

Framework of childhood sexual behaviour and inappropriate sexual behaviours

This is designed as a guide only

This brochure presents a continuum of childhood sexual behaviours observed in people with an intellectual disability.

Three classifications of sexual behaviour have been identified; behaviours typical of healthy development, behaviours which may cause concern and behaviours which require immediate professional intervention. Each behaviour should be observed in context before considering an appropriate response. Bear in mind, some behaviours may not be sexually motivated but are engaged in for a number of other reasons i.e. boredom, sensory stimulation, emotional upset.

There are no set of definite guidelines that determine appropriate and inappropriate sexual behaviour among individuals. However, the general parameters of age and developmental groupings, by which sexual behaviours are determined to be appropriate or inappropriate, are commonