _____

Day	My Main Feeling (Word or Emoji)	What helped or made it harder? (One note)
Mon		
Tue		
Wed		
Thu		
Fri		
Sat		
Sun		

Look Back: At the end of the week, glance at your chart. Do you see a pattern? Did a certain tool help a lot? Just notice, without judgment.

💖 Big Sis Closing Note:

You are doing amazing work. By building your toolkit and noticing your feelings, you’re becoming the expert on YOU. This is a lifelong superpower for confidence, resilience, and happiness. Keep going!

Chapter 11. Confidence and Body Image: Being Kind to Yourself

Welcome to one of the most important chapters. As your body changes, your thoughts and feelings about it might change too. This chapter is your guide to building unshakable confidence and a kind, realistic relationship with your amazing body.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: “Sometimes I look in the mirror, and I don’t recognize myself. Other times, I feel really good. My thoughts are all over the place!”

Big Sis: “That is the perfect way to describe this time. It’s like you’re getting to know a new friend—your future self! And just like with any friend, the goal is kindness and respect, not perfection. Let’s start by clearing up two key ideas.”

Self-Esteem vs. Body Image: What’s the Difference?

It’s easy to mix these up, but they are different parts of your confidence.

Self-Esteem: Your Inner Compass

- This is how you feel about **WHO YOU ARE** on the inside.
- It’s about valuing your personality, sense of humor, kindness, creativity, intelligence, and efforts.
- **Strong self-esteem sounds like:** “I’m a good friend.” “I worked hard on that project.” “My ideas matter.”

Body Image: Your Mind’s Mirror

- This is how you **THINK and FEEL** about what your body looks like.
- It includes your thoughts about your shape, size, height, hair, skin, and all the changes happening.
- **A positive body image sounds like:** “My body is strong and gets me places.” “All bodies are different, and mine is mine.”

★ **Big Sis Tip:** Your **self-esteem** is your foundation. When it’s strong, a bad body image day (“Ugh, my hair is weird”) doesn’t knock you over, because you know you’re so much more than your hair. The goal is to build up your self-esteem so powerfully that it supports you through any body image ups and downs.

How They Work Together:

Imagine your confidence is a tree.

- **Self-esteem** resembles a tree’s core structure—its roots and trunk—strong, stable, and central to who you are.
- **Body Image** is the **leaves**—they change with the seasons, sometimes vibrant, sometimes falling. They’re affected by the weather (comments, comparisons, mirror moments), but the tree remains standing.

Whoever’s in Your Corner: The adults in your life can help you build strong self-esteem by celebrating your efforts, your character, and your unique strengths. You can tell them, “I’m feeling unsure about my looks lately,” and they can help remind you of all the incredible non-physical things that make you, YOU.

💖 **The Takeaway:** You are not a body with a person attached. You are a wonderful, complex person who has a body. Nurture your inner self (your self-esteem) and practice kindness toward your outer self (your body image). This is the path to true confidence.

How to Respond to Comments About Your Body

Unfortunately, as your body changes, people might feel like they can comment on it. Their comments say more about them than about you. But it can still hurt. Here's your guide on how to handle different situations while protecting your peace.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"My aunt just said, 'Look at you, getting so curvy!' at dinner, and I wanted to disappear. What do I even say?"*

Big Sis: *"That's so uncomfortable, and you have every right to feel that way. People often comment without thinking. Let's plan some responses so you don't feel stuck. You always have the right to set a boundary."*

From Classmates (Teasing or "Jokes")

Scenario: "Whoa, you're getting tall!" or "What's happening there?" (looking at your chest).

- **Your Goal:** Shut it down, show it's not okay, and move on.
- **Simple, strong responses:**
 - ▶ **Direct:** "That's not okay to say." (Then walk away or go back to your work).
 - ▶ **Question:** "Why would you say that?" (This often makes them stammer).
 - ▶ **Boring:** "Okay." or "Thanks, I guess." (Then change the subject).
- **Always:** Tell a trusted adult—a teacher, counselor, or your parent—if the comments are mean, don't stop, or make you feel unsafe. That's not tattling; it's getting help.

From Relatives (Well-Meaning but Hurtful)

Scenario: "You're becoming a woman!" or "You've filled out so much!"

- **The Challenge:** They probably think it's a compliment, but it can make you feel exposed and awkward.
- **Your Goal:** Politely deflect or express your boundary.
- **Responses you can practice:**
 - ▶ **Change the Subject:** "Thanks. How was your trip?"
 - ▶ **Set a Gentle Boundary:** "I'd rather not talk about my body, thanks."
 - ▶ **Use an Ally:** You can tell your parent privately afterward, "It makes me uncomfortable when Aunt Jen comments on my body. Can you help?"

🌟 **Big Sis Tip:** You don't owe anyone a smile or a thank you for a comment that makes you cringe. It's okay to be polite but firm.



On Social Media (Comments, DMs, Comparisons)

Scenario: Seeing perfect photos, getting a mean DM, or comparing your real life to someone's highlight reel.

- **Your Goal:** Protect your mental space and remember reality.

- **Action Plan:**

1. **Curate Your Feed:** Unfollow or mute accounts that make you feel bad about yourself. Follow accounts that celebrate real bodies, hobbies, science, art, and animals.
2. **Respond (or Don't):** For mean DMs, you can **block and report** without engaging. Don't feed the trolls.
3. **The Reality Check:** Remind yourself: **"Social media is a showroom, not real life."** Photos are posed, edited, and filtered. Compare less, create more.
4. **Take a Break:** It's always okay to log off for a day, a week, or as long as you need.

♥ **Remember:** Your body is your private home. You get to decide who gets to make comments about it. Practicing these responses builds your confidence muscle. And always, always talk to a trusted adult if comments are weighing on you—they can provide backup and comfort.

Positive Affirmations (Your Inner Cheerleader)

Affirmations are kind, true statements you say to yourself. They're like planting seeds of confidence in your mind. Try saying one of these (out loud or in your head) every morning or when you need a boost.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"Talking to myself sounds silly. Does it really work?"*

Big Sis: *"It's like exercise for your brain! The more you hear a kind thought, the more you start to believe it. It pushes out the mean, doubtful thoughts. Let's find a few that feel true for you."*

Pick Your Power-Ups!

1. I am more than my looks.
2. My body is strong and capable.
3. I am learning and growing every day.
4. I choose to speak kindly to myself.
5. My feelings are valid and important.
6. I am surrounded by people who care about me.
7. I can handle tough moments.
8. I respect myself and my boundaries.
9. My worth is not determined by a mirror or a scale.
10. I am becoming the best version of me.

★ **Big Sis Tip:** Write your favorite one on a sticky note for your mirror or inside your locker. Seeing it regularly reminds your brain what's truly important.

Media Reality: Picture vs. Real Life

It's time for a behind-the-scenes tour of the images you see online and in magazines. Knowing the truth sets you free from comparison.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"But their skin is perfect, their hair is perfect, everything is perfect. Why don't I look like that?"*

Big Sis: *"Because they don't look like that either! What you're seeing is a carefully crafted illusion—a mix of technology, lighting, and posing. Let's pull back the curtain."*

Important: Myth vs. Fact

MYTH: “The people in pictures and videos online look like that in real life.”

FACT: Filters, editing apps, special lighting, and strategic posing are used by almost everyone. Pores are smoothed, waists are nipped, skin is evened out. You are comparing your real, living self to a digital fantasy. It’s not a fair fight!

MYTH: “Comparing myself to others online helps me see how I *should* look.”

FACT: Comparison is a trap. It steals your joy and focuses you on what you aren’t instead of who you are. The only person you should compare yourself to is the person you were yesterday.

What To Do Instead:

- **Be a Detective:** Ask, “How was this photo made?” Look for signs of editing, perfect lighting, or a pose that hides normal body folds.
- **Follow Real Accounts:** Seek out people who post unedited photos, talk about real life, and celebrate diversity.
- **Create, Don’t Just Consume:** Spend less time scrolling and more time drawing, writing, playing music, or being outside. Your own creativity is infinitely more valuable than passively watching someone else’s highlight reel.

💖 **The Takeaway:** Your real, unfiltered life—with its laughter, friendships, efforts, and yes, even its awkward moments—is beautiful and valuable. Don’t trade it for a filtered fantasy.

Practice: "Media Reality Check" Worksheet

This isn't a test—it's a detective mission. Use these questions the next time you're scrolling or see an ad and start to feel that "not good enough" feeling. Becoming a critical thinker about media is a superpower for your confidence.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: "Okay, I know it's not all real... but how do I actually remember that in the moment?"

Big Sis: "That's where this worksheet comes in! It gives your brain a job to do—to investigate instead of just compare. Let's turn you into a super-sleuth of social media."

Your Investigator's Notebook

Think of a recent photo, video, or ad that made you pause (maybe it was "perfect" or made you wish you looked different).

1. The Basic Facts:

Where did you see this image? (Instagram, TikTok, ad, etc.):

Who posted it? (A friend, celebrity, company?):

2. The Detective Work:

- **What's the goal here?** (Circle what fits)
 - ▶ To sell me something (clothes, makeup, a product).
 - ▶ To get more likes/followers.
 - ▶ To share a fun moment.
 - ▶ I'm not sure.
- **What might be edited or enhanced?** (Check all you notice or suspect)
 - ▶ Skin texture (looks too smooth)
 - ▶ Body shape/size
 - ▶ Lighting is super flattering/studio-like
 - ▶ A filter is clearly used
 - ▶ The background/pose hides things
 - ▶ It looks like a professional photoshoot

3. The Reality Reminder:

- What's **one thing** this image doesn't show about real life?
(Example: It doesn't show the 50 other photos they didn't post, the uncomfortable pose, or how they feel when they wake up.)
-
- What's **one thing** you like about your own real, unedited life right now?
(Example: My dog's silly personality, the taste of my favorite snack, laughing with my friend.)
-

4. My Action Step:

Based on my detective work, I will...

- **Mute or unfollow** this account if it often makes me feel bad.
- **Take a 24-hour break** from this app.
- **Go do something real** right now (read, draw, walk, call a friend).
- **Remind myself:** “This is a creation, not a standard.”



Big Sis Closing Note:

EXCELLENT DETECTIVE WORK! By asking these questions, you’ve just taken back your power. You’re no longer a passive viewer—you’re an active, smart critic. The more you practice this, the less power those perfect pictures will have over how you feel about your wonderful, real self.

Q&A: “Stretch Marks, Weight, Mirrors – What’s Normal?”

These are some of the most common worries about the body’s landscape during puberty. If you’ve looked in the mirror and wondered about these things, you are in very good company. Let’s talk facts.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *“I have these silvery lines on my hips. Are they... bad?”*

Big Sis: *“Those are your body’s love notes! They’re called stretch marks, and they’re incredibly common. They’re proof that your skin stretched quickly as you grew taller or your shape changed. Think of them like nature’s glitter stripes—totally normal and nothing to worry about.”*

Your Questions, Answered

Q: “If I have stretch marks or skin that isn’t ‘perfect’—is that normal?”

A: It is more than normal—it is universal! Almost everyone gets stretch marks, especially during growth spurts in puberty. They can appear on the hips, thighs, breasts, and buttocks. They start pink/purple and fade to silvery-white over time. As for skin, “perfect” skin is a myth. Real skin has texture, a few marks, freckles, and pores. It’s a living organ, not a plastic doll. Yours is working perfectly.

Q: “I feel like my weight is always changing. Is that okay?”

A: Yes, it is part of the process. Remember, your body is preparing for a growth spurt and building curves. Weight can fluctuate (go up and down) for many reasons: growth, hormones, muscle development, and even water retention. It’s a sign your body is dynamic and alive. **Your job is to nourish it, move it joyfully, and rest it—not to police a number on a scale.**

Q: “What do I say when someone comments on my body?”

A: This puts you on the spot, but you have power in your response. Remember: **You do not have to justify your body to anyone.**

- **For unwanted “compliments”** (“You’re getting so tall/curvy!”):
 - ▶ A simple, flat **“Okay,”** or **“Thanks, I guess,”** and then change the subject.
 - ▶ A polite boundary: **“I’d rather not talk about my body.”**
- **For rude or teasing comments:**
 - ▶ A firm: **“That’s not okay to say.”**
 - ▶ A question: **“Why would you say that?”**
 - ▶ Then, walk away and **tell a trusted adult.** You shouldn’t have to manage meanness alone.

★ **Big Sis Tip:** Practice your responses in the mirror. It makes them easier to say in the moment. And always remember: A comment about your body reflects the other person’s thoughts, not your worth.

Whoever’s in Your Corner: If comments from family members are hurtful, you can ask a parent or guardian you trust for backup. You can say, “It makes me feel weird when Grandma talks about my weight. Can you help me talk to her about it?”

♡ **Remember:** Your body’s job is to carry you, to grow, to experience life. Stretch marks are signs of that growth. Weight changes are signs of that life. Your worth is constant, no matter what the mirror or anyone else says in a fleeting moment.

Worksheet: "Three Things I Love About Myself"

This is your celebration page. It's easy to focus on what you want to change. This exercise is about shifting that focus to appreciation. These things don't have to be about your looks—in fact, it's even better if they're not!

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: "Three things? What if I can only think of one?"

Big Sis: "Start with one! The point is to begin noticing the wonderful things that make you, YOU. They can be tiny, like 'I make great hot chocolate,' or big, like 'I stand up for my friends.' There are no wrong answers."

My Appreciation List

Instructions: In each box below, write or draw one thing you love, like, or appreciate about yourself. Need ideas? Think about: your personality, your skills, your sense of humor, your efforts, your heart.

Thing 1:

(Example: I am a really loyal friend.)

Thing 2:

(Example: I am curious and love learning new facts.)

Thing 3:

(Example: I am good at making people laugh.)

★ **Big Sis Challenge:** Try to add one new thing to this list each month. Tuck this page in your journal or pin it up where you can see it.

★ Big Sis Closing Note for Part 4:

YOU DID IT! You've just completed an incredible journey through your emotions and confidence. You've learned that your feelings are normal, your changing body is worthy of kindness, and your worth is unshakable. You are building the foundation for a lifetime of self-respect. Be proud of yourself!

PART 5: FRIENDSHIP, FAMILY, BOUNDARIES

Chapter 12. Friendships Change – And That’s Okay

Welcome to Part 5! As you change, it makes sense that your friendships might change too. This can feel confusing or sad, but it’s a normal part of growing up. This chapter is your guide to navigating friendship shifts with confidence and care.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *“My best friend from last year just wants to hang out with different people now. Did I do something wrong?”*

Big Sis: *“Probably not. Just like you’re discovering new things about yourself, your friends are too. Sometimes people grow in the same direction, and sometimes they grow apart. It doesn’t mean anyone is ‘wrong’—it just means you’re both becoming your own unique people.”*

Why Friendships Shift During Puberty

- **Different Speeds:** You or a friend might start puberty earlier, bringing new interests, moods, or social circles.
- **New Interests:** You might get into art while your friend gets into sports. Different hobbies can lead to different friends.
- **Personality Growth:** You’re figuring out who you are! You might gravitate toward people who share your emerging values or sense of humor.
- **It’s Practice:** These shifts are practice for adulthood, where you’ll naturally make different friends at different life stages.

★ **Big Sis Tip:** A changing friendship doesn’t erase the good times you had. You can be grateful for the friend they were, while making space for new connections.



Conflicts, Gossip, Drama: How to Handle It

Conflict is normal, but how you handle it matters. Here’s a step-by-step guide for resolving friend fights:

Step 1: Cool Off. Don’t try to solve things when you’re super angry or upset. Take some deep breaths or take a break.

Step 2: Use “I Feel” Statements. When you talk, focus on your feelings, not blaming them.

- **Say:** “I felt upset when I heard that,” instead of, “You were so unkind.”

Step 3: Listen. Let them share their side without interrupting. Try to understand their perspective.

Step 4: Find a Solution. Ask, “How can we fix this?” or “What can we do differently next time?”

Step 5: Move Forward. Decide if you can forgive and rebuild trust, or if you need some space from the friendship.

What About Gossip? If you hear a rumor, don’t pass it on. You can say, “I don’t feel right talking about someone who isn’t here.” It takes courage, but it earns respect.

Healthy vs. Unhealthy Friendship: The Signs

How do you know if a friendship is good for you? Check this list.

Healthy Friendship	Unhealthy Friendship
You feel safe, supported, and like you can be yourself.	You feel anxious, put down, or like you have to pretend.
You both celebrate each other’s successes.	They get jealous or competitive when good things happen to you.
Conflicts are resolved with respect.	Fights involve name-calling, gossip, or the silent treatment.
You can say “no” or have different opinions without fear.	They pressure you or get mad if you don’t do what they want.
Trust is a foundation. You believe what they say.	You often catch them in lies or talking behind your back.

Whoever’s in Your Corner: If a friendship is making you feel bad more often than good, talk to a trusted adult. They can help you sort out your feelings and make a plan. You can say, “My friendship with [name] is really stressing me out. Can I talk to you about it?”

 **The Takeaway:** Your feelings are your best guide. A true friend should add to your happiness and confidence, not subtract from it. It’s okay to outgrow friendships, and it’s brave to choose ones that make you feel good.

Practice: Peer Pressure – Phrases to Say No

Peer pressure is when friends (or classmates) try to get you to do something you don't want to do. It can feel really hard to say no. Having a few simple phrases ready is like having a superpower. Practice these so they feel natural.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"What if they call me boring or a baby for saying no?"*

Big Sis: *"A real friend respects your 'no.' And anyone who calls you names for having boundaries is showing you they're not a good friend. Saying no takes courage, and these phrases help you do it without a big confrontation."*

Your "Say No" Scripts:

1. **The Simple No:** "No, thanks." (You don't owe anyone an explanation).
2. **The Truthful No:** "I'm not comfortable with that."
3. **The Rule-Based No:** "My parents/guardians would not be okay with that."
4. **The Future-Focused No:** "I don't want to risk [getting in trouble / hurting someone / feeling bad]."
5. **The Deflective No:** "Nah, I'm good. Let's do something else instead."
6. **The Team No:** "My friend and I said we'd stick together on this."
7. **The Walking No:** Say nothing, shake your head, and walk away.
8. **The Broken Record:** Keep repeating your simple "No, thanks" if they keep asking.

★ **Big Sis Tip:** Pair your words with confident body language: stand tall, make eye contact, and keep your voice calm and firm.

Q&A: "Tough Friendship Situations"

Q: "How do I know if it's bullying or 'just jokes'?"

A: A **joke** makes everyone laugh, including the person it's about. **Bullying** is hurtful, repeated, and makes the target feel powerless, sad, or scared. If it feels mean, happens over and over, and the person won't stop when asked, it's bullying. Trust your gut.

Q: "How do I ask an adult at school for help?"

A: It can feel scary, but adults are there to help. You can:

- Ask to speak privately.
- Be clear: **"I need help with a problem with some kids."** or **"Someone is bullying me/leaving me out."**
- You can write it down and hand the note to a teacher or counselor if saying it is too hard.
- Remember: Telling is **not** tattling. Tattling is getting someone in trouble. Telling is to get yourself or someone else out of trouble.

Worksheet: "My Values in Friendship"

What matters most to you in a friend? Knowing your values helps you choose friends who are truly good for you and recognize when a friendship isn't working.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: "How do I even know what I want in a friend?"

Big Sis: "Think about how you want to feel when you're with them. That's your clue! This worksheet helps you turn those feelings into a guide."

Instructions: Read the list below. Put a **star** (☆) next to your top 3–5 most important values in a friend.

My Friendship Values List:

- **Trustworthiness:** I can tell them secrets, and they won't spread them.
- **Kindness:** They are caring and considerate.
- **Respect:** They respect my opinions, my time, and my boundaries.
- **Fun:** We laugh together and have a good time.
- **Support:** They cheer me on and are there when I'm sad.
- **Honesty:** They tell me the truth, kindly.
- **Loyalty:** They stick up for me and don't drop me for cooler people.
- **Shared Interests:** We like some of the same things.

My Top Value is: _____

My Friendship Mission Statement:

Based on my values, a good friend is someone who makes me feel:

Keep this list.
It's your
compass
for healthy
friendships.

💖 **Chapter Closing Note:** You are learning to be a great friend to others and to yourself. That is one of the most important skills you'll ever build. Trust your instincts—you know more than you think you do.

Chapter 13. Family and Safe Adults: Who to Talk to

Everyone needs a support team—people who are safe, trustworthy, and on your side. As you go through changes, knowing who you can talk to is your secret weapon. This chapter will help you map out your team and learn how to start those important conversations.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *“What if I don’t feel comfortable talking to my parents about certain things?”*

Big Sis: *“That’s perfectly okay and normal. Your support team can include lots of different people. The important thing is that you do talk to someone you trust. You don’t have to figure everything out alone.”*

Safe Spaces: Where to Find Support

Your support team is your personal safety net. It’s a group of people and places where you feel heard and respected.

Who Might Be on Your Team?

- **Family:** Parents, guardians, grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings, or cousins.
- **School:** A favorite teacher, school counselor, coach, or nurse.
- **Community:** A mentor, a leader in an activity you love (like arts or sports), or the parent of a close friend.
- **Professionals:** Your doctor or a therapist.

★ **Big Sis Tip:** A “safe adult” is someone who listens without judgment, respects your privacy, and wants to help you, not just control you. Trust your gut feeling about who that is.

Practice: How to Start a Tough Conversation

Starting the talk is often the hardest part. Here are scripts for three common scenarios.

Scenario 1: Asking for Help with Body Changes

- **You:** “Hey [Parent/Guardian], can I talk to you about something that’s been on my mind? I’ve been noticing some body changes, and I have some questions.”
- **Why it works:** It’s clear, respectful, and tells them exactly what you need.

Scenario 2: Talking About Friendship Drama or Bullying

- **You:** “I’m having a problem with some friends at school, and I’m not sure how to handle it. Can I get your advice?”
- **Why it works:** It shows you trust their judgment and frames it as asking for advice, which can feel easier.

Scenario 3: Asking for Privacy or New Boundaries

- **You:** “As I’m getting older, I’m starting to feel like I need a little more privacy sometimes. Can we talk about that?”
- **Why it works:** It’s mature, non-accusatory, and opens a negotiation instead of a fight.

🌟 Mini-Story from Chloe, Age 12:

“I needed my first bra, and the only person to ask was my dad. The thought of saying the word ‘bra’ to him made me want to disappear. I felt so awkward. Then I remembered the conversation scripts in this book. I picked one and just practiced it in my head like a secret mantra.

After dinner one night, before I could lose my nerve, I just said it: ‘Dad, I need to talk about getting some new clothes... like, for bras.’

I held my breath. He just looked up from his phone, nodded, and said, ‘Okay, no problem. We’ll make a list, and your Aunt Sarah can take you shopping this weekend.’ And that was it. He went right back to what he was doing.

*All that worry and build-up in my head... and it was no big deal at all. **Having those first words ready was like a key—it unlocked the conversation that I was so scared to start.***

🌟 Mini-Story from Amara, Age 12

“I live with my single dad and my older brother. My dad is the best, but honestly? The idea of talking to him about period stuff felt so awkward. I kept avoiding it, even when I knew I needed to get ready.

One day at the store, my brother saw me staring at the pad aisle like it was a math final. He just shrugged and said, ‘Seriously, just take a picture of the box you want and text it to him. Dad’s cool. He just wants the info.’

So I did it. Right there in the aisle, I snapped a photo of the box and texted it to my dad with a message: ‘Can you grab these for me, please?’

He replied with a thumbs-up emoji.

*That night, the box was on my bed with a little sticky note that said: ‘**Let me know if you need anything else. Love, Dad.**’*

*It hit me then: **He wasn’t the one making it weird—I was.** He just wanted to help. And finding a simple, low-pressure way to ask (thank you, technology!) made all the difference.”*

Q&A: “Finding Your Support”

Q: “Who can be a ‘safe adult’ besides my parents?”

A: Any trusted adult who is consistent, responsible, and cares about your well-being. This could be: an aunt or uncle, a grandparent, your school counselor, a coach who always listens, or even a friend’s parent you feel close to. Look for someone who makes you feel safe, not nervous.

Q: “Can I ask for more privacy—and how?”

A: Absolutely. Needing more privacy is a normal part of becoming a teenager.

- **How to ask:** Choose a calm time. Be clear and polite. “I’m working on being more independent. Would it be okay if I [had private time in my room after homework / knocked before coming into my room]?” Explain it’s about your growing maturity, not about hiding things.

Worksheet: "My Support Map"

Let's make your support network visible! Draw or write the names of the people and places you can turn to in different situations.

In the center circle, write or draw: ME

In the surrounding circles/branches, fill in:

- **For Body/Puberty Questions:** _____
- **For Friendship Drama:** _____
- **For Big Feelings/Sadness:** _____
- **For Just Fun & Laughter:** _____
- **For Emergency Help:** _____
(e.g., school nurse, doctor)
- **My Safe Place to Be Alone:** _____
(e.g., my room, the library, a park bench)

 **Chapter Closing Note:** Knowing who to turn to is a sign of strength and wisdom. You are building a web of support that will hold you steady through all of life's changes. Look at your map—you are not alone.

Chapter 14. Your Body, Your Rules: Boundaries and the Online World

This chapter is about a superpower: the right to decide what happens to your body, your feelings, and your time. As you grow older, understanding and setting boundaries is the key to staying safe, feeling respected, and building healthy relationships both in person and online.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: “What does ‘body autonomy’ even mean? It sounds like a science term.”

Big Sis: “It’s a powerful human right. It means you are the boss of your own body. No one can touch you, hug you, kiss you, or make you feel uncomfortable without your clear, happy ‘YES.’ Not even family. It’s the foundation of all safety and respect.”

What Is Body Autonomy and Why It Matters

- **Body Autonomy** is your absolute right to control what happens to your body. It means:
 - **You decide** who can hug or touch you.
 - **You decide** who sees you changing or bathing.
 - **You decide** when and how to talk about your body.

Why It Matters: It teaches others how to treat you. When you know you have this right, you can spot when someone is disrespecting it. It’s your first line of defense. This right is yours no matter your age, your family situation, or who you’re with.

Types of Boundaries (Your Personal Force Field)

Boundaries are the rules and limits you set to protect your well-being. They come in different forms:

- **Physical Boundaries:** About your body and space.
 - ▶ *Examples:* “I don’t like hugs; can we fist-bump?” “I need to knock before entering my room.”
- **Emotional Boundaries:** About your feelings and energy.
 - ▶ *Examples:* “I can’t listen to gossip about my friend.” “I need to take a break from this stressful conversation.”
- **Social/Digital Boundaries:** About your time, attention, and online life.
 - ▶ *Examples:* “I won’t answer messages after 9 PM.” “I don’t share my passwords.” “Please don’t tag me in photos without asking.”

Non-Negotiables vs. Flexible Boundaries

Not all boundaries are the same. Knowing the difference helps you know when to stand firm and when you can be flexible.

Non-Negotiable Boundaries (The Steel Door)

These are your absolute rules, especially for safety. **They should never be crossed, and you should never feel bad for enforcing them.** If someone breaks these, tell a trusted adult immediately.

- *Examples:* No one should touch your private parts without your consent. No one should pressure you to send pictures. No one should make you keep scary secrets.

Flexible Boundaries (The Garden Gate)

These are your personal preferences. You can open or close them depending on the person, situation, and how you feel. It's okay to change your mind.

- *Examples:* You might hug your grandma but not your uncle. You might share your feelings with your best friend, but not a classmate. You might play video games for an hour on weekends but not on school nights.

 **Big Sis Tip:** Your **gut feeling** is your best guide. If a situation makes you feel icky, scared, or pressured, that's a signal that a boundary is being pushed. Listen to it. It's not "drama"—it's your inner wisdom.

Whoever's in Your Corner: You have the right to set boundaries with anyone, including family members. A safe adult will respect a clear, polite boundary like, "I'd prefer a high-five today." If setting a boundary causes a big problem at home, that's a sign to talk to another trusted adult (like a school counselor) for support.

Learning to Say "No"

Knowing you can set a boundary is one thing. Actually saying the words can feel scary. This page is your toolkit for speaking up with confidence and dealing with the feelings that come after.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"But if I say no, they might think I'm rude or get mad at me. I don't want to be mean."*

Big Sis: *"There's a huge difference between being assertive (standing up for yourself) and being aggressive (attacking someone). Saying 'no' clearly and politely is a sign of self-respect. A good friend or a safe adult will respect it, even if they're a little disappointed."*

Learning to Say "No"

Knowing you can set a boundary is one thing. Actually saying the words can feel scary. This page is your toolkit for speaking up with confidence and dealing with the feelings that come after.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"But if I say no, they might think I'm rude or get mad at me. I don't want to be mean."*

Big Sis: *"There's a huge difference between being assertive (standing up for yourself) and being aggressive (attacking someone). Saying 'no' clearly and politely is a sign of self-respect. A good friend or a safe adult will respect it, even if they're a little disappointed."*

The Difference Between “Being Nice” and “Being a People-Pleaser”

- **Being Nice** is about kindness. It’s voluntary. You choose to help or agree because you want to, and it feels good. You can still say no.
- **People-Pleasing** is about fear. You say yes because you’re afraid of conflict, rejection, or someone’s anger. You ignore your own needs to keep others happy.

★ **Big Sis Tip:** If you feel anxious, resentful, or drained after saying “yes,” it was probably people-pleasing. If you feel warm, happy, and genuine, it was being nice.

Handling Guilt

It’s natural to feel a little guilt when you begin setting boundaries. Often, that feeling is just your old habit of pleasing others pushing back! Remind yourself:

- **“My needs are important too.”**
- **“A real friend will respect my limits.”**
- **“I am not responsible for managing other people’s emotions.”**

The guilt will fade as you practice and see that the world doesn’t end when you say no.

Practice: “My Personal Boundary Statements”

This worksheet helps you build your own scripts. Fill in the blanks with what feels true for you.

Step 1: Choose Your Scenarios.

For each situation below, circle the script starter that feels most like you, or write your own.

1. Physical Touch (e.g., unwanted hug):

- “I’m not really a hugger. How about a _____?”
- “I need a little more space right now, thanks.”
- My phrase: _____

2. Emotional Energy (e.g., friend dumping drama):

- “I care about you, but I don’t have the mental space for this conversation right now.”
- “That sounds really hard. Can we talk about something lighter for a bit?”
- My phrase: _____

3. Digital/Social (e.g., asked to share password):

- “I don’t share my passwords with anyone. It’s my personal rule.”
- “No, thanks. I like to keep my accounts private.”
- My phrase: _____

Step 2: My Empowerment Statement.

When I feel guilty for saying no, I will remind myself:

“I have the right to _____.”

(Example: ...protect my peace / decide what happens to my body / take a break.)

💖 **Big Sis Closing Note:** Saying “no” is a muscle—the more you use it, the stronger it gets. You are teaching people how to treat you, and you are honoring your own worth. That is one of the bravest things you can do.

Social Media: “Scroll Like a Pro”

Your digital life is an extension of your real life. The same boundaries and self-respect apply here. Let’s learn how to navigate social media like a pro—protecting your peace, your privacy, and your self-esteem.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *“Everyone’s life online looks so perfect. And then there are these weird comments sometimes... it’s a lot.”*

Big Sis: *“Exactly. It’s a curated world, not real life. And just like in the hallway at school, you have the power to block out the noise and protect your space. Let’s get you the tools to be in control.”*

Reality vs. Picture

Remember: Social media is a highlight reel, not a documentary.

- That “perfect” photo involved angles, lighting, and probably many deleted tries.
- Filters smooth skin, reshape faces, and alter reality.
- People post their best moments, not their average Tuesday.

Scroll with this question: “Is this making me feel inspired or inadequate?” If it’s the latter, it’s time to mute or unfollow.

Body Comments Online

Your body is not up for public discussion. Period.

- **On your own posts:** Delete or hide any comment about your body that makes you uncomfortable. You can turn off comments altogether.
- **On others’ posts:** Do not comment on anyone else’s body—even as a “compliment.” It fuels comparison culture.
- **In DMs:** If someone sends an unwanted comment about your body, you do not need to respond. **Screenshot it, block them, and tell a trusted adult.** This is enforcing a digital boundary.

Healthy Habits in the Digital World

- **Curate Your Feed:** Your follow list is your choice. Fill it with accounts that make you feel good—art, animals, hobbies, activists, friends who keep it real.
- **Set Time Limits:** Use app timers. Scrolling mindlessly for hours drains your mood and time.
- **Privacy Settings:** Regularly check them. Set accounts to private. Be selective about who you accept.
- **The Pause Before You Post:** Ask: “Why am I posting this? Who is it for? Could this hurt me or someone else?”

Practice: Card “What to Do If There’s an Online Threat”

EMERGENCY DIGITAL PROTOCOL

If someone online:

- Threatens you
- Asks for inappropriate photos
- Requests a face-to-face meeting
- Won’t stop harassing you after you’ve said no



DO THIS:

1. **DO NOT RESPOND.**
2. **SCREENSHOT EVERYTHING.** (Evidence is key).
3. **BLOCK THE PERSON/ACCOUNT.**
4. **REPORT** the account to the platform.
5. **TELL A TRUSTED ADULT IMMEDIATELY.** (Show them the screenshots).

This is not an overreaction. This is being smart and safe.

Remember: You have not done anything wrong by receiving a threatening message. The person sending it is in the wrong. Adults are there to help you handle it.

Whoever’s in Your Corner: The adult you tell might be a parent, guardian, aunt, older sibling, or school counselor. You can say, “I got a really scary message online, and I need help.” A safe adult will want to know.

Q&A: "If I Feel Uncomfortable Online..."

These are the "what now" questions for online situations. Knowing exactly what to do takes the panic out of the moment.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"What if I get a creepy DM? I'd be too embarrassed to show anyone."*

Big Sis: *"That feeling is exactly what the sender is counting on—to keep you quiet. But you have nothing to be embarrassed about. You didn't ask for it. Showing an adult is the strongest thing you can do."*

Q: "If someone sends me unpleasant messages—what do I do?"

A: Follow the "S.S.B.R.T." Rule.

- **S**creenshot (Take a picture of the message for evidence).
- **S**top (Do NOT reply. Engaging often makes it worse).
- **B**lock (Block the account immediately).
- **R**eport (Report the account/content to the app).
- **T**ell (Tell a trusted adult. Show them the screenshot).

Q: "Who do I show the messages to if I'm worried?"

A: Show them to **any trusted adult who will take it seriously and help you.** This could be:

- A parent or guardian.
- An aunt, uncle, or older cousin.
- A school counselor, teacher, or coach.
- **If the first adult you tell brushes it off, tell another one.** Your safety and comfort matter.

★ **Big Sis Tip:** You are never "overreacting" or "causing drama" by reporting a message that scares you or makes your stomach drop. Trust your gut. It's your built-in alarm system.

Worksheet: "My Personal Boundaries"

This is your personal contract with yourself. Writing down your boundaries makes them clearer in your mind and gives you a script to use in real life.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"It feels weird to write rules for myself."*

Big Sis: *"Think of it as a user manual for how to be treated. You're the CEO of You, Inc. This is your company policy!"*

My Personal Boundary Statements

Physical Boundaries:

- I am okay with this kind of touch from close family:

- I prefer this greeting from friends/acquaintances:

-
- My body is private. I will not share photos of it with anyone online.

Emotional Boundaries:

- It is okay for me to say, "I don't have the energy to talk about that right now."
- I will not let someone pressure me into a secret that makes me uncomfortable.
- I value friendships where we _____
(e.g., lift each other up).

Digital/Social Boundaries:

- I will log off by _____ p.m. on school nights.
- I will not respond to messages from people I don't know.
- I have the right to delete comments or block anyone who makes me feel bad online.

My Support Promise:

If one of my boundaries is crossed and I feel scared or unsure, I promise to tell:

Name: _____

Back-Up Person: _____



Chapter Closing Note: You have just done powerful work. By defining your boundaries, you are building a life where you feel respected, safe, and free to be yourself. Carry this confidence with you everywhere—in the halls, at home, and in every scroll.

Sign your name here as a promise to yourself:

Signed, _____

PART 6: A STRONG BODY AND YOUR FUTURE

Chapter 15. Strong Body: Nutrition, Movement, Sleep (No Diets, No Shame)

Welcome to the final part of your journey! This section is all about building a strong, healthy future. Forget diets and shame—this is about giving your amazing, growing body the love and fuel it deserves to feel its best.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"Everyone talks about 'eating right,' but it just feels like a list of rules. And I feel hungry ALL the time now!"*

Big Sis: *"That constant hunger is a clue! Your body is building a whole new you—bones are lengthening, muscles are growing, and your brain is developing. It needs more fuel, and the right kinds of fuel. Think of food as your body's building materials and energy source, not as 'good' or 'bad.'"*

Why Nutrition Matters During Growth

Right now, your body isn't just maintaining itself—it's doing major construction. Good nutrition provides:

- **Energy:** To get through your busy days of school, friends, and activities.
- **Building Blocks:** For strong bones, healthy organs, and developing muscles.
- **Brain Power:** To help you focus, learn, and manage those big emotions.

The Goal: Variety and Balance. Eat a rainbow of foods when you can. Listen to your hunger and fullness cues. Food is not a reward or a punishment—it's necessary and can be joyful.

Important: A Note on Weight

MYTH: "Gaining weight before or during puberty means you're unhealthy."

FACT: **Weight gain is a normal, expected, and healthy part of puberty.** Your body is preparing for a growth spurt by storing energy. It's also developing curves, breasts, and muscle. The number on the scale is less important than how you feel—energized, strong, and capable. Your changing shape is a sign of health, not something to fear.

Basic Nutrient Helpers

Think of these as your body's special construction crews. Here's what they do and where to find them.



PROTEIN (The Builder)

- **Job:** Builds and repairs muscles, organs, and tissues.
- **Find it in:** Chicken, fish, beans, lentils, nuts, eggs, tofu, yogurt.



CALCIUM + VITAMIN D (The Bone Crew)

- **Job:** Team up to build dense, strong bones for life.
- **Find it in:**
 - ▶ Calcium: Milk, cheese, yogurt, fortified plant milks, leafy greens (like kale).
 - ▶ Vitamin D: Sunshine! Also in fatty fish, egg yolks, and fortified foods.



IRON (The Oxygen Mover)

- **Job:** Helps red blood cells carry oxygen to your muscles and brain. (Extra important once you start your period!)
- **Find it in:** Red meat, beans, lentils, spinach, fortified cereals, tofu.



WATER (The Essential Transport)

- **Job:** Carries nutrients, regulates temperature, keeps every system running.
- **Find it in:** Water! Also in fruits (like watermelon, oranges), vegetables (like cucumber, lettuce), milk, or plant-based beverages.



Big Sis Tip: You don't need to memorize lists. Just aim for a colorful plate: some protein, some grains, and lots of fruits and veggies. Drink water when you're thirsty. It's that simple.

Whoever's in Your Corner: The adults in your home are your partners in this. You can say, "I learned we need more iron and calcium during growth spurts. Can we make sure we have some snacks with those?" It starts a positive conversation about fueling your future.

Healthy Eating Habits (No Diets!)

Forget about restrictive diets, “good” foods, and “bad” foods. A healthy relationship with food is one of the best gifts you can give your growing body and mind. This is about tuning in, not cutting out.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *“But what about ‘clean eating’ or cutting out sugar? Everyone online is doing some kind of diet.”*

Big Sis: *“Diets are often disguised as ‘healthy,’ but their main goal is usually to make your body smaller, not stronger. During puberty, your body needs permission to grow in every way. Restricting food can actually stunt your growth, hurt your bones, and mess with your mood. Your job is to nourish, not punish.”*

What Healthy Habits Actually Look Like:

- **Listen to Your Body:** Eat when you’re hungry, stop when you’re comfortably full. Your hunger cues are your best guide.
- **Eat Regularly:** Don’t skip meals, especially breakfast. It keeps your energy and mood stable.
- **Enjoy All Foods:** A cookie isn’t a “cheat.” Pizza isn’t “bad.” All foods can fit. It’s about balance over time, not one single meal.
- **Eat for Energy & Joy:** Ask: “Will this help me feel energized for my day?” and “Do I enjoy eating this?”
- **Notice How Food Makes You Feel:** Does a heavy meal before sports make you sluggish? Does skipping lunch make you cranky? Use that info to make choices that serve you.

The Red Flags of Diet Culture:

- Labeling foods as “good” or “bad.”
- Feeling guilt or shame after eating.
- Cutting out entire food groups (like carbs) without a medical reason.
- Talking constantly about weight loss or “burning off” food.

★ **Big Sis Tip:** If you find yourself constantly thinking about food, weight, or your body shape, talk to a trusted adult. This could be a sign that you need support to build a healthier mindset.

Whoever’s in Your Corner: Every family has different foods available and different traditions. The adult who does the shopping and cooking is your teammate. You can say, “I’m trying to listen to my hunger better. Can we make sure we have some easy snacks like fruit or nuts around?” This focuses on adding nourishment, not taking things away.

Q&A: “About Food, Weight, Appetite”

These are the real, everyday questions about food and your changing body. If you're thinking them, thousands of other girls are too. Let's clear up the confusion with facts and kindness.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: “My appetite is all over the place! And my jeans fit differently every month. Is my body broken?”

Big Sis: “Not at all! It's the opposite—it's a sign your body is brilliantly alive and responding to its needs. Let's translate what your body is trying to tell you.”

Q: “Why do I sometimes want to eat way more?”

A: This is your body's wise fuel-gathering system! A sudden increase in appetite often means:

1. **A growth spurt is coming.** Your body needs extra materials (calories and nutrients) to build new bone, muscle, and tissue.
2. **You're more active.** Sports, walking more, and even a busy day at school burn energy.
3. **Hormonal shifts.** Especially around your period, your body may crave more energy.

The takeaway: Honor that hunger. Choose snacks that combine protein and carbs (like an apple with peanut butter or cheese and crackers) to give you lasting energy.

Q: “If my weight changes—is that always bad?”

A: No. Weight fluctuation is a normal, healthy part of being a human with a dynamic, living body. Your weight can change because of:

- Growth spurts (muscle and bone weigh more than fat).
- Hormonal cycles (water retention is normal).
- Time of day, what you've eaten, or how much you've exercised.

Focus on how you feel: Are you strong? Do you have energy? Can you concentrate? These are better signs of health than any number on a scale.

Q: “What does ‘food for energy’ mean, not diet?”

A: A **diet** focuses on rules, restrictions, and changing your body's size. **“Food for energy”** is a mindset shift. It asks:

- **“What will give me steady energy for my math test?”** (Maybe oatmeal, not just candy).
- **“What will help my muscles recover after soccer?”** (Maybe a turkey sandwich, not just chips).
- **“What sounds satisfying and enjoyable right now?”** (Maybe both the salad and the cookie).

It's about choosing foods that help you live your life fully and feel your best, not about shrinking yourself.

★ **Big Sis Tip:** If you hear a voice in your head calling foods “good” or “bad,” gently correct it. Try: “This is a food that gives me quick energy” or “This is a food I eat for celebration and joy.” All foods have a place.

Whoever's in Your Corner: If conversations about weight or dieting are common in your home and make you anxious, it's okay to set a boundary. You can say, “Talking about weight makes me feel stressed. Can we focus on how our bodies feel and what they can do instead?”

Physical Activity and Sports

Movement is a celebration, not a punishment. It's about feeling the power of your own body, managing stress, having fun, and building strength—inside and out.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"I'm not the 'sporty' type. Does that mean I'm not healthy?"*

Big Sis: *"Absolutely not! Being active isn't just about teams and competition. It's about finding ways to move that make YOU feel good. That could be dancing in your room, hiking, yoga, skateboarding, or walking a dog. The goal is to feel energized and strong, not to fit a certain label."*

Why Move Your Body?

- **Mood Booster:** Releases chemicals that help you feel happier and less stressed.
- **Strength Builder:** Builds muscle and strong bones for lifelong health.
- **Energy Giver:** Improves sleep and overall stamina.
- **Social Fun:** Can be a great way to connect with friends.

The Golden Rule: Find joy in movement. If you dread it, try something different!

Safety in Sports

Having fun also means staying safe. As your body changes, you may need to adjust how you play.

Key Safety Points:

- **Use the Right Gear:** Always wear recommended protective equipment (helmets, pads, supportive shoes).
- **Hydrate:** Drink water before, during, and after activity.
- **Listen to Pain:** Distinguish between good muscle fatigue and sharp, bad pain. **Stop and tell a coach or adult if you feel sharp pain.**
- **Sports Bras:** If you have breast buds or growing breasts, a supportive sports bra is essential for comfort and safety during activity. It's not optional—it's equipment.
- **Periods & Play:** You can and should participate in sports during your period. Use a tampon, menstrual cup, or period underwear if needed. Exercise can even help ease cramps!

Sleep and Rest: Why It's Not Lazy

Sleep is when the real magic of growth and repair happens. It's not a waste of time—it's essential work.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: "I feel like I need SO much sleep. Am I just lazy?"

Big Sis: "Think of your body like a construction site that's working 24/7. The day crew (you awake) brings in the materials. The night crew (you asleep) does the heavy building: repairing tissues, consolidating memories, and releasing growth hormones. You need more sleep now because you're building a bigger, more complex 'you!'"

Why 8–10 Hours Matters:

- **Growth:** Your body releases the majority of its growth hormone during deep sleep.
- **Brain Power:** Sleep is critical for learning, memory, and problem-solving.
- **Mood Regulation:** Lack of sleep makes it harder to manage emotions and stress.
- **Appetite Balance:** Sleep helps regulate the hormones that control hunger.

Tips for Better Sleep:

- **Create a Routine:** Try to go to bed and wake up around the same time, even on weekends.
- **Wind Down:** Spend the last hour before bed away from screens. Read, draw, or listen to calm music instead.
- **Your Bedroom:** Keep it cool, dark, and quiet.

