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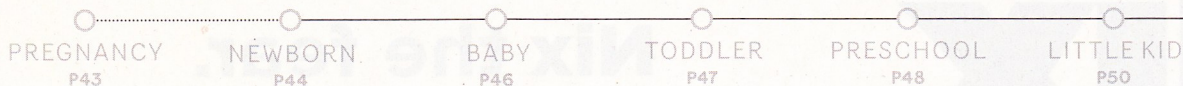
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Is it time for some...support? We have advice for parents wondering how to handle the first bra talk.

DIANA CARMICHAEL* OF PETERBOROUGH, ONT. HAS three daughters, and they've all responded differently to the "first bra" milestone. "My oldest was pretty low-key about it, and asked for a bra when she needed one. My 11-year-old should be wearing one now, but doesn't want to, and my nine-year-old keeps stealing and wearing her sisters' bras, even though she doesn't need them yet," says Carmichael.

Arati Mokashi, a paediatric endocrinologist in Halifax, says that breasts may start budding as early as eight or as late as 13, but age 10 and a half is the average. "American data suggests that puberty is beginning earlier now than in the past, which may be due to improvements in nutrition and an increase in obesity," explains Mokashi. "We can assume this data would be similar for Canadian girls." Girls with breast buds may ask for a bra for comfort or modesty, or parents may be first to make the suggestion.

Bobcaygeon, Ont. mom Gina Reilly* started noticing her 11-year-old daughter's body changing last summer. "I suggested we pick up a bra as part of our back-to-school shopping—I thought it was best to start the year with it." Reilly says she wasn't fazed by the changes. "It certainly made me think about how fast she's growing up, but I try to appreciate every age my kids have reached—the baby stage, heading off to school and now puberty. It's all new and exciting for me as a parent." Carmichael felt a bit sentimental when bra shopping with her eldest, but with her younger daughters, she's been much more matter-of-fact.

When you start bra shopping, you may be surprised by some of the padded and push-up options on the market for young girls. Many parents prefer to start with a sports-bra style. After Wyoming teenager Megan Grassell found the bra choices for her 13-year-old little sister to be too sexual, she started YellowBerry, an online bra company offering age-appropriate underwear for girls 11 to 15. Her Kickstarter fundraising campaign went viral, and Grassell, now 18, is shipping her designs internationally.

What if, like Carmichael, your daughter wants to go bra shopping before she really needs one? Carla Fry, a psychologist in Vancouver, recommends listening to what



your child is telling you. "Simple formula: If she's asking for a bra, it's time to get her one, whether it's for modesty, fitting in or fashion." (Fry isn't saying parents should *always* give in for the sake of social acceptance. If fitting in seems to be a frequent preoccupation for your child, have a conversation about peer pressure.)

While some girls may be teased for being late bloomers, well-developed girls can be self-conscious as well. (Carmichael's 11-year-old reports that her grade-five peers get made fun of as soon as they start wearing bras.) Let your daughter know that all girls develop differently, and many share the same self-doubts. "Help her to see the big picture. Eventually all females will have breasts and wear bras, we're just on different timelines," suggests Fry.

Some girls might prefer to celebrate the milestone with a fun, parent-tween shopping day, while others will appreciate a private, online purchase with little fanfare. Follow your daughter's lead, advises Fry, and if you're in doubt, just ask her. Reilly chose not to make bra shopping into a production, as her daughter initially seemed a bit embarrassed when talking about her body (and she still prefers the term "undershirt" to "bra").

Keeping the lines of communication open is important. A girl's first period will likely begin two to two-and-a-half years after breasts begin to develop, says Mokashi, so plan to have casual but honest conversations in the coming years.

"Now we're talking more often, and she's more comfortable as we go through other changes," says Reilly. —KATE WINN

* NAME HAS BEEN CHANGED



Girls now need bras about a year earlier than they did 20 years ago. A study published in the journal *Pediatrics* back in 2010 found that by the age of seven, 10 percent of white girls, two percent of Asian girls, 15 percent of Hispanic girls, and 23 percent of black girls had started developing breasts.