

# WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME?

## A Story for Girls Starting Puberty Early







By Carolina C. Di Blasi, M.D.  
and Robin Wallace-Wright, certified sexuality educator  
Illustrated by Michaele Miller

Copyright info: Effective date of Registration - May 15, 2018.

Dedication and Acknowledgment: This book was written with the financial support provided by the Fund for Excellence granted by Seattle Children's Hospital.

The book is dedicated to all the little girls who in sharing their stories over the years, inspired us to write this book. We hope this book helps many girls experiencing puberty at a younger age realize that they are normal, amazing and not alone.





Today is Stella's first day of second grade.

She is happy to be back in school and so excited to be one of the tallest in her class.

The day passed quickly as she got settled into her new classroom and reconnected with friends.



After school, Stella's mom came to pick her up. Stella scrambled into the car and fastened her seat belt. "Ow!" she said, frowning. "This really hurts!"

"What's the matter honey?" her mom inquired, glancing at Stella in the rear view mirror.

Stella replied, "The seatbelt strap hurts. My chest feels really sore."





Later that night, as Stella was taking a bath, she noticed a few dark hairs under her arms. Shocked, she yelled - “MOM!”

Her mom came running up the stairs to find Stella in the tub looking surprised.

After her bath, Stella's mom helped comb the tangles out of her curls.



Looking at her mom with confused eyes, Stella said somewhat quietly, “Mom, I’ve noticed a lot of different things happening to my body lately.”

“What have you noticed?” her mom asked kindly.

Stella hesitated and then confided, “Well, this year I am one of the tallest in my class. Also, I have raised bumps on my chest and they hurt! And I have some hair growing under my arms. None of my friends have that.” Her chin trembled slightly.

Mom put her arms around Stella and gave her a hug. “I’ve noticed these changes too, she gently replied. “It looks like you are beginning **puberty**, which means your body is starting to grow and change into a grownup body. Don’t worry, all these changes are normal and everybody goes through them.”

Stella’s eyes widened. “Puberty?” Wow!! How old were you when you started puberty?

Thinking for a moment, her mom replied, “I think I was ten. But everybody starts puberty at the age that is right for them.”  
Next week we are seeing your pediatrician for your annual exam. Let’s talk with her about the changes you have noticed. “I’m sure she will have lots of information and can answer any questions you may have.”

Feeling reassured, Stella smiled and hugged her mom back.





The following day, Stella's best friend, Jada, came over to play. While the girls were playing dress-up, Stella started giggling wildly, but then suddenly started to cry.



“What’s wrong?” Jada asked, confused. “I thought we were having fun?”



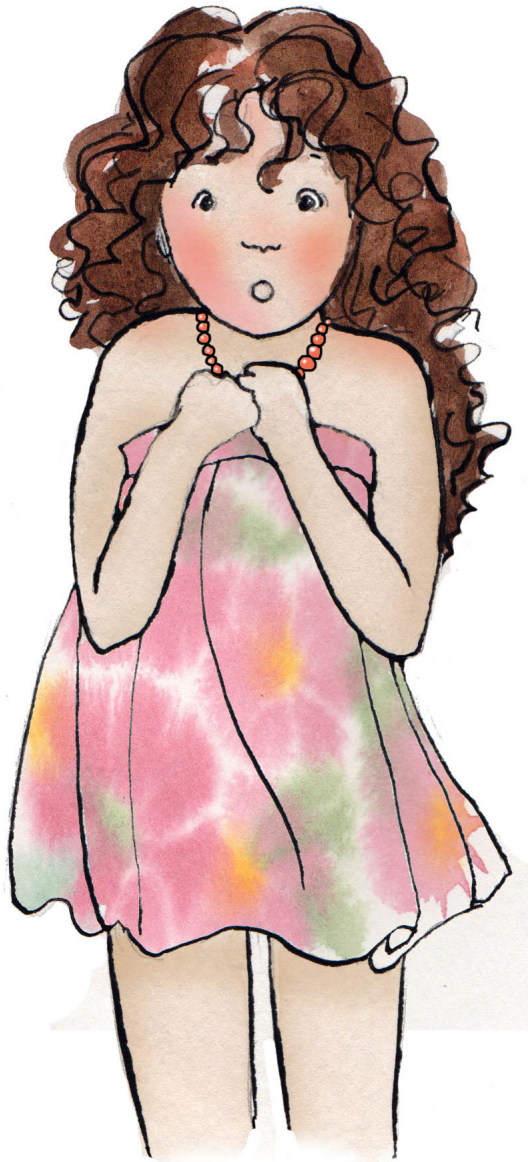
Wiping a tear from her cheek, Stella answered,  
“We are - I am. I don’t know why I have so many different feelings  
inside me. One minute I feel really happy and the next minute I feel  
sad. It’s so confusing.”

