



**Hannah, Beth; Dyer, Fiona, ed. (2019) Puberty as a life transition : understanding and supporting young people with additional support needs. In: Prevention, Intervention & Inclusion, 2019-04-03 - 2019-04-03, Centre for Youth & Criminal Justice. ,**

This version is available at <https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/67842/>

**Strathprints** is designed to allow users to access the research output of the University of Strathclyde. Unless otherwise explicitly stated on the manuscript, Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Please check the manuscript for details of any other licences that may have been applied. You may not engage in further distribution of the material for any profitmaking activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute both the url (<https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/>) and the content of this paper for research or private study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge.

Any correspondence concerning this service should be sent to the Strathprints administrator: [strathprints@strath.ac.uk](mailto:strathprints@strath.ac.uk)



## School of Education and Social Work University of Dundee

Puberty as a life transition: Understanding and  
supporting young people with additional support  
needs

Dr Beth Hannah

Senior Lecturer in Educational Psychology

Director, Transformative Change: Educational and Life  
Transitions (TCELT) Research Centre





# Puberty as a Life Transition

- Onset of puberty marks the passage from childhood to adolescence and acquiring skills to carry out adult roles
  - Normal range of onset of puberty is 8 -14 years in females and 9 -15 years in males
  
- Puberty is transitional period between childhood and adulthood
  - Period of rapid physical growth
  - Physiological - endocrine (hormone) changes
  - Sexual maturation & sexual relationships
    - Secondary sexual characteristics appear
    - Fertility is achieved
  - Profound psychological changes take place
    - Increased desire for autonomy, self-determination and independence
    - Identity –sense of self
  - Social relationship changes
    - Peers
    - Adults
  - Cognitive development
    - Development of neuroimaging technology (1970s) led to new ways of studying brain development
    - Evidence suggests that brain growth continues into adolescence –changes which are likely to stimulate cognitive growth and development, including capacity for abstract reasoning
  - Emotional growth



# Stage-Environment Fit Theory

- Proposed by Eccles and Midgely (1989)
- Drew on person-environment fit theory (Hunt, 1975)
  - Behaviour, motivation and mental health influenced by fit between characteristics of individuals and their social environments
  - Added the idea of developmental stages to Hunt's theory
- Importance of fit between developmental stage of adolescents (and associated needs) and social environment (so interaction between individual and environment)
  - May be a mismatch which can have negative consequences
- How social and learning environments (home, school etc.) respond to changing needs of adolescents is important and can impact on
  - Academic motivation & educational achievement
  - Self-perceptions
  - Social-emotional wellbeing
  - Problem behaviours (e.g. conflict in the home due to mismatch in need for autonomy)
  - Mental health



## Puberty for young people with ASN

- The majority of children with additional support needs will experience puberty at the same time and rate as their peers.
- Lack of research into how men and women with disabilities experience sexuality and sexual identity and, in particular, the views and experiences of young people (Morrison , 2011)
- Impact of YP's difficulties in areas such as cognition, language, social communication, social interaction, physical, sensory, visual and hearing on ability to understand the changes associated with puberty
- Importance of educating children with ASN about Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP)
  - Personal safety-how to keep themselves safe
  - Understanding difference between public and private places and appropriateness of behaviour in context (e.g. masturbation in inappropriate place)



Telling a person with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) about puberty can be a challenge and your approach must be based on their emotional and cognitive ability rather than their chronological age.

This does not mean that most children with ASD or learning disabilities require information at a different time to their peers. Rather that they need the same information at the same time but in a different format.

Shona McMonagle, Pupil Support Teacher,  
Grangemouth High School - 2014

Ref: NHS Forth Valley (n.d. p.3)



## Current Practices for Young People with ASN

- How do we support young people (YP) with ASN making transition from childhood to adulthood?
- Children with a learning disability/additional support needs routinely miss out on Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) Education, or are taught certain topics far later than their peers (Morrison, 2011)
- Recommended that they should be taught at same stage as peers but pedagogical approaches (content, resources etc) should be adapted to meet their needs
- Recommended that education in RSHP should start early as it takes children with a learning disability longer to learn new information and practise skills



## Resources for teachers and other staff in educational establishments

- A Framework Supporting Second to Fourth Level Curriculum for Excellence Health and Wellbeing 2017. (Stirling, Falkirk and Clackmannanshire Council)
  - Aimed at those involved in delivery of relationships, sexual health and parenthood (RSHP) education for young people in secondary schools with ASN
  - Recommended that young people with learning disabilities should receive education in RSHP at same age as peers (Barnardo's/British Institute of Learning Disability 2015).
  - Recommends that “When planning it is essential that learning and teaching engages with young people and takes account of their voice and experiences” (p5)
  - Recommends that “In many cases, children with additional support needs will need the same information at the same time as their typically developing peers, but may require staff to adapt their teaching, methodologies or input” (p10)
  - Advise on importance of gaining support of parents/carers
  - Main recommended resource for secondary schools in Scotland is ‘SHARE’ from Health Scotland.  
[www.healthscotland.com/SHARE](http://www.healthscotland.com/SHARE)
  
- A Framework Supporting Early to Second Level Curriculum For Excellence Health and Wellbeing 2015. (Stirling, Falkirk and Clackmannanshire Council)
  - This resource pre-dates the secondary resource





