

Parents' Views on Education & Health Support Around Puberty for SEND Children and Young People

1. Sensory Processing, Behaviour & Emotional Regulation

Parents consistently report that puberty intensifies sensory and behavioural challenges:

- Heightened sensory sensitivities (touch, smell, sound, clothing, pads, shaving, body hair).
- Increased emotional distress, anger, anxiety and dysregulation.
- Need for calming strategies, sensory tools, and predictable routines.
- Difficulty understanding or communicating internal changes, especially for non-verbal children.
- Behaviour changes linked to hormones are often misunderstood as "bad behaviour".

Parents want:

- Clear guidance on what behaviour is puberty-related.
- Early identification of sensory needs before they escalate.
- Support to understand what "bad" looks like in a safeguarding sense, not a moral one.

-2. Learning Support & Accessible Teaching About Puberty

Parents say current education is not accessible for SEND children:

- No appropriate pictures, symbols, or visual resources.
- Teachers lack training to deliver sexual health or puberty education to SEND pupils.
- No consistent terminology or shared language across

schools and services.

- No pathway explaining when puberty starts, what to expect, and how to teach it.

Parents want:

- Visual boards, symbol sets, objects of reference.
- Social stories for hygiene, periods, shaving, body changes, private vs public behaviour.
- A clear “pathway into puberty” for ages 8+ and 18+.
- Tools to explain body changes in simple, concrete ways.

3. Need for Specialist Support

Parents strongly feel the borough needs:

- A specialist in sexual behaviour and puberty for SEND.
- Professionals trained in sensory processing, communication needs, and sexual development.
- Ongoing puberty training for young adults, not just children.
- Subgroups for:
 - Boys
 - Girls
 - Gender identity
 - Cultural groups where discussing puberty is difficult

4. Hygiene, Periods & Body Care

Parents need practical guidance on:

- Introducing pads to girls with sensory sensitivities.
- Supporting shaving (face, underarms, body hair).
- Teaching hygiene in a way that is visual, concrete, and repeatable.
- Understanding what is “normal” vs “concerning” at different ages and stages.

5. Safe Relationships, Consent & Boundaries

Parents want:

- Clear explanations of safe vs unsafe touch, private vs public behaviour.
- Guidance on how to teach consent to children with learning disabilities.
- Support around:
 - Hugs and kisses
 - Sensory-seeking behaviours
 - When these become safeguarding concerns
- Tools for “private time” (timers, visual cues, routines).

Parents also need reassurance about:

- Children avoiding nudity on TV — is it good or bad?
- How to respond when a child touches their private parts in public.
- How to teach safe exploration of their body in a private, respectful way.

6. Online Safety & Exposure to Harmful Content

Parents are worried about:

- Children accidentally accessing adult content.
- No clear pathway for parents to follow when this happens.
- Lack of training on online safety for SEND families.

They want:

- Practical, step-by-step guidance.
- Training on filters, parental controls, and supervision.
- Education on how puberty and curiosity can increase online risks.

7. Cultural & Language Barriers

Parents highlight:

- Some families cannot discuss puberty due to cultural norms.
- Language barriers make it harder to access support.
- Need for culturally sensitive subgroups and translated resources.

8. Understanding Arousal & Sexual Development

Parents are unsure how to manage:

- Unexpected or unusual triggers for arousal.
- How to redirect behaviour safely and respectfully.
- How to teach privacy when children share bedrooms or have no private space.
- How to support young people who are mentally younger than their chronological age.

They want:

- A parent toolkit explaining:
 - What is normal
 - What is inappropriate
 - How to respond calmly and safely
 - How to teach boundaries without shame

- 9. Gaps in Education & Health Pathways

Parents report:

- No universal puberty training across primary, secondary, and post-16.
- No joined-up information between health, education, and families.
- No clear terminology or guidance from schools.

- No assurance that children understand what is happening to them.

They want:

- A consistent, borough-wide puberty curriculum for SEND.
- Visual aids available in family centres.
- Clear signposting to services and professionals.
- A structured pathway for parents to follow when concerns arise.

-10. Practical Tools Parents Say They Need

Parents request:

- Visual cards, cue cards, timetables.
- Social stories for all aspects of puberty.
- Sensory-friendly hygiene products.
- Timers for private time.
- Objects of reference for body changes.
- Safe, practical measures for home environments.
- Guidance on co-sleeping and shared bedrooms.

-- Overall Message from Parents

Parents are asking for early, accessible, specialist, and ongoing support that recognises the unique sensory, communication, and learning needs of SEND children and young people.

They want:

- Consistency
- Clarity
- Visual tools

- Specialist training
- Safe spaces to talk
- Support that respects their child's developmental stage, not just their age

And above all, they want reassurance that their children will be safe, understood, and supported.