Jada reached over and took Stella’s hand. She felt bad for her friend  
and all the different emotions she was feeling.

The girls started changing out of their dress-up clothes.



Jada's mouth dropped open and she exclaimed, "Your body looks different!"



Stella blushed bright red and quickly covered her body with her arms. She felt awkward and embarrassed.



The following week, Stella went to see her pediatrician. During the visit, the doctor measured Stella's height, examined her body and ran various tests.



Afterwards, she sat down with Stella and her mom to talk about the changes Stella was experiencing. Smiling warmly, the doctor explained:

For most girls, puberty begins between the ages of eight to thirteen, but it can be earlier or later. For a few girls, puberty is so early or happens so quickly that special tests and medicine are needed, but most girls don't need any treatment. During puberty, your body starts making **hormones**, which are special chemicals that tell your body to do dif-

ferent things. Those hormones tell your body to grow up.

Some girls start puberty earlier, at age seven, like you. During puberty your body starts growing and changing in different ways. For example, you may notice your breasts starting to grow. As they are growing, they can feel sore and tender.

Stella nodded and thought to herself, “That’s why the seat belt hurt across my chest.” She felt relieved understanding the reason behind the soreness.

The doctor continued, “The first stage of breast growth is a raised bump under your nipple. This is called a **breast bud**. One breast may grow faster than the other. Don’t worry; the other breast will catch up. It can take several years for your breasts to fully develop. As your breasts grow, you may want to start wearing a bra to feel more comfortable and at that time, your mom can help you find one that is right for you.

Stella leaned forward in her chair. She found the doctor’s words helpful.



As you have noticed, you are taller and you may grow really fast. This is called having a growth spurt. It's totally normal to grow up to three to four inches in a year! During this time, I suggest buying pants that are longer; to give you room to grow. You can roll them up at first and then unroll them, as your legs get longer. It also helps to get shoes that are a bit bigger, so your feet have room to grow and you don't have to buy new shoes as often.

Giggling, Stella swung her long legs out in front of her. She was excited

about the idea of getting new clothes and shoes.

The doctor added, “You probably also noticed some hair growing under your arms. Your armpits may also start having a strong smell.” This is called **body odor**. Body odor happens because sweat mixes with bacteria under your arms, which can cause a strong smell. It helps to take a shower or bath daily. While bathing, wash your armpits with soap. You can also wear **deodorant** under your arms to help reduce odor.

Another area where you start growing hair is between your legs. That area is called your **vulva** and the hair that grows there is called **pubic hair**.