## Resources for teachers and other staff in educational establishments

- Clackmannanshire, Stirling and Falkirk Education Service (2013). *Managing sexualised behaviour guidelines*. <https://centralsexualhealth.org/media/8936/msb-nov-17-changes.pdf>
  - Provides guidance on Managing Sexualised Behaviour for school staff in Forth Valley
  - Importance of RSHP education
  - Key values underpin document
  - Links to relevant policy and legislation
  - Aims to achieve consistency of approach by staff
  - Staff can monitor behaviour in their schools; evaluate how they respond to incidents; highlight need for additional support for children and young people; and identify staff development needs
  - Framework for management of incidents -8 steps
  - Information on what is appropriate behaviour linked to age and stage-useful red, amber, green grading system
  - Illustrative case studies with suggested strategies



## Resources for parents/carers

→ Preparing for (and Surviving) Puberty: For parents and carers of children and young people with a learning disability

[https://www.centralexualhealth.org/media/7961/preparing\\_for\\_puberty-1-.pdf](https://www.centralexualhealth.org/media/7961/preparing_for_puberty-1-.pdf)

→ Information & advice for parents/carers on a range of issues associated with puberty

→ Recommends parents/carers start educating their child early about body changes

→ Helps reduce and manage anxiety during puberty

→ Recommends parents talk to child's school and work closely with them

→ Provides information on extensive range of resources including reference list and website links

→ NSPCC (2013) Talk pants and play safe

→ Research indicates that disabled children are **three times** more vulnerable to abuse

→ Autism-specific version of [The Underwear Rule](#) -help parents keep their child safe



## Perspective on Current Practices

- Important to share resources and current practices in relation to RSHP education for YP with ASN
- Important to evaluate resources and current practices in relation to RSHP education for YP with ASN
  - Views of teachers and other school staff
  - Views of other professionals working with YP with ASN
  - Views of parents/carers of YP with ASN
  - Views of young people (e.g. Highland Children's Forum evaluation of SHARE programme and SHARE for ASN provision in 2017-18)
    - In relation to YP with ASN
      - Embarrassment about topic –some YP
      - Importance of learning from someone you know and trust
      - Want to be taught in ASN departments (if in a mainstream school)
      - Want to be taught in smaller groups



## Useful websites

Central Sexual Health

<https://centralsexualhealth.org/professionals/asn-learning-disabilities/>

NHS Share resource

[www.healthscotland.com/SHARE](http://www.healthscotland.com/SHARE)

Managing Sexualised Behaviour Guidelines

[http://www.centralsexualhealth.org/media/6505/msb\\_guidelines.pdf](http://www.centralsexualhealth.org/media/6505/msb_guidelines.pdf)

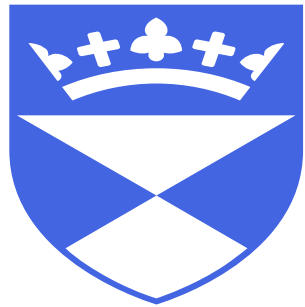
Books for children and young people with autism

<https://www.jkp.com/uk/series/sexuality-and-safety-with-tom-and-ellie.html>



## References

- Clackmannanshire, Stirling and Falkirk Education Service (2013). *Managing sexualised behaviour guidelines*. Retrieved from <https://centralsexualhealth.org/media/8936/msb-nov-17-changes.pdf>
- Eccles, J. S., Midgley, C., Wigfield, A., Buchanan, C. M., Reuman, D., Flanagan, C., & Maclver, D. (1993). Development during adolescence: The impact of stage– environment fit on adolescents’ experiences in schools and families. *American Psychologist*, 48, 90–101.
- Highland Children’s Forum (2018). *School Sexual Health and Relationship Education: The Views of Young People with Additional Support Needs*. Retrieved from [http://www.highlandchildrensforum.org/userfiles/file/hcf\\_reports/SHARE-for-ASN-Consultation-Report.pdf](http://www.highlandchildrensforum.org/userfiles/file/hcf_reports/SHARE-for-ASN-Consultation-Report.pdf)
- Morrison, C. A. (2011). *From disability to capability: Sex and relationship learning for children and young people with a learning disability* (doctoral thesis). Retrieved from <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/2910/>
- NHS Forth Valley (n.d.). *Preparing for (and Surviving) Puberty: For parents and carers of children and young people with a learning disability*. Retrieved from [https://www.centralsexualhealth.org/media/7961/preparing\\_for\\_puberty-1-.pdf](https://www.centralsexualhealth.org/media/7961/preparing_for_puberty-1-.pdf)
- NSPCC (2013). *Talk pants and play safe*. Retrieved from <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/underwear-rule/>
- Stirling, Falkirk and Clackmannanshire Council (2015). *A framework supporting early to second level Curriculum for Excellence Health and Wellbeing*. Retrieved from <https://centralsexualhealth.org/professionals/asn-learning-disabilities/>
- Stirling, Falkirk and Clackmannanshire Council (2017). *A framework supporting second to fourth level Curriculum for Excellence Health and Wellbeing*. <https://centralsexualhealth.org/professionals/asn-learning-disabilities/>



# University of Dundee

Dr Beth Hannah  
[e.hannah@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:e.hannah@dundee.ac.uk)