

NINA MOINI: Puberty is something everyone goes through in life, but it is an uncomfortable topic to talk about for many. A new podcast is putting puberty front and center of the conversation. Presented by the BRAINS ON! universe, the podcast is simply titled *Puberty! The Podcast*. It's designed for kids 7-12, and is also a resource for parents helping their kids navigate their changing bodies and brains.

Joining me now in the studio is the Host and Executive Producer of the show, Molly Bloom. Thanks for being here, Molly.

MOLLY BLOOM: Oh, my gosh, Nina, thanks for having me.

NINA MOINI: I was joking with you during our last song that I get a little embarrassed even talking about puberty, and I thought, we are going to help this next generation to not feel that way. And that's very important. Did you see that need for this podcast when it came to this topic? Because you've covered so many.

MOLLY BLOOM: Yeah, yeah. I mean, so BRAINS ON! is a show where we answer questions from our audience. And we've been around for a long time. So we've answered a lot of questions. Like, everything from what's at the edge of the universe to why is sugar so tasty? But we got a lot of questions over the years related to puberty. From just, like, what's going on with my hormones? What is puberty? And we hadn't answered them yet because we were kind of like, I don't how to do this. But then we've been working on it for a while now, and it was time to help the kids figure out what's going on, because it happens to everybody.

NINA MOINI: Yeah. Do you have a sense and maybe some research you did for this of how puberty education has evolved or how is it going in schools these days?

MOLLY BLOOM: It varies so widely. Like, some schools do very little, some schools do a lot. And it depends if you're going to a private school or a public school or you're being homeschooled. So it's a huge range. So this is why we wanted to make this show, and partially because our show is for kids who are elementary school age, like 6 to 12, and puberty is happening younger, actually.

So the majority of kids start puberty around age eight. And so, that's kind of before a lot of the education in schools is happening. And so we wanted something that was speaking to them at that level that they could access so when these changes start that they will feel more prepared. And information means less anxiety. So having more information is a good thing.

NINA MOINI: It's power. And it's so great to about your body and how it functions for your whole life. It makes such a difference. Do you find that kids are comfortable talking about it? Maybe it's adults that make the kids feel weird talking about it. Or what are you seeing among kids these days?

MOLLY BLOOM: When we talk to our-- we talked to a lot of experts for this series. And one is Dr. Cara Natterson, who is from *Less Awkward*, and she wrote *The Care & Keeping of You*, the American Girl doll book about puberty, so she's a big star.

And, she said that your kid will feel as awkward as you feel when you're talking to them about it. And I think, again, it varies. There are some kids, like my kid, who's very comfortable talking about it, maybe because it's just always kind of been around in our world. We're very open about talking about things. And I feel like her and her friends are very open with each other, which has been really cool to see because I don't remember that being that way when I was her age.

NINA MOINI: So to give us the breadth or the range of topics that you do cover, give us a sense for what you're covering when it comes to puberty.

MOLLY BLOOM: Well, we're answering kid's questions. And we're sort of starting-- it's kind of chronological. So like our episode that came out last week was looking at skin, sweat, and hair. So what is acne? Why is there hair in my armpits now? And then in the future episodes, we'll be covering crushes. What's happening in your brain, mood swings, consent, periods, reproduction, like all of the things we're covering.

NINA MOINI: And what's really great about BRAINS ON! is that you've always done a great job of centering kids and teen voices as a part of the conversation. It doesn't stop right with the experts. These are their questions, and you're going to the heart of what they're saying. So you have co-hosts who are high schoolers, who've just been through puberty. So we're going to play a short example here of the pod from Declan.

DECLAN: I'd say, I was what you call an early bloomer. And I remember several things about going through puberty. One is that my hair was super greasy, and I would need to shampoo it every day. And then my mom made me start using deodorant, which I never really used, although now, I wish I did.

One of my favorite things about being an early bloomer. I'm not a very tall person now, but there was a time in my life where I was way taller than all my friends, and that was like the best six or seven months of my life.

MOLLY BLOOM: Same.

NINA MOINI: Yeah. That time passed quickly.