★ **Big Sis Tip:** Rest is also active recovery. Taking a quiet day, reading, or just daydreaming is not laziness—it's allowing your nervous system to reset. It's part of the training for a healthy life.

💖 **Chapter Closing Note:** Caring for your body through joyful movement, safety, and deep rest is the ultimate form of self-respect. You are building a foundation of strength and well-being that will support you for your entire, amazing life.

Q&A: Sleep Problems — What to Do

Trouble sleeping is one of the most common challenges during puberty. Your brain is busy processing a lot of new information—social, emotional, and physical. If your mind races at night, you are not broken. Here are tools to help it quiet down.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"I get into bed and suddenly remember every embarrassing thing I've ever said, or I worry about tomorrow. My brain just won't turn off!"*

Big Sis: *"That's the 'bedtime brain spiral.' It happens because when you finally get still, all the thoughts you've been pushing aside all day come rushing in. The trick isn't to stop thinking—it's to give your thoughts a better job to do."*

Q: "How do I fix my sleep when my mind won't quiet down?"

A: You can't force your brain to be silent. Instead, try these techniques to gently guide it toward calm.

- **The Worry Dump (Before Bed):** Keep a notebook by your bed. 10–15 minutes before you want to sleep, write down EVERYTHING swirling in your head—worries, to-do lists, random thoughts. Tell yourself, "It's all on the paper now, so my brain doesn't have to hold it."
- **The 4–7–8 Breathing Trick (In Bed):** This breathing pattern calms your nervous system. Breathe in quietly through your nose for 4 seconds. Hold your breath for 7 seconds. Exhale slowly through your mouth for 8 seconds. Repeat 4 times.
- **The Mental Movie (In Bed):** Don't just lie there telling yourself to sleep. Imagine a favorite, calm, repetitive scene in vivid detail. For example, walking slowly through a familiar forest, noticing every leaf and sound. When other thoughts intrude, gently return to your movie.
- **The 20-Minute Rule:** If you've been lying in bed awake for more than 20 minutes, get up. Go to a dimly lit place and do something boring (read a textbook, fold laundry) until you feel sleepy. Then go back to bed. This breaks the association of "bed = frustration."

★ **Big Sis Tip:** Screens are the #1 sleep thief. The blue light tricks your brain into thinking it's daytime. Try a "digital sunset"—power down all phones, tablets, and TVs at least one hour before bed.

Q: "What if I'm just not tired at a 'normal' bedtime?"

A: Your internal clock (circadian rhythm) naturally shifts later during the teen years. It's biology, not defiance!

- **Maximize Morning Light:** Open your curtains first thing in the morning. Natural light helps reset your clock.
- **Be Consistent:** Even on weekends, try not to shift your sleep schedule by more than 2 hours. Big swings make Monday mornings brutal.
- **Talk to Your Adults:** Explain the biology. Ask if you can have a slightly later, but still consistent, bedtime that works for your body and household rules.

When to Ask for Help: If you consistently can't fall asleep, wake up many times, or feel exhausted every day for weeks, talk to a parent or doctor. There could be an underlying issue (like anxiety or low nutrients) that they can help you address.

Chapter 16. Mental Health: When You Need Help

Your mental health—how you think, feel, and cope with life—is just as important as your physical health. It's normal to feel stressed or anxious sometimes, especially during big changes. This chapter will help you understand your feelings, learn coping tools, and know when and how to get more support.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"Sometimes I feel so overwhelmed and worried for no clear reason. Is that normal?"*

Big Sis: *"Completely. Think of your brain as another part of your body going through puberty. It's being reshaped by hormones and flooded with new social and academic pressures. Feeling waves of stress or anxiety is a common reaction. The key is learning how to ride those waves so they don't knock you over."*

Stress and Anxiety in Puberty: The Signs

It's important to recognize when normal worries tip into something that needs more attention.

Common Signs:

- **In your body:** Frequent headaches or stomachaches, trouble sleeping, feeling tired all the time, changes in appetite.
- **In your feelings:** Constant worry, irritability, sadness that won't lift, feeling numb or empty.
- **In your thoughts:** "What if..." thoughts on a loop, negative self-talk, trouble concentrating.
- **In your actions:** Withdrawing from friends/family, dropping activities you used to enjoy, and changes in school performance.

☀ **Big Sis Tip:** Stress is often about a specific thing (a test, a fight). Anxiety is a more general, persistent feeling of worry or dread, even when things seem okay. Both are valid and manageable.

Self-Help Techniques (Coping Strategies)

When feelings get big, these tools can help you find your calm center.

- **Grounding (The 5–4–3–2–1 Method):** Name 5 things you see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you hear, 2 things you smell, 1 thing you can taste. It brings you back to the present.
- **Move It Out:** Shake your hands vigorously for 30 seconds, do 10 jumping jacks, or go for a brisk walk. It burns off stress hormones.
- **The Worry Window:** Give yourself 10–15 minutes each day to write down all your worries. When time's up, close the notebook. Tell your brain, "Worry time is over for today."
- **Talk to Your Support Squad:** Don't isolate. Text or call a trusted friend or family member. Just saying, "I'm having a tough day," can lighten the load.

When to Reach Out for More Help

Self-care is powerful, but even the strongest people need a teammate. Asking for professional help isn't a sign of weakness—it's a super-smart sign of strength and knowing yourself.

▶ These Are Your Signals to Tell a Trusted Adult

You should reach out to a parent, guardian, school counselor, or another adult you trust if you [4.1]:

- Have thoughts of hurting yourself or someone else.
- Feel intense sadness, anger, or anxiety almost every day for two weeks or more.
- Can't do your normal things (like go to school, see friends, or take care of yourself) because of how you feel.
- Are using food, social media, or anything else in a way that feels out of control to numb your feelings.

Here's the most important sisterly note: Having these thoughts or feelings doesn't make you "bad" or "crazy." **Not even a little bit.** It means your brain is having a really tough time right now, and it's sending out a major signal that you deserve support. A trusted adult or a therapist is there to help you untangle those feelings and find your way back to feeling safe and like yourself again.

Support Resources

You are never alone. Free, confidential help is available 24/7:

- **Crisis Text Line:** Text HOME to 741741
- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** Call or text 988
- **The Trevor Project (LGBTQ+ Support):** Call 1-866-488-7386 or text START to 678-678

How to Start the Conversation (You've got this):

- "I haven't been feeling like myself lately, and I think I need to talk to someone who can help."
- "My anxiety/sadness is getting in the way of everything. Can you help me find a counselor?"
- "I read about therapy. Can we look into this together?"

💖 **Chapter Closing Note:** Caring for your mind is the bravest, most important work you can do. It's the foundation for everything else in your life. By learning these skills and knowing when to ask for help, you are building resilience that will last a lifetime.

Q&A: “Sadness, Anxiety, Loneliness – What Do I Do?”

These feelings are heavy, and asking these questions takes courage. You are not alone in feeling this way, and there is a clear path forward. Let's tackle the big worries about getting help.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *“I feel like I should be able to handle this on my own. If I tell someone, won't they think I'm just weak or dramatic?”*

Big Sis: *“That's the biggest myth of all. Think about it: if you broke your arm, you wouldn't call yourself weak for going to a doctor. Your mental health is the same. Asking for help is the strongest, smartest thing you can do when you're in emotional pain. It means you know your worth.”*

Q: “How do I know I need help and I'm not ‘just weak’?”

A: You are not weak. **You need help when your feelings are getting in the way of living your life.** Ask yourself:

- Are these feelings intense and lasting most of the day, nearly every day?
- Are they stopping me from doing things I need or want to do (school, hobbies, seeing friends)?
- Do my coping tools (like breathing or talking to a friend) not provide enough relief?
- Am I having thoughts of harming myself or feeling completely hopeless?

If you answered yes to any of these, it's not about “strength”—it's about **needing a different tool for the job**. A therapist or counselor is that tool.

Q: “Who do I tell if I'm sad or anxious?”

A: Tell **any trusted adult who will listen without judgment and help you take the next step**. Your goal is to get connected to professional support.

- **First Choice:** A parent, guardian, or the adult you live with.
- **At School:** A school counselor, psychologist, or a teacher you deeply trust. They are trained for this.
- **Other Options:** An aunt/uncle, older cousin, your doctor, or a friend's parent who is a safe person.
- **If the First Person Doesn't Listen:** This happens sometimes. **Don't give up.** Tell another adult. Say, “This is really important, and I need help finding someone to talk to.”

🌟 **Big Sis Tip:** You don't have to have the perfect words. You can start the conversation by saying:

- “I've been feeling really down/anxious for a while, and I think I need to talk to a professional.”
- “Can you help me make an appointment with a therapist or counselor?”
- Even showing them this page in the book can help start the conversation.

💡 **Remember:** Seeking help is a proactive, powerful choice. It means you are taking the driver's seat in your own life. You deserve to feel better, and there are people who have the skills to help you get there.

Doctor's Visit: What to Expect

The idea of talking to a doctor or therapist about your feelings can feel intimidating. Knowing what to expect can make it feel much more manageable and even empowering. This is a positive step toward feeling better.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"What if I get there and freeze? Or they ask a question I don't know how to answer?"*

Big Sis: *"That's why we prepare! Think of it like going to a tutor for a subject you're struggling with. You'd bring your questions and notes, right? This is the same. The doctor is there to help you understand your own mind better. They've heard it all, and they want to help, not judge."*

What Happens at the Appointment (No Scary Stuff):

1. **You'll Talk:** The doctor or therapist will ask questions about how you've been feeling, sleeping, eating, and managing daily life. Their goal is to understand, not to interrogate.
2. **You'll Be Heard:** This is a safe, confidential space for you to express yourself. You can talk about stress, sadness, anxiety, friendships, family—anything that's on your mind.
3. **They'll Explain:** They will help you understand what you're experiencing. They might give it a name (like anxiety or depression), which can make it feel less confusing and scary.
4. **You'll Make a Plan:** Together, you'll discuss options. This could include:
 - Learning new coping skills in follow-up sessions.
 - Possibly considering safe, age-appropriate medication (if needed, and only with your guardian's involvement and consent).
 - Getting resources for support groups or other helpful tools.

How to Prepare: Be Your Own Best Advocate

Take 10 minutes before the appointment to write a few notes. This will help if you get nervous.

What to Write Down:

- **Main Feelings:** 2–3 words for how you've been feeling most often (e.g., "overwhelmed," "empty," "on edge").
- **How Long:** When did you start feeling this way? (e.g., "Since school started," "A few months").
- **What's Harder Now:** What activities or parts of your day are most affected? (e.g., "Focusing in class," "Wanting to hang out with friends").
- **What Helps a Little:** Is there anything that makes you feel even slightly better? (e.g., "Walking my dog," "Talking to my aunt").

Questions to Ask the Doctor:

- "What do you think is going on?"
- "What are my options for feeling better?"
- "Is what I'm experiencing common for my age?"
- "What can I do at home to help manage how I'm feeling?"

 **Big Sis Tip:** You have a right to ask for a minute alone with the doctor to speak privately. You can say, "Is it okay if I talk to you for a few minutes by myself?" This is normal and ensures you can share everything you need to.

 **Closing Note:** Walking through that door is the bravest step. You are taking charge of your well-being and investing in your future happiness. You should be incredibly proud of yourself.

Chapter 17. Your Path to Growing Up: Goals and Dreams

This final chapter isn't about body changes—it's about you as a whole person. Growing up is so much more than your appearance. It's about becoming the interesting, capable, and unique individual you are meant to be. Let's dream and plan together.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"Does 'growing up' just mean more rules and homework?"*

Big Sis: *"It means more you! It's about discovering your voice, your passions, and your own inner compass. Yes, responsibility comes with it, but so does incredible freedom—the freedom to shape your own life."*

What Does "Growing Up" Mean? (Not Just About Your Body!)