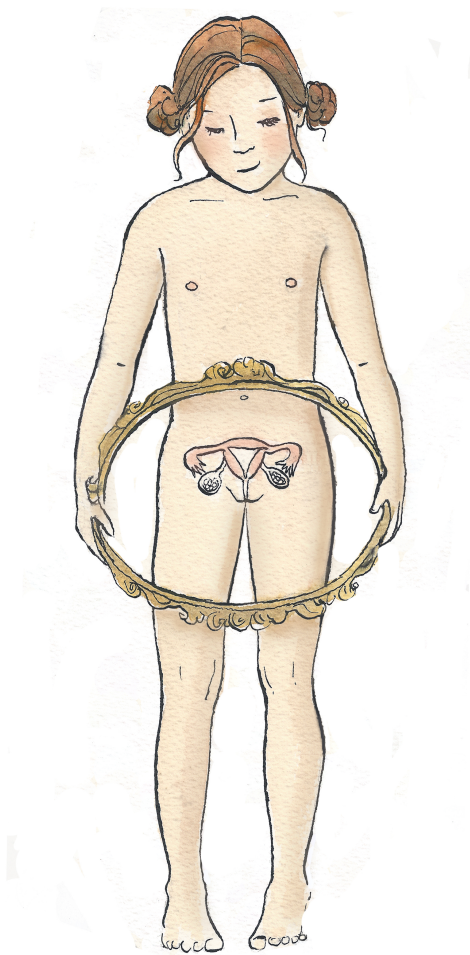
Feeling shy, Stella responded, “I have noticed underarm hair, but not body odor yet.”

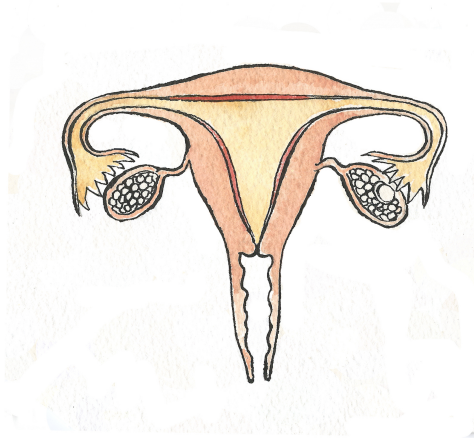
The doctor nodded, and then asked, “Have you noticed any pimples on your face or your skin being oily?” Touching her face, Stella replied, “No, not really.”

The doctor continued, “If you start to notice bumps - pimples - on your face or if you notice your face has become more oily, gently wash your face once or twice a day with an unscented soap and warm water. Rinse the soap off with warm water too. This will help keep your skin clean and can help prevent pimples - which is also called **acne**.

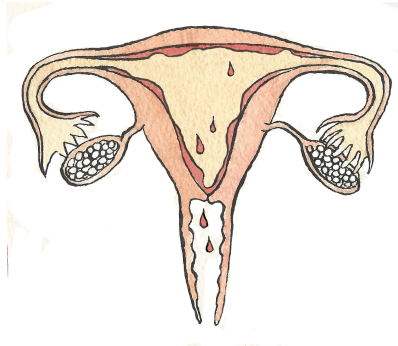
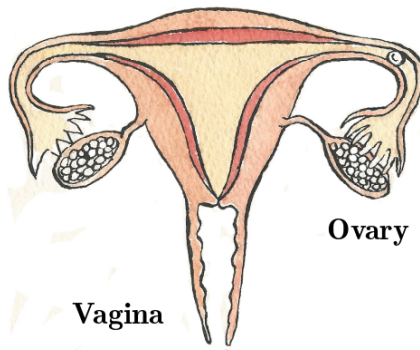


Another important event of puberty is that eventually you will have your **menstrual period**. The doctor showed Stella a diagram to explain.





**Uterus**



A girl's first period is called **menarche**. This is a sign that her body is growing up. This happens each month because her ovary releases an egg. This egg is only the size of a grain of sand. While the egg is ripening, the uterus builds up a lining which contains a little blood. Each month she experiences a menstrual flow, which leaves the body through the vagina. The **vagina** is a passage way between your vulva and uterus.

However, breast development is usually the first sign of puberty in girls. The length of time between when breast development begins to when she starts her menstrual period can be different for each girl. Sometimes it can take many years. We will talk about this more when you are getting closer to that time.

