

BOOK REVIEW

What About Me? Puberty Education for Preteens

by Ann McGaffey, MD; Anne Boyd, MD; Maribel Cedillo, MS, RD;
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Review by Michael E Lynch

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Editor's note: Helpful and well-written books are often as difficult to find as are capable reviewers of those books. Thus, at times we will review older books that fill needs in current times. This book, written a decade ago for children entering puberty, was "passed" by a surprising number of potential physician reviewers. Their avoidance was ultimately resolved by Michael E Lynch, a bright high school student in San Francisco who provides us this perceptive analysis.

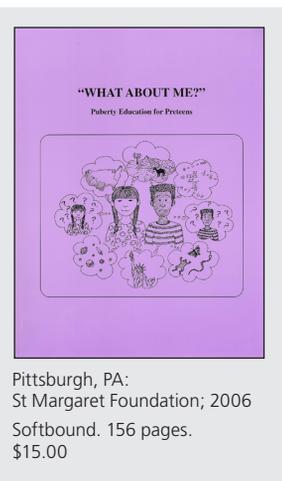
— Vincent J Felitti, MD, Associate Editor

The creation of taboos is a natural human tendency, manifesting itself as the prohibition of certain behaviors and conversation topics in societies all around the world. Although taboos often provide welcome civility, in some situations they cause more problems than they solve. Throughout many circles of American society, social doctrine encourages restricting the flow of puberty-related information that is provided to tweens and teens. The tragedy of this phenomenon is that children fail to receive valuable information about the inevitable change of their bodies at precisely the time that this information becomes relevant to them.

What About Me? exists as a solution to this problem. This book provides children with clear answers to their questions about puberty that adults cannot, or will not, answer for them. The book begins with a straightforward explanation of puberty: what it is and why young readers must know about it. The first 40 pages or so provide readers with a general yet detailed understanding of puberty and its characteristics, written as both expository passages and answers to common questions. Additionally, this section gives information that matters even in adulthood, such as nutrition, hygiene, and exercise, or how to measure your body mass index and what it means. This section not only teaches good habits, it discusses common bad habits (such as smoking and steroids), and why they should be avoided. The next 60 pages are divided into a section for boys and a section for girls. These serve the purpose of handling gender-specific questions and concepts. One subsequent section then handles boys and girls together once again, covering feelings and sexuality. The Appendices cover miscellaneous information that doesn't fit into the earlier categories, such as diet. The book ends with some more suggested reading and a helpful glossary of terms. In about 150 pages, this book manages to cover an array of subtopics, and it does this in a concise and readable manner.

The book is not just a collection of information to be read, it contains many engaging anecdotes that make it much more readable for its target audience. Longer passages are embedded with questions, often the very questions that children are unable or are afraid to ask. These questions are not glossed over—they tend to receive multiple paragraphs of explanation, and different subtopics are given in "Myths and Facts Boxes" as another method of conveying important information, as well as activities that encourage kids to examine their own beliefs or simply quiz them on what they have learned. These additions to the book give it another dimension that keeps the reader interested.

What About Me? holds together its expository information by its open and sympathetic voice. The book is written in a fashion that is clearly targeted to young readers, yet it doesn't make the common mistake of denying them respect. No question is even hinted at as being a "stupid question," and an enthusiasm on the part of the authors for teaching this material permeates the pages. Children who read it are encouraged to feel good about the experience of puberty. The narration links all of the specific questions covered in the book back to the simple feelings of curiosity and worry that underlie puberty and does its best to satisfy those feelings. This is a good and crucially informative book for any child to read, or to facilitate dialogue between children and their parents on any of the topics contained within. ❖



How to Cite this Article

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