Growing up is an **inside job**. It's about:

- **Knowing Yourself:** Understanding your values, what you like, what you're good at, and what matters to you.
- **Resilience:** Learning how to handle disappointments, stress, and mistakes and bounce back stronger.
- **Empathy:** Deepening your ability to understand and care about how others feel.
- **Independence:** Making thoughtful choices and learning to trust your own judgment.

Freedom and Responsibility: Finding Balance

These two go hand-in-hand like a bicycle. **Freedom** is the ability to make choices. **Responsibility** is steering thoughtfully so you don't crash.

- **Example:** The freedom to manage your screen time comes with the responsibility to get your homework done and get enough sleep.
- **The goal isn't perfection.** It's about learning. If you mess up (and everyone does), you learn how to make a better choice next time.

Short-Term and Long-Term Goals

Goals give you direction and a wonderful sense of accomplishment. Think of them like a video game: you need to complete small quests to level up for the big boss battle!

Short-Term Goals (This week/month):

- *Example:* Try out for the school play, improve your grade in one subject, and learn a new skateboard trick.
- **Why they rock:** They give you quick wins and build confidence.

Long-Term Goals (This year/few years):

- *Example:* Save up for a special item, master an instrument, get a summer job, or volunteer position.
- **Why they rock:** They teach you patience and perseverance, and make the future exciting.

Finding Your Interests and Strengths

You are a collection of amazing talents and curiosities, waiting to be explored.

- **Pay Attention to Joy:** What activity makes you lose track of time? What topics do you love to read or talk about?
- **Reflect on Strengths:** Are you a great listener? A creative problem-solver? A loyal friend? A determined learner? These are superpowers!
- **Try New Things:** Join a club, watch a documentary, volunteer. You won't love it all, but each experience teaches you more about who you are.

★ **Big Sis Tip:** Your interests and goals will change, and that's perfect! This isn't about picking one thing forever. It's about following your curiosity.

Whoever's in Your Corner: The adults in your life can be amazing guides and cheerleaders for your goals. You can ask them, "Can you help me brainstorm how to reach this goal?" or "What were you interested in when you were my age?"

Q&A: “Figuring It All Out”

Feeling uncertain about the future is not a problem—it’s part of the adventure. These questions are perfectly normal, and the answers are all about progress, not pressure.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: “Everyone asks what I want to be when I grow up, and I just draw a blank. What’s wrong with me?”

Big Sis: “Absolutely nothing! That question puts way too much pressure on one single answer. Your job right now isn’t to pick a final destination. It’s to explore the map. The goal is to discover what makes you curious and what you’re good at, one step at a time.”

Q: “I don’t know what I want to be—is that normal?”

A: It is not only normal, but it is also wise. Very few people have their whole life figured out at 12, 15, or even 25. Your interests, strengths, and the world itself will change. Right now, focus on asking better questions:

- “What subjects do I enjoy learning about?”
- “What problems do I see that I wish I could help solve?”
- “What kind of work environment would make me happy?”

Collecting answers to these questions is how you’ll eventually build a fulfilling future.

Q: “What if I’m afraid of making mistakes?”

A: Reframe what a “mistake” is. It’s not a failure; **it’s data**. Every time something doesn’t go as planned, you learn valuable information about what doesn’t work for you, which gets you closer to what does.

- **Mistake:** Trying out for the soccer team and not making it.
- **Data:** “I learned that I prefer individual sports over team sports,” or “I need to practice a different skill if I want to try again.”
- **Mistakes are how we grow.** The only real mistake is letting the fear of them stop you from trying.

Q: “How do I set small goals I can actually achieve?”

A: Use the “**Tiny Steps**” method. Break any goal down into the smallest, easiest first step possible.

- **Big, Scary Goal:** “Get better at math.”
- **Small, Achievable Goal:** “This week, I will re-read my class notes for 10 minutes every night after dinner.”
- **Big, Scary Goal:** “Learn to play guitar.”
- **Small, Achievable Goal:** “This month, I will watch three beginner tutorial videos and practice holding the chords for 5 minutes a day.”

The Magic Formula: Make your goal **Specific** (what exactly will you do?), **Measurable** (how will you know you did it?), and **Tiny** (so small it’s almost impossible to fail). Success with tiny goals builds the confidence to tackle bigger ones.

🌟 **Big Sis Tip:** Share your small goals with a supportive friend or family member. They can be your accountability partner and cheerleader, celebrating your tiny wins with you.

Activity: "A Letter to My Future Self"

This is your final activity in the book—a special gift to your future self. Writing a letter now is like planting a time capsule. You get to capture who you are at this moment and send kindness and hope forward to the person you are becoming.

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: "A letter to myself? What would I even say?"

Big Sis: "Anything you want! Think of it as a conversation with a friend you haven't met yet—your older, wiser self. You can tell her what you're proud of, what you hope for her, and remind her of how brave you were to get through all these changes."

Instructions: Find a quiet spot. Take a deep breath. Use the prompts below if you like, or just write freely from your heart. When you're done, seal it in an envelope. Write "OPEN ON [Your Birthday or a Future Date]" on the outside, and tuck it somewhere safe.



My Letter to My Future Self

Date: _____ **Future Opening Date:** _____

Dear Future Me,

Right now, I am _____ years old. Here are a few things about my life today:

- My favorite thing to do is: _____
- I feel really proud of myself for: _____
- Something that makes me laugh is: _____
- My biggest hope for you is: _____
- A challenge I'm facing right now is: _____
- I want you to remember: _____
- Never forget that you are: _____

I can't wait to meet you.

Love,

Your Past Self (aka, Me!)

(Sign your name)

★ **Big Sis Tip:** You can also add a small photo, a drawing, or a list of your current favorite songs to really capture this moment in time.

♥ **Final Closing Note of the Book:**

CONGRATULATIONS! You have just completed an incredible journey of learning, reflection, and growth. You have equipped yourself with knowledge about your body, skills for your emotions, tools for your relationships, and dreams for your future.

Remember, this isn't an end—it's a beginning. You are strong, capable, and wise. You have a whole community of support around you, even if it sometimes feels quiet. Be patient with yourself. Celebrate every small victory. You are becoming an amazing young woman, and we are all so proud of you.

Now, go out there and shine. The world is waiting for you. ✨

Conclusion

Your Journey, Your Strength

If we could sit down right now with a cup of something warm, here's what I'd want you to remember most from our time together in this book:

First, a Recap of Our Big Sister Promises:

I promised you no shame, no silly rules, and no one-size-fits-all answers. I promised to walk with you through the confusing bits—the changing body, the rollercoaster feelings, the new social maps—and to remind you, on every page, that you are not traveling this path alone. I promised this book would be a toolkit, not a textbook. Looking back, I hope you feel that every chapter has delivered on that pact.

The Lessons, Repackaged for the Road Ahead:

1. **Your Body is Wise, Not Weird.** Every change, from the first hint of a curve to the arrival of your period, is a sign of a healthy, powerful system doing exactly what it's designed to do. Its timeline is its own, and that timeline is perfect.
2. **Your Feelings are Valid, Not “Too Much.”** Big emotions are the construction crew of your growing mind—sometimes loud and messy, but always building something stronger. You now have a “Calm Down Toolkit” to help you when the noise gets too high.
3. **You Are the Author of Your Boundaries.** From your physical space to your digital life, you have the right to say what feels safe and okay. “No” is a complete sentence, and your comfort is the most important rule.
4. **Connection is Your Superpower.** It's okay to need help. It's smart to ask questions. The trusted adults in your life—in whatever form your family takes—are on your team. So are the friends who respect you. Reaching out is a sign of incredible strength.
5. **You Are Already Enough.** In a world that loves to compare, your worth is not measured by your development speed, your jean size, or a filtered photo. It is measured by your kindness, courage, and the unique light only you carry.

A Final Message from Your Big Sis:

You started this book maybe feeling unsure. Look at you now. You're armed with knowledge, grounded in self-compassion, and equipped with practical plans for everything from a first bra to a first period, from friendship drama to online safety.

This isn't an ending. It's a launch. Puberty isn't a problem to be solved; it's the remarkable beginning of your story as a young woman. There will still be confusing days, and that's okay. You now have a foundation. You have language for what's happening. You have a map you helped to draw yourself.

So go forward. Be curious. Be kind to yourself. Use your voice. Celebrate the small victories. And whenever you need a reminder, come back to these pages, or just remember the feeling of this truth:

You are capable. You are resilient. You are deeply, truly understood. You've got this. And I'm always in your corner.

A Final Sis Chat

Little Sis: *"What if I forget everything I read?"*

Big Sis: *"You won't forget the most important thing: the feeling that you can handle this. The facts are here to come back to anytime (hello, Quick Find page!). But the confidence? That stays with you. You've got it now."*

So, what's next?

Keep listening to yourself. Keep using your voice. Come back to these pages when you need a refresher or a boost. Your journey through puberty is just one chapter in the big, beautiful story of you. The next chapters are about your passions, your friendships, your dreams—all the things this strong, capable, growing body and mind will help you achieve.

You are not just getting through puberty. You are **blooming** through it.

I am so proud of you. Now go show the world who you're becoming.

With all my belief in you,

Your Big Sis

Always in your corner.

Summary of Promises Fulfilled:

- ✓ **A judgement-free zone** for all your questions and feelings.
- ✓ **Clear, accurate information** about physical and emotional changes.
- ✓ **Practical tools & scripts** for real-life situations (hygiene, periods, boundaries, conversations).
- ✓ **Celebration of diversity** in bodies, families, and timelines.
- ✓ **Empowerment over fear**, building confidence from the inside out.
- ✓ **A bridge to trusted adults**, facilitating open and supportive communication.

A Note for the Grown-Ups in Her Corner

If you're reading this, you've just peeked into your daughter's guidebook for this journey. You've seen the tone—the big sister voice, the honest answers, the zero-judgment zone. That voice exists to partner with you, not replace you.

Now, let's turn to your part of the map.

Part B of this book (starting on page 121) is your dedicated toolkit. Here, you'll find modern conversation scripts that feel natural, a special "Dad's Guide" for navigating these talks, and clear guidance on developmental red flags. It's designed to equip you with the same confidence and calm that we're trying to build in her.

Our shared goal isn't to have one "Big Talk," but to build a foundation for a thousand little ones. This section is here to help you do just that.

You are her most important guide. Think of this as your backup, your playbook, and your reassurance—all in one.

Let's continue together.

PART B: FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Hey Parents and Caregivers!

Welcome to this special section just for you. Think of these pages as a supportive chat over a cup of coffee with someone who's been there. Your daughter is embarking on a huge journey, and you're her most important guide. That might feel like a big responsibility—and it is—but you don't have to have all the answers. You just need to be there, ready to listen and learn alongside her. Whether you're a birth parent, adoptive parent, step-parent, grandparent, or any kind of loving caregiver, your role is vital. Let's get you equipped with some warm, practical tools.

How to Talk to Your Daughter About Puberty

The goal isn't one big, scary "Talk." It's about building an ongoing, comfortable conversation where she knows she can come to you with anything.

Principles of Calm Conversation: Shame-Free Language

The words we use matter. They can build confidence or create embarrassment.

- **Use Accurate Words:** Using clinical terms like "vulva," "uterus," or "menstruation" alongside casual words like "period" removes mystery and shame. It says, "This is a normal part of biology, and we can talk about it openly."
- **Frame it Positively:** Instead of "You're going to get moody," try, "You might notice your feelings are stronger, which means you're understanding yourself and the world in a deeper way."
- **Normalize, Normalize, Normalize:** "Every single person goes through this," and "However you're feeling is okay," are powerful messages.