Stella leaned her head on her mom's arm. "Wow that's a lot of changes!" she exclaimed. Grinning, she added - "I do feel better understanding what's happening to me and that these changes are normal."

"Definitely", the doctor agreed, "It can feel overwhelming at first. Yet, it really helps knowing what to expect - and knowing these changes are all normal. Also, keep in mind that everybody goes through these changes. Your body decides when to go through puberty and every person goes at their own pace."

Stella's mom hugged her close. She felt better understanding these changes too.

The doctor continued, “Besides changes in your body, you may also notice changes in how you feel inside - changes in your emotions and feelings. For example, you may feel awkward or self-conscious about your body as it grows and changes.”

Stella remembered feeling that way when playing dress up with Jada.

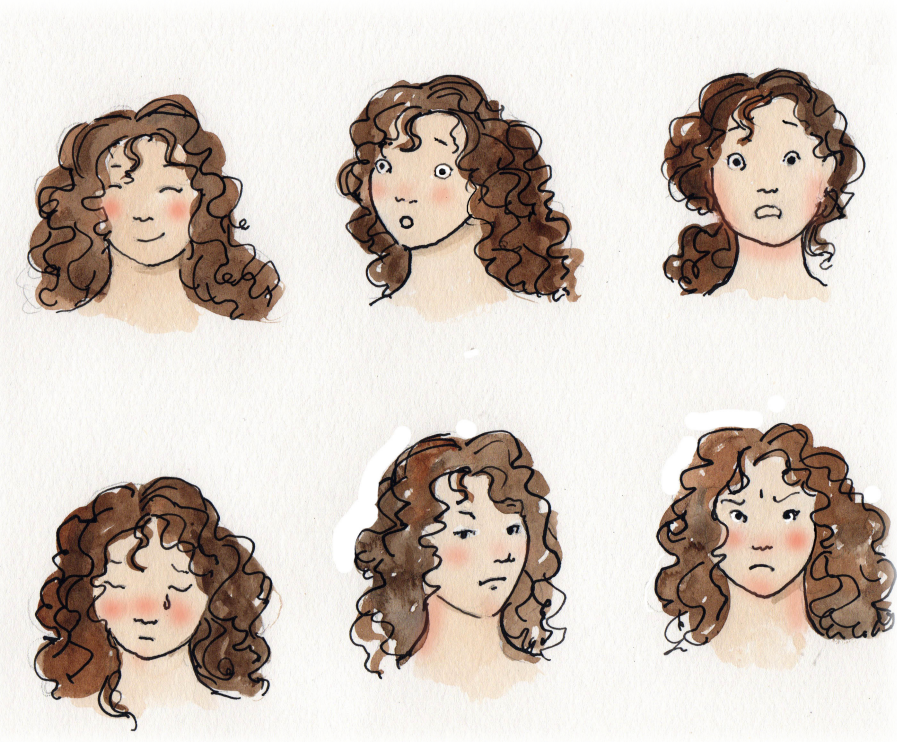


Frowning slightly, she admitted, “I felt embarrassed when my friend laughed at my body because it looks different than hers.”

Nodding, the doctor replied, “Uh-huh - I can understand you feeling

embarrassed. It may help to let your friend know that these changes are happening because you are going through puberty. Explain to her that someday she will go through puberty too. Everybody does.”

The doctor then asked, “Have you had **mood swings**? This is where your **emotions** may swing from feeling happy or excited one moment to sad or angry the next.”



Leaning towards the doctor, Stella blurted in a rush, “Yes! - sometimes I feel happy and giggly and then the next minute I am sad and sometimes I cry. And the smallest things can make me feel upset. Is this normal?”

Grinning, the doctor clarified, “Yes - it is your body getting used to



the changes. In time, these mood swings will likely even out.”

Stella sighed and snuggled closer to her mom. She felt so much better understanding why she was having different feelings all at once.

The doctor looked over at Stella and her mom. Her eyes were warm and kind.

