You may have noticed things about yourself and your friends that are starting to change. Changing bodies, changing feelings, changing relationships.

Or maybe you’re not changing at all – at least not yet.

This booklet gives you some facts about what to expect. And some ideas on how to cope if it doesn’t happen quite like you thought it would.
Many of these changes have to do with sex. But what is sex?

Yes, you may already know it’s about making babies. But it’s a lot of other things as well.

It’s easier to explain by looking at those body changes in more detail...
First, a word about words. It's good to know about your body, and it's important to know the names for the parts you're learning about.

But there are many different words, and not all of the words you use with your family or friends will be liked or understood if you use them with other people.

The words in this booklet are generally understood by most people.

A person's body changes throughout life. But here we're talking about particular changes called puberty.
Puberty is when your body changes from being a child to a young adult.

Puberty usually starts earlier in girls than boys. It can start as young as 8 (but usually later), and continue until 15 or 16.

The changes happen because the body produces chemicals called sex hormones.

Everyone changes at their own rate. Sometimes it’s hard not to compare yourself to other people but there’s no need. Everybody gets there in the end.
During puberty, a girl’s body starts to change shape.

She grows taller and heavier, and her hips and breasts get bigger.

The reproductive organs inside a girl’s body start to develop.

We can’t see from looking at the outside of our bodies so let’s have a look inside.

Puberty is also the time when changes happen inside your body. Although you are too young to think about having a baby now, your body starts to get ready for this. Each month a tiny egg (too small to see) is released from one of the ovaries and it moves down the fallopian tube.

At the same time the lining of the uterus is becoming thick and soft. When your body knows that no baby is growing, the egg is re-absorbed into your body. The lining passes out of your body as blood through the vagina.

This is called “having a period.”

Hair grows in her armpits and around her vulva, and she sweats more.

The amount of blood is very small – about enough to fill an egg-cup. It takes 4 to 5 days to come out.
Starting your periods can feel like a big change. For most girls it happens between the ages of 8 and 14 but sometimes later.

Some girls get a whitish stain on their pants. This is a sign that their periods may soon begin.

To begin with your periods might not come regularly but after a while they settle down and come about once a month.

Girls and women use sanitary towels or tampons to soak up the blood. Towels and tampons have to be changed every few hours.

Towels or tampons? It's your choice. Some people prefer one, some the other.

But it is important to be prepared. So talk to a grown-up that you trust, maybe a parent, carer, or school nurse, about what's going to happen and what to do when it does.

Don't flush a tampon or towel down the toilet. Wrap it up and put it in a bin, if possible.

At school, there may be a special bin for you to use. If you're not sure, ask your teacher or school nurse.