MOLLY BLOOM: Uh-huh.

NINA MOINI: So why is it so important to center these voices, Molly?

MOLLY BLOOM: Yeah, I think, for younger kids to hear from teens is very powerful because they are so cool. And there's this phenomenon in family media where we think about near peer. So a kid who's like a little bit older than you will have a lot of influence on you, more than just like me as a grown up would have. So we wanted to make sure that kids were hearing from cool teens that could tell them what it was like.

NINA MOINI: So what are you hoping that kids are gaining from listening to this, and are they listening with their parents?

MOLLY BLOOM: Yeah, we've heard both. So there is some where the parent and kid will listen together, or the parent will listen first and then pass it on to the kid, or the parents just saying, here's a podcast for you. Why don't you listen to it in your headphones, and then we can talk about it afterwards. But I hope that kids come away just having more knowledge and feeling more prepared and just confident and understanding that there is not one normal way to go through puberty, and everyone's going to have their own path, and that's OK.

NINA MOINI: Do you have a suggestion of how parents should listen to it or how they should approach it? You mentioned parents listening first, maybe depending on the age of their child. What would you suggest?

MOLLY BLOOM: Yeah, I mean, I think kids and parents should both listen to it. And depending on your kids' comfort level, maybe listen together or just say like, why don't you listen to this episode, and then we'll chat about it afterwards. Maybe in the car is a really good place to have conversations that might be a little awkward, because you don't have to make eye contact, and you can just have a chat about so, what did you think about that last episode about periods, and see what they say.

NINA MOINI: So you take listener questions about puberty and really everything, but how can people share their questions? Like, are these episodes wrapped up, or when could they have the opportunity to be a part of it?

MOLLY BLOOM: Yeah, they can still share their questions. We're doing a special episode at the end of the series where we're going to just answer all the questions that have come in during the series. So you can go to brainson.org/contact, and send us your questions, and we'll get them answered for you.

NINA MOINI: Were there ever times during this process that there were topics that you thought, oh, I don't think we can approach this, or I mean, how did you decide where to go?

MOLLY BLOOM: Yeah, we let the experts really guide us. And so we wanted to make sure it was appropriate for kids in elementary school. And the things that they told us were just making sure that you're straightforward, you're using the appropriate language for everything, the actual scientific names for body parts, because that's actually really important for kids to the names of body parts, and to just follow the curiosity of kids. And so that's what we did.

NINA MOINI: This is such a great resource. I mean, it's amazing that you did this. Like, do you feel like you learned anything about puberty? Because as soon as I heard about this, it's like you have all these memories. You're like, oh, my acne, and oh-- well, sometimes, still.

MOLLY BLOOM: Yes.

NINA MOINI: But I wonder, if you thought about that time in your life differently?

MOLLY BLOOM: Oh, absolutely. I was going into it fairly like, didn't know a lot. My mom had gotten me a book, and I read it, and-- but I think you're not really prepared until you go through it. And so I think, even with this information, it'll still be a surprise to you. But I think just feeling like you have tools and resources at your disposal is good. Because not every kid has a book that their parent got for them, and maybe they have one day of it in school. So we see this whole series as sort of like a book on the podcast shelf that's sitting there, and you can revisit it whenever you need to.

NINA MOINI: I wonder if you ever think about partnering with districts or if you ever visit schools or bring them this resource in that way?

MOLLY BLOOM: Yeah, we haven't thought about that exactly. But a lot of the organizations we partnered with for this series, they have curriculum. And so Less Awkward, Spark*ED, all of these places that we worked with, they have really great curriculum, and so those resources are on our website-- brainson.org/puberty.

NINA MOINI: Amazing. Molly Bloom, thank you so much for stopping by MPR News and *Minnesota Now*. So excited for you. Congratulations on your amazing work and what you're doing for people. It really matters.

MOLLY BLOOM: We really appreciate it.

NINA MOINI: Thank you. Molly Bloom is the Executive Producer and Host of BRAINS ON! Presents *Puberty! The Podcast*. You can find it wherever you get your podcasts.