“It helps to think about different things you can do when you’re feeling moody or have unpleasant feelings.”

“What are some things that might help you feel better during these times?”

Stella sat up straight and said: Listening to music really helps.

“Great!” her mom exclaimed, “Any other ideas?”

“Let’s see” Stella pondered, “I could paint my nails, cuddle with my dog or read a book.”

“These are wonderful ideas!” the doctor acknowledged.



Mom added,

“You could also talk with someone you trust - that can help you feel better.”

“Like you, mom? Or a good friend?” Stella asked.

“Exactly!” her mom agreed.

The doctor nodded. “One last thing I want you to keep in mind, Stella, is that your body goes through the changes of puberty at its own pace. You may feel a little uncomfortable because you experiencing changes before your friends - but sooner or later they will go through puberty too. Everybody does.”

Stella sighed. She felt so much better. It really helped knowing what to expect and that everyone goes through puberty.



During dinner that night, Stella's mom brought up the doctor's visit with Stella's dad. "We saw Dr. Dunn today and learned about puberty and what happens to your body and your emotions during this time."

"There are a lot of changes," Stella stated.

Her dad smiled warmly at her. "I'm glad you learned more about pu-

berthy,” he said. “Mom and I want you to know that we are always here for you if you have any questions or concerns”, he added, “We actually know a lot about puberty. Do you know why?”

Stella raised her eyebrows and thought for a moment. “Is it because you’ve already been through puberty?”

Smiling broadly, her dad exclaimed, “Yes! And we are here to help you as you grow and change.” Nodding, Mom added, “You can always talk with us.”

Stella got quiet for a moment. Frowning slightly, she murmured, “Well? there is one thing I want to talk about. The other day Jada was staring at my body and said it looked really different. I felt uncomfortable.”

Looking concerned, her dad reached over and took Stella’s hand. Quietly he explained, “Sometimes others may do or say things that hurt our feelings or make us feel uncomfortable. When this happens, it helps to set a boundary with them. Do you know what a boundary is”?

Confused, Stella replied, “Uh - not really.”

He continued, “Boundaries are limits we put in place with others to let them know what behaviors are OK and what behaviors are not OK. ”  
”When a friend says or does something that makes you feel uncomfortable or upset, that can be a sign that they have crossed your personal boundary.”

Stella thought about what her dad was saying. She did feel uncomfortable when Jada stared and commented on her body. It gave her an upset feeling in her stomach.

Sensing her feelings, her dad asked, “When Jada stared and said your body looked different - how did you feel?”

Stella shrugged her shoulders and replied sadly. “I didn’t like it. I felt



uncomfortable and embarrassed.”

“I can understand you feeling that way, Stella, her dad responded gently. It was your body telling you that what Jada said crossed your personal boundary.”

Frowning, Stella inquired, “What should I do if someone crosses my boundary?”

Her mom got up from the table and took a piece of paper and a pen out of the desk drawer. Sitting down next to Stella, she wrote some notes on the paper.

“A great way to let someone know your boundary is by using an “I-Statement Showing Stella her notes, she explained, “Here’s how it works:

**I feel:** Name the specific feeling you have, for example: uncomfortable, embarrassed, upset.

**When you:** State the specific thing they said or did that cause you to feel this way.

**Could you please:** State what you’d like the person to do instead. This is your boundary



For example, to set a boundary with Jada, you could say: “I feel embarrassed when you stare and laugh at my body. Could you please not do that?”

Stella sighed. “I feel strange using an I-Statement,” she murmured.

“That’s understandable,” her dad replied. “Using I-Statements can feel awkward at first, but it gets easier the more you practice. And if it does not go as planned, you can always ask a trusted adult for help, such as your teacher or us.”

Her dad’s enthusiasm was contagious. Stella smiled. She was willing to try.

The next morning, as Stella was getting ready for school, her mom came into the bathroom. She had another piece of notebook paper with her. “Good morning, Stella,” she said warmly. She gave Stella a hug and pressed her nose into her hair. “Umm - smells nice and clean.” Stella grinned.

“Thanks mom! What’s that in your hand?”

Taping the paper to the mirror in front of Stella, her mom replied -

“I know we’ve talked about the changes your body is experiencing and how it’s important to keep your body clean and smelling nice. It can seem like a lot of things to remember - so I made a chart to help you.”

Intrigued, Stella read over the checklist.

My  
"Keeping me Clean and Healthy"  
to do List

- Shower or bath every 1-2 days  
In shower or bath:
  - Wash body with unscented Soap
  - Pay special attention to washing under arms
  - Gently wash face
  - Shampoo hair
- Put on clean underwear every morning, and after shower or bath
- Brush teeth twice a day

"This will help a lot," she thought to herself.

Her mom continued, "One day you may also need to start wearing **deodorant** under your arms to help with body odor. We can add that to the check list when the time comes."

"Okay! Thanks mom - this will really help," Stella replied with a laugh."





During school the next morning, Stella was hanging up her coat when a boy in her grade walked by.



Smirking, he whispered in her ear, “You are so tall - you look like a giraffe!”

Stella felt embarrassed and uncomfortable. Her chin trembled a little, and tears started to form in her eyes. But then she remembered what her dad had said the night before about boundaries.

Standing tall and straight, she looked him in the eye and assertively

said, “I feel uncomfortable when you call me a giraffe. Could you please stop saying that?”

The boy squirmed and put his hands in his pockets. He didn’t know where to look or how to respond.



Quickly, he walked away down the hall.

Feeling relieved, Stella walked proudly into the classroom.

That afternoon, Jada came over to play again. The girls decided to have a tea party.

Stella reached up to get the tea set and could easily retrieve it from the highest shelf.



“Wow!” Jada cried, her eyes widening. “That’s great how you can reach the cups and saucers so easily. I wish I could do that.”

Stella chuckled and said with pride, “I’m growing taller now that I’m starting puberty.”

“What is puberty?” Jada asked.

“It’s when your body starts making special hormones that tell it to start growing up. Getting taller is one thing that happens.”

Jada thought for a moment and a small frown furrowed her brow. “One of these days I’m going to begin puberty and start growing up too. When this happens, would it be okay if I talk to you about it? I’d feel so much better knowing I could talk to you.”

Stella’s eyes shown and a big grin came over her face. She felt grand. “Of course you can talk to me!” she exclaimed. You can also talk with your parents or a trusted adult, because they can really help too! She reached down and took Jada’s hand.

Looking relieved, Jada replied, “Thanks! I will!”



The girls sat down and raised their teacups towards each other.

“Here’s to puberty and growing up!” Stella said happily, as their cups clinked together.





## **Book Description:**

Second grader Stella's body is changing. She finds out she is starting "puberty". Her parents and family doctor help her understand puberty and how all the changes of puberty are normal. They also teach her how to set and communicate personal boundaries.

Early puberty, also called precocious puberty, happens before the age of eight. Starting puberty early can cause girls to feel isolated or different. This book helps girls understand the changes of puberty, that what they are experiencing is normal and helps them realize that many other girls start puberty early too!



## **About the Authors**

Dr Carolina C. Di Blasi is a pediatric endocrinologist. Over the years, she developed a strong interest in female health and reproduction. She was inspired by her patients to develop an early puberty workshop and this children book was an extension of that. She wanted to address the increasing rate of early development in girls helping them understand the process at their own developmental stage of maturity.

Robin Wallace-Wright, is a certified sexuality educator and founder of The Wright Conversations. She is passionately devoted to making growing up easier for young people and the adults who love them. She has provided puberty education and consultation to thousands of students and parents through school presentations, seminars and workshops. In addition to helping children understand and feel more comfortable about puberty, Robin specializes in giving parents the tools, knowledge and confidence they need to guide their children on this important journey toward adulthood.