

CHILDREN'S SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

Children's sexual behaviour develops over time, like other areas of growth. Many behaviours are healthy and are normal for children at certain ages. On the other hand, there are some behaviours which we should be concerned about. These behaviours are "worrisome" and should not be ignored or seen as child's play. The parent/caregiver may need to redirect the child, or consider asking for advice on what to do. Other behaviours are more serious and may even be dangerous to the child and others. These children may need professional help, and the parent/caregiver should talk with someone who understands the sexual development of children (for example, a doctor, a public health nurse, or a child protection worker).

The behaviours in the first chart are mostly seen in toddlers and preschoolers, but may also be seen in older children. The second chart looks at behaviours common in older children (adapted from Johnson, *Updated Understanding Children's Behaviors, What's Natural And Healthy*, 2004).

SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR IN TODDLERS & PRESCHOOLERS

TYPE OF BEHAVIOUR	OKAY	WORRISOME	GET HELP
CURIOSITY BEHAVIOURS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> asks appropriate questions about sex, for example "where do babies come from?" children learn to name parts of the body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shows fear when talking about anything to do with sex 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> does not stop asking questions about sex knows too much about sexuality for age and stage of development
SELF-EXPLORATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> likes to be naked has erections is curious and enjoys exploring own body touches own genitals as a self-soothing behaviour (for example, when going to sleep, when feeling sick, tense or afraid) very aware of genital area during toilet training puts objects in own genitals or buttocks without it feeling uncomfortable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> self-stimulates on furniture, toys and uses objects to self-stimulate imitates sexual behaviour with dolls or toys continues to self-stimulate in public after being told that this behaviour should take place in private puts something in genitals, buttocks even when it feels uncomfortable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> self-stimulates in public or in private instead of playing in other activities self-stimulates on other people harms own genitals, buttocks

(Sexual Behaviour In Toddlers & Preschoolers, continued)

<p>BEHAVIOUR WITH OTHERS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explores the bodies of other children when playing if people are naked, the child likes to look wants to touch genitals, to see what they feel like may show his/her genitals or buttocks to others may take off clothes in front of others sees these behaviours as fun and silly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> continues to play games like "doctor" after asked not to always wants to touch other people tries to do adult sexual behaviours copies adult sexual activity with clothes on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> forces, bullies other children to take their clothes off or do sexual things sad, angry or aggressive scenes between people is shown in dramatic play demands to see the genitals of other children or adults tricks or forces other children into touching genitals, adult sexual behaviours, copying sexual acts with clothes off, oral sex
<p>BATHROOM, TOILETING AND SEXUAL FUNCTIONS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> interested in peeing and poeing is curious about and tries to see what people are doing in the bathroom some preschoolers want privacy in the bathroom and when changing uses unacceptable words for toileting and sexual functions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> spreads poo purposefully pees in places they shouldn't often caught watching others who want privacy in the bathroom continues to use unacceptable words after asked not to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> keeps on spreading poo continues to pee in places they shouldn't does not allow others privacy in the bathroom or bedroom does not care about the rules set for unacceptable language and continues to use it
<p>RELATIONSHIPS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> plays house with other children kisses and hugs people who are important to him/her may share what they have found out about sex 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> when talks about adult relationships, refers to sex a lot afraid of being kissed or hugged talks or acts in a sexual way with others uses sexual language even after asked not to talks about sex or includes sex in play instead of doing other things 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> imitates adult sexual behaviour in detail being touched causes fear talks in a sexual way even with people s/he does not know
<p>BEHAVIOUR WITH ANIMALS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> curious about how animals have babies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> touches genitals of animals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sexual behaviour with animals

SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR IN SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

TYPE OF BEHAVIOUR	OKAY	WORRISOME	GET HELP
RELATIONSHIPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • thinks children of the opposite sex are “gross” • chases children of the opposite sex • talks about sex with friends, talks about having a boyfriend/ girlfriend • older children play games with peers about sex • likes telling and listening to dirty jokes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • refuses contact with specific individual(s) • uses sexual language to insult or scare others • wants to play games related to sex with younger or older children • continues to tell dirty jokes after asked not to • makes sexual sounds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hurts and/or avoids certain types of people (e.g., the opposite sex, people with certain features such as facial hair) • cannot seem to stop talking about sex and sexual acts • sees all relationships in a sexual way • forces others to play sexual games • continues to tell dirty jokes even after being disciplined
NATURE OF SEXUAL AWARENESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • includes genitals on drawings of people • looks at pictures of naked people • makes fun of the opposite sex • shows that s/he wants privacy respected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • includes genitals in drawings of one sex and not the other • genitals are a main feature in pictures, or are larger than the rest of the body parts • overly-curious with pictures of naked people • wants to be the opposite sex • becomes very upset when privacy is not respected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • drawings may include adult sexual activity, sexual abuse of a child • hates being a boy or girl • hates own genitals • demands privacy in an aggressive or overly upset way