

What is Sexually Harmful Behaviour?

Researchers have estimated that between a third and a quarter of child sexual offending is committed by young people less than 18 years old (Horne and Glasgow, 1991; Kelly et al, 1991; N. Ireland Research Team 1991, Home Office 1997; Lovell, 2002; Vizard, 2004). That said it must be remembered that these statistics do not include children under 10 years old (age of criminal responsibility) and young people who by the nature or virtue of their learning difficulties are precluded from criminal prosecution. In addition these statistics obviously cannot take into account the number of sexual offences committed by young people that are not reported.

You may find the following guidelines helpful in recognising if the sexual behaviour is harmful.

Does one child have authority over another?

- Is one child older than the other?
- Is one child bigger?
- Is there a difference in their levels of understanding?

Did they consent?

- Was there any intimidation, trickery or bribery?
- Did they understand what they consented to and the consequences?
- Was force or coercion used?

How persistent is the sexual behaviour?

- Have there been other concerns
- Does the behaviour continue, despite requests for it to stop?
- Are there obsessive or compulsive elements to the behaviour?
- Do other young people complain about the behaviour?

What is the level of secrecy?

- Is the behaviour done openly?
- Is it planned?
- Is it secret?
- How did it come to your attention?

What should you do about it?

CONTACT

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Referral & Assessment Team
Children's Social Care
01733 864170 / 01733 864180

Following consultation you may need to refer the young person to:

Referral & Assessment Team
Children's Social Care
01733 864170 / 01733 864180

Child Abuse Investigation Unit
Cams Constabulary
0345 456 456 4

Out of Office Hours
Emergency Duty Team
01733 234724

Children and Young People Who Display Sexually Harmful Behaviour

- What is It?
- What should you do about it?



What is it?

Young people who engage in any form of sexual activity with another individual that they have power over by virtue of age, emotional maturity, gender, physical strength, intellect and where the victim in this relationship has suffered an exploitation and/or betrayal of trust. (Adapted from Palmer, 1995)

Many people are not aware of the 'normal' or expected sexual development of children. You may find the guidelines below helpful in setting any sexual behaviour within a context of expected sexual development.

(Cavanagh, Johnson 2002)

Birth to 2 years

Sexual Development	Sexual Behaviour	Sexual Knowledge
Gender established	None	None
Physiology for arousal present Spontaneous penile erection.	Recognising / experience of pleasurable feelings when touching genitals Erect penis.	
Vaginal lubrication	Touches self, sometimes looks at and touches others	Limited language for body parts

3 - 6 years

Sexual Development	Sexual Behaviour	Sexual Knowledge
Children grow, boys testicles descend.	Touch / show their own / others (peers) genitals. Experience pleasurable feelings.	Become inquisitive / verbal about some adult sexual functions without understanding.
Peer exploration	Play doctors & nurses / mum's & dad's games with peers. Pretend to have babies in their tummies.	Limited knowledge about where babies come from. Recognises gender differences as they get older.
	Interest in their own faeces, watches others use the toilet and bathroom.	Child asks about genitals. Can name body parts more accurately.
Erections and lubrication for boys and girls.	Rub genitals masturbates when unhappy, tense, upset, excited or afraid. Practices kissing.	Use of words for toilet / bathroom functions, genitals and sex. Little understanding of sex

7 - 9 years

Sexual Development	Sexual Behaviour	Sexual Knowledge
Children of 8 - 9 may experience pubertal changes.	Masturbates in private. Shows guilt and embarrassment re sexual activities	Increasing knowledge of sexual behaviour and language (inc. slang terms)
Masturbates, wet dreams, develops sexual fantasies.	Simulates intercourse, kissing, petting with peers.	Confused about sexual behaviour and casual effects.
Cannot give informed consent.		Unclear about intercourse / pregnancy

10 - 12 years

Sexual Development	Sexual Behaviour	Sexual Knowledge
May enter puberty. Hormonal changes lead to a range of physical emotional sensations.	Masturbates in private. Shows guilt and embarrassment re sexual activities.	Likely to have received formal sex education.
Menstruation, wet dreams, develops sexual fantasies.	May have intercourse without knowing the consequences.	Increasing understanding of intercourse and consequences of sexual behaviours.
Cannot give informed consent.	Experimenting with sexual behaviours with same and opposite sex.	Language for body parts, including formal words and slang terms.
Some girls are capable of childbirth	Sharing information and comparing body parts with peers. Kissing and petting with peers.	

Expected Sexual Behaviour in Adolescents includes:

Consensual Activity with Age and Developmentally Appropriate Partner	Individual Activity
Embracing, kissing	Masturbation.
Close bodily contact. Mutual fondling, masturbation and intercourse.	Highly eroticised fantasies. Wet dreams.
Explicit jokes / sexual discussions.	Interest in erotic materials and use in masturbation.