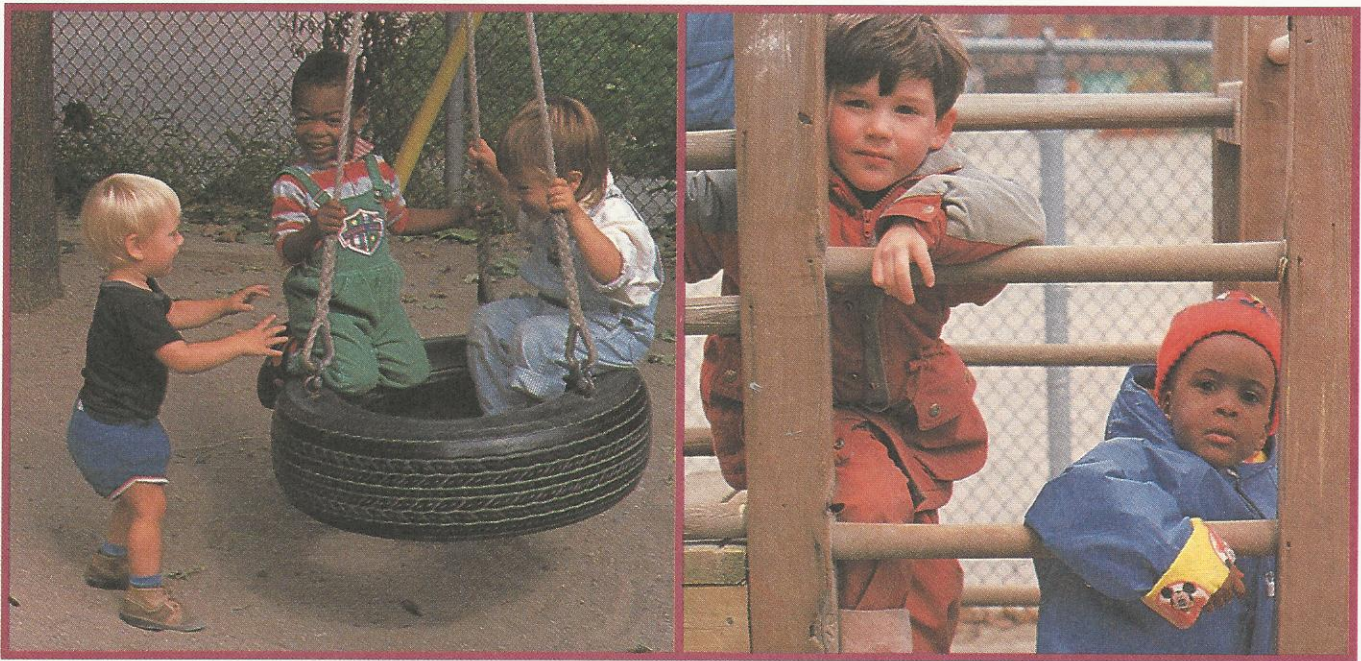


Sexual Identity and Sexual Roles

Children usually take their sexual identity for granted. They don't spend much time thinking about it and they tend to be more involved with their own sex than with the opposite sex. This attitude begins to change in early adolescence. Some young people suddenly become very aware of themselves as males and females, curious about each other, and interested in relationships with the opposite sex. For others, their attitude changes very slowly over a number of years. This second group of young people sometimes wonder

what all the fuss is about. They don't spend a lot of time daydreaming about being grown up, thinking about their masculinity or femininity, or worrying about whether they are attractive.

Both attitudes are completely normal. Just as physical development during puberty begins at different times and can be fast or slow, an interest in sexual identity, sexual roles, and relationships with the opposite sex can begin early or late in adolescence, and may develop quickly or slowly over a number of years.



Most children know which sex they are by the time they are two, or sometimes even younger.

Growing Up as Males and Females

Our understanding of ourselves as males and females is called *sexual identity*. Sexual identity includes knowing which sex you are

(*gender identity*) and your ideas about the way males and females are expected to act in a particular society (*sexual roles*).