When to Start and How to Pace by Age

Start early, go slow, and follow her lead.

- **Ages 8–9:** Start with the basics in casual moments. "Your body is going to start changing to get ready for you to grow up. One of the first signs for girls is usually breast buds—little bumps under the nipples. That's totally normal and healthy!" This makes future changes less surprising.
- **Ages 10–11:** Expand the conversation. Discuss body hair, sweat, and the fact that periods will start sometime in the next few years. Keep it light and factual.
- **Age 12+:** Be ready for more detailed questions. This is the time to ensure she has practical knowledge and knows you are a safe, non-judgmental resource.

Practice: Conversation Scripts

Here are phrases for 10 common situations. Adapt them to fit your family.

1. **If she asks where babies come from:** "A baby grows in a special organ inside a person called a uterus. When a sperm from a man and an egg from a woman join, it can start growing into a baby. I'm happy to tell you more whenever you're curious."
2. **If she seems embarrassed about buying bras:** "Shopping for new clothes as your body changes is a milestone! Do you want to go look at some options together, or would you prefer I pick up a few styles for you to try in private at home?"

- 
3. **If you need to bring up periods first:** “I was thinking about you growing up and wanted to make sure you have all the info you need. One of the big changes for girls is getting a period. What have you heard about that?”
 4. **If she’s irritable or crying easily:** “I can see you’re having a really big feeling right now. I’m here for you. Do you need a hug, some space, or help figuring something out?” (Focus on the emotion, not the “attitude”).
 5. **If she asks about adoption/family structure and puberty:**

Scenario A: If she asks about her biological family’s timeline (like “When did my birth mom start her period?”).

Your Calm, Connecting Response:

“That is such a smart and natural question to wonder about. We may not have all those specific details about your biological family’s timeline, and that’s okay. Here’s what’s most important: **your body has its own perfect, built-in schedule.** It knows exactly what to do and when.”

If you’d like, we can absolutely ask your pediatrician at your next checkup if there is any helpful information in your medical records. But here is my promise to you: whether we find those answers or not, I am right here for you—for every question, every change, every step. Your journey is yours, and getting to be your guide through it is my privilege.”

Scenario B: If she feels “different” in developing at a different pace than siblings or other family members.

Your Calm, Reassuring Response:

“You might notice your body is changing on a different timeline than your [brother/sister/cousin]’s did, or that you look different from me. That makes total sense, and here’s why: **you have your own unique genetic blueprint** from your biological family. That’s not a gap—it’s what makes you, you.”

There is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ schedule, only **your** schedule. And here’s what will never change: you belong in this family, in this home, with all of us, exactly as you are. Your journey is part of our family’s story now, and we’re cheering for you every step of the way.”

6. **If she doesn’t want to talk:** “That’s completely okay. I just want you to know I’m always here when you do. Let’s leave this book/pamphlet in your room in case you have questions when you’re alone.”
7. **If she’s developing earlier or later than friends:** “Your body has its own perfect calendar. Comparing is so hard, but there’s no right or wrong speed. The friend who starts first isn’t better, and the one who starts last isn’t behind. They’re just different.”
8. **Discussing privacy and safety:** “As your body changes, it’s important to know that it is yours. No one should touch you in ways that make you uncomfortable. That includes friends, family, or anyone else. You can always tell me if something feels wrong, and I will believe you and help you.”
9. **If she makes a mess with period products:** “No worries at all! Let’s clean this up together. It can be tricky to get the hang of at first. Do you want a tip for next time?”
10. **Celebrating milestones:** “I know this can feel overwhelming, but I also want to acknowledge that this is a sign of you becoming the amazing young person you are. However you feel about it, I’m proud of you.”
11. **If she asks about LGBTQ+ topics (e.g., “Can two girls have a baby?” or “What if I like girls?”):** “A great question. Families are made in many different, loving ways. Some families have a mom and a dad, some have two moms or two dads, and some have one parent. Love and commitment are what make a family. As for your feelings, it’s completely normal to have

questions about who you're attracted to as you grow up. There's no rush to figure it out, and I will love and support you no matter what."

12. **If she's distressed by social media or online comments about her body:** "I'm so sorry you're seeing those hurtful things. Let's take a deep breath. What you see online is often a heavily edited highlight reel, not real life. Those comments say more about the people posting them than about you. Your worth is not measured in likes or mean words. Would you like to take a break from that app together, or do you want help reporting those comments?"
13. **If she's struggling with self-care (e.g., not showering, skipping hygiene routines):** "I've noticed it's been a little harder to keep up with [showering/brushing teeth/etc.]. I get it—sometimes our energy is low, or we feel overwhelmed. Let's problem-solve together. Would a new fun-smelling soap help, or would it be easier if we just focus on a quick 5-minute routine for a few days? I'm on your team."
14. **If she asks about the differences in boys' puberty:** "That shows great curiosity! Just like your body is changing, boys' bodies go through their own changes, like their voices getting deeper and growing facial hair. It's all part of growing into adults. If you're curious about the specifics, we can find a good, factual book or resource to look at together."
15. **If you find her searching for information online and want to ensure safety:** "I noticed you were looking things up about growing up—that's really smart to seek information. The internet can have great info, but also some that's confusing or not true. How about we bookmark a few trustworthy websites or your book's index together, so you know where to go first? And remember, you can always bring any question to me—nothing is too weird or embarrassing."

"Dad's Guide" (Expanded)

Dads and father-figures, you are irreplaceable. Your support teaches your daughter that these topics aren't just "women's business," but a normal part of life that men can understand and respect.

✔ Do's / ✗ Don'ts: Specific Advice

- ✔ **DO:** Offer to pick up supplies. Say, "I'm heading to the store, can you text me a picture of the box you need?" ✗ **DON'T:** Make it a huge, awkward deal. Avoid, "Ugh, that errand..."
- ✔ **DO:** Validate her emotions. "It sounds like that was really frustrating for you." ✗ **DON'T:** Dismiss or joke about PMS. Never say, "Is it that time of the month?"
- ✔ **DO:** Learn the basics. Know what a period is and that cramps are real pain. ✗ **DON'T:** Claim ignorance. "I don't know anything about that girl stuff" sends the message that she can't rely on you.

Practice: Shopping Cheat Sheet

(Imagine a simple photo collage of period product packages with labels)

- **Pads:** Look for "Wings" (flaps that wrap under underwear for security). Sizes are often Regular (medium flow), Super (heavy), and Overnight (longest). "Ultra-thin" means more discreet, not less absorbent.
- **Tampons:** Start with Slim/Regular size with a plastic applicator (easiest to use). The absorbency (Light, Regular, Super) should match her flow.
- **Sample Phrase:** "Hey, I see they're out of the brand you like. Would the 'Ultra-thin with wings' in 'Regular' from this other brand work, or should I try another store?"

Red Flags: When to See a Specialist

Most puberty is normal, but sometimes the body or mind needs extra help. Trust your instincts.

Physical Signals

- **Timing:** Signs of puberty (breast buds, body hair) before age 8, no signs at all by age 13, or no period by age 15.
- **Period Concerns:** Pain so severe it makes her miss school/activities, bleeding that soaks through a pad/tampon every 1–2 hours for more than a day, or periods lasting longer than 7 days.
- **Other:** Strong, unpleasant odor from discharge, intense itching, or sudden, significant changes in weight or appetite.

Emotional Signals

Watch for changes that last **more than two weeks** and interfere with her life:

- **Persistent sadness, hopelessness, or apathy.**
- **Intense anxiety or panic attacks.**
- **Withdrawing** from friends, family, and activities she used to love.
- **Major changes** in sleep or eating patterns.
- **Talking about life being meaningless** or being a burden.

Practice: How to Prepare for the Visit

Taking notes helps you be a calm advocate.

- **What to Write Down:** 1) Specific symptoms & when they started. 2) How often they happen. 3) What makes them better or worse. 4) Any questions YOU have.
- **What to Ask the Doctor:** 1) "What do you think is the most likely cause?" 2) "What are our next steps?" 3) "Are there lifestyle changes that could help?" 4) "When should we follow up?"



Final Caregiver Tip:

You are building a bridge of trust that will last through the teenage years and beyond. It's okay to be nervous. It's okay to say, "I'm not sure, let's find out together." Your loving, steady presence is the very best support system she could have.

Appendix A. Practical Tools (Workbook)

Hey You! Welcome to Your Personal Toolkit.

Think of these pages as your very own command center—a place to get organized, feel prepared, and write down whatever you need to. This isn't about more rules; it's about giving you the power to take care of your amazing, changing body. Whether you live with your mom, dad, grandparents, foster family, or anyone else, these tools are for you to use.

Daily Hygiene Checklist

Keeping clean helps you feel fresh and confident. Check off what works for you!

Morning	Evening
☐ Wash face	☐ Wash face
☐ Apply deodorant	☐ Shower or bath
☐ Brush teeth	☐ Brush & floss teeth
☐ Take any vitamins/meds	☐ Put on clean underwear
☐ Put on clean clothes	☐ PJs on!

 **Big Sis Tip:** This is a guide, not a test! Some days you'll do it all, other days just the basics. That's life!

"Period Emergency" Plan

Don't worry—be prepared! Fill this out so you're ready anywhere.

- **At School:** My go-to person is: _____
(Trusted teacher, nurse, counselor, or friend).
- **Where I Keep a Spare:** In my locker/backpack, I'll stash a pad/tampon in a: _____
(small pouch, pencil case).
- **At a Friend's House:** It's okay to say: "Hey, I just got my period. Could I borrow a pad or tampon?"
- **On the Go:** My on-the-go kit is always in my: _____
(purse, backpack). (See A. 3!)

My Personal Hygiene Kit

Pack a small pouch (even a makeup bag works!) with these essentials:

- 2–3 pads and/or tampons
- A clean pair of underwear
- A few small plastic bags (for disposal or wrapping)
- Travel-sized wet wipes
- Travel deodorant
- Small pack of tissues
- Hand sanitizer
- A little chocolate or treat (because you deserve it!)

A Quick Sis Chat

Little Sis: "What if someone makes fun of me for having a period or tries to look in my bag?"

Big Sis: "Your body and your stuff are private. You can say, 'That's personal,' or 'I don't share that,' and walk away. If someone keeps bothering you, tell an adult you trust. It's not tattling; it's asking for respect."



Boundary Statements (Ready-to-Use Phrases)

You have the right to privacy and respect. Try these out loud:

- “I’m not comfortable talking about that.”
- “Please knock before coming in.”
- “No, thank you. I’ve got it handled.”
- “I’d rather not hug right now.”
- “That question is too personal.”

Cycle Tracker

Tracking helps you learn your patterns and feel in control. Use this for one month, then copy the template to a notebook or notes app!

Day	Date	Flow (Light/Med/Heavy)	Mood/Energy	Notes (Cramps? Headache?)
1				
2				
...				

 **Big Sis Tip:** Most cycles are between 21 and 35 days. Count from Day 1 (first day of bleeding) to the day before your next period starts. Don’t stress about it being “perfect”—it’s just info for you!

“Ask My Grown-Up / Ask My Doctor”

Tear this page out or copy your questions here. No question is silly!

Questions for my trusted grown-up (Mom, Dad, Grandma, Aunt, etc.):

1. _____
2. _____

Questions for my doctor or nurse:

1. _____
2. _____

Body Gratitude (7-Day Challenge)

Your body is doing incredible things. Let’s thank it! For one week, write down three things.

Example: *Day 1: 1. My legs carried me to school. 2. My brain helped me solve a hard math problem. 3. My hands let me hug my pet.*

Day	3 Things I’m Grateful to My Body For Today
Day 1	1. 2. 3.
Day 2	...
Day 3	...

 **Big Sis Final Tip:**

You are the expert on YOU. These tools are here to serve you, not the other way around. Mix, match, and change them to fit your life perfectly. You are capable, you are smart, and you are doing a great job.

Appendix B. Quick Answers and Myth-Busting

Hey! Got Questions? We've Got Answers.

Feeling like you have a million little questions buzzing around? That's completely normal. This section is your quick-reference guide—think of it as the “rapid-fire round” with your big sis. No question is too small, too weird, or too embarrassing. Let's clear things up!

Mini-FAQ: Top 20 Questions

About Your Body

1. **Q: Why is there hair there? A:** It's a normal part of puberty for hair to grow under your arms and in the pubic area. It's there for protection and is totally healthy.
2. **Q: One breast is bigger than the other. Is that okay? A:** Absolutely! Most people have one breast that's slightly larger. They usually even out over time.
3. **Q: Why do I smell different? A:** New sweat glands are activating. Washing every day and using deodorant can help you stay fresh.
4. **Q: What are these bumps on my face? A:** They're likely pimples or acne, caused by your skin producing more oil. A gentle face wash can help.

About Periods

5. **Q: How much blood will there be? A:** It usually looks like more than it is—about 2–6 tablespoons total over all the days. It's a mix of blood and uterine lining.
6. **Q: Can I swim on my period? A:** Yes! Use a tampon or menstrual cup, and hop in. The water pressure actually lessens the flow temporarily.
7. **Q: Will anyone know I have my period? A:** No, it's a private bodily function. No one can tell unless you tell them.
8. **Q: Can I get my first period at school? A:** You can, but don't panic. Go to the nurse or a trusted teacher—they've helped many girls before.

About Hygiene

9. **Q: How often should I shower? A:** Once a day is a good goal, especially after sweating.
10. **Q: Do I need to use special soap “down there”? A:** No! The vagina is self-cleaning. Warm water and mild soap on the outside (the vulva) is all you need.
11. **Q: How do I ask an adult to buy pads/tampons? A:** You can text a picture, write it on the shopping list, or just say, “Can we pick up some pads next time we're at the store?”

About Feelings & Family

12. **Q: Why do I feel so angry/sad for no reason? A:** Hormone shifts can make emotions feel super intense. It's normal. Talking, writing, or moving your body can help.
13. **Q: I feel awkward around my family now. Why? A:** As you grow into your own person, it's common to want more privacy. It doesn't mean you love them any less.
14. **Q: What if I'm adopted and curious about genetics? A:** Your body will develop on your timeline, influenced by your biological roots. Your family is who loves and raises you—they're here to support you through it all.

15. **Q: Is it okay to say “no” to a hug from a relative?** **A:** Yes. Your body is yours. You can say, “I’m not in the mood for a hug today,” or offer a high-five instead.

Quick Practical Stuff

16. **Q: How do I know what pad/tampon size to use?** **A:** Start with Regular. If you leak quickly, try Super. If it’s barely used, try Light/Slim. It’s trial and error!
17. **Q: How do I throw away pads/tampons?** **A:** Wrap them in toilet paper or the wrapper and put them in the trash bin—not the toilet.
18. **Q: What are cramps?** **A:** They’re muscle aches in your lower belly/back, caused by your uterus contracting. A hot water bottle, gentle exercise, or medication can help.
19. **Q: Can I exercise on my period?** **A:** Yes! It can actually boost your mood and ease cramps. Listen to your body—some days you might want a gentle walk, others a full workout.
20. **Q: What if I never want to have a baby?** **A:** That’s a totally valid personal choice for your future. Getting your period just means your body is capable of it, not that you have to.

Real Questions from Real Girls

Case 1: *“My stepmom and I aren’t that close yet. How do I ask her for period help?”*

- **Answer:** It’s okay to feel shy. Try writing a note or texting: “I think I might need some period supplies soon. Can you help me figure out what to get?”
- **Big Sis Advice:** This can actually be a way to build trust. She’ll likely be glad you came to her.

Case 2: *“My friend got her period two years before me. I feel left out.”*

- **Answer:** Your body is on its own perfect schedule. Starting later doesn’t mean you’re less mature.
- **Big Sis Advice:** You can still be a supportive friend. Ask her what it’s been like for her—you’ll learn and connect.

Case 3: *“I have really bad cramps. Is something wrong with me?”*

- **Answer:** While cramps are common, severe pain that stops your life isn’t normal.
- **Big Sis Advice:** Talk to a parent and your doctor. There are ways to manage strong cramps—you don’t have to just suffer.

Case 4: *“I live with my grandma. She says things like ‘in my day...’ and it’s confusing.”*

- **Answer:** Knowledge and products have changed a lot! It’s a chance to learn together.
- **Big Sis Advice:** Say, “That’s interesting, Grandma. Can we look up what doctors recommend now?” Make it a team project.



Myths That Need Busting

Let's set the record straight once and for all.

Myth	Truth
You can't get pregnant the first time you have sex.	You absolutely can. Pregnancy is possible any time sperm meets an egg.
Using a tampon means you're not a virgin.	False. Virginity is about sexual intercourse, not a tampon. The opening in the hymen is usually large enough for a tampon.
Period blood is "dirty" blood.	Nope. It's just a mix of blood and tissue from the uterine lining—a normal, healthy process.
You should rest and not move during your period.	Move if you feel like it! Exercise can reduce cramps and boost your mood. Listen to your body.
Your period syncs up with the girls you live with.	This is mostly a coincidence. Cycles vary in length, so they'll overlap sometimes by chance.
Chocolate and junk food are the only PMS cures.	A balanced diet helps more! Foods with iron, calcium, and magnesium can actually ease symptoms. (But a little chocolate for your soul is fine!)
If your cycle isn't 28 days, it's wrong.	There's a wide range of "normal"! Any cycle between 21 and 35 days is regular.
Puberty is only about your body changing.	It's a whole-person upgrade! Your brain is maturing too, affecting how you think, feel, and make decisions.



Big Sis Final Tip:

When you hear a "fact" that makes you feel worried or ashamed, come check here. True information is your superpower. You are smart, you are capable, and you can understand your own amazing self.

Appendix C. Glossary of Terms

Glossary: Your A–Z of Growing Up Words

Think of this as your personal dictionary for all the new words you might hear during puberty. Knowing the right terms helps you understand your body and ask clear questions.

A

- **Acne:** A skin condition causing pimples, common during puberty due to increased oil.
- **Adopted Family:** A family formed through legal adoption. Love, not biology, makes a family.
- **Anxiety:** A feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease. It's normal to feel sometimes, but if it's constant, talk to an adult.

B

- **Body Autonomy:** Your right to make decisions about your own body and who touches it.
- **Boundaries:** Personal rules and limits you set to feel safe and respected.
- **Bra:** A garment that provides support for the breasts.
- **Breast Buds:** The first, often tender, lump under the nipple, signaling the start of breast development.

C

- **Consent:** Giving permission for something to happen. It must be a clear, enthusiastic “YES” and can be taken back at any time.
- **Cramps:** Aching feelings in the lower abdomen or back, often caused by the uterus contracting during a period.
- **Cycle (Menstrual Cycle):** The monthly process your body goes through to prepare for a possible pregnancy. It includes your period.

D

- **Deodorant/Antiperspirant:** A product applied to the underarms to reduce sweat (antiperspirant) and odor (deodorant).
- **Discharge (Vaginal):** A clear or whitish fluid from the vagina. It's normal and helps keep the vagina clean and healthy.

E

- **Egg (Ovum):** The female reproductive cell, released from an ovary during ovulation.
- **Emotional Intelligence:** The ability to understand and manage your own emotions and recognize the emotions of others.

F

- **Follicle:** A small sac in the ovary where an egg develops.

G

- **Growth Spurt:** A quick increase in height and sometimes weight.

H

- **Hormones:** Chemical messengers made by your body (like estrogen and progesterone) that travel in your blood to tell different parts what to do. They are the “bosses” of puberty.

- **Hymen:** A thin, stretchy piece of tissue with an opening that partially surrounds (not “covers”) the vaginal opening. It does not ‘break’ and is not a sign of virginity. It varies greatly in shape and size from person to person and can stretch during activities like sports, tampon use, or sexual activity.

I

- **Intimate Area/Genitals:** The private parts of your body between your legs (vulva, vagina).

M

- **Menstruation (Period):** The monthly shedding of the uterine lining, which comes out of the vagina as blood and tissue.
- **Mental Health:** Your emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It’s just as important as physical health.

O

- **Ovaries:** Two small organs inside the lower abdomen that store eggs and produce hormones like estrogen.
- **Ovulation:** The process in which a mature egg leaves the ovary and moves through a fallopian tube.

P

- **Pad (Sanitary Pad):** An absorbent product worn in underwear to catch menstrual flow.
- **PMS (Premenstrual Syndrome):** Physical and emotional changes (like mood swings or bloating) that can happen in the days before a period.
- **Puberty:** The time when your body changes from a child’s body to an adult’s body, getting ready for reproduction.
- **Pubic Hair:** Hair that grows in the genital area during puberty.

S

- **Self-Esteem:** How you feel about yourself and your own worth.
- **Specialist (Doctor):** A doctor who focuses on a specific area, like a gynecologist (women’s health), dermatologist (skin), or therapist (mental health).

T

- **Tampon:** A period product made of absorbent material that is worn inside the vagina to catch menstrual flow.

U

- **Uterus (Womb):** A muscular organ in the lower abdomen. Its lining thickens each month to nourish a possible pregnancy and is shed during a period if pregnancy doesn’t occur.

V

- **Vagina:** The muscular tube that connects the uterus to the outside of the body. Menstrual flow leaves the body through the vagina.
- **Vulva:** The name for all the external female genital parts you can see.

Big Sis Note on Language:

Using the right words—like vulva, period, or boundaries—is powerful. It takes away shame and gives you confidence. If a word sounds confusing at first, that’s okay! Come back here anytime. Knowledge is your friend.

Sources used

1. **American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).** (2023). *Caring for Your Teenager*. Bantam.
A comprehensive guide from the nation's leading pediatric authority, covering physical, emotional, and social development during adolescence.
2. **American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG).** (2021). *Your First Period (Especially for Teens)*. Patient Education Pamphlet. Retrieved from www.acog.org/womens-health
Provides clear, medically accurate information on menstruation and gynecological health from the leading organization in women's healthcare.
3. **Huebner, D., & Bennett, C.** (2021). *What's Going on Down There? A Boy's Guide to Growing Up*. Illustrated by M. S. Hanson. Magination Press.
While focused on boys, the publisher (Magination Press, an imprint of the American Psychological Association) is a gold standard for evidence-based, emotionally intelligent guides for youth. Their approach strongly informed the tone and structure of this book.
4. **Loveday, S., & O'Connell, K.** (2020). *Celebrate Your Body (and Its Changes, Too!): The Ultimate Puberty Book for Girls*. Rockridge Press.
A contemporary, body-positive puberty book for the 8–12 age range that emphasizes confidence and normal diversity, mirroring the core philosophy of this guide.
5. **Talking with Kids about Health.** (n.d.). *Puberty Education Resources*. The Center for Parent and Teen Communication at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. Retrieved from parentandteen.com
A trusted, hospital-backed resource offering research-based strategies for open communication between caregivers and adolescents on health and development topics.
6. **National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH).** (2023). *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health. Retrieved from www.nimh.nih.gov

The federal agency's resources provided the foundation for the sections on emotional changes, stress management, and identifying when to seek help for mental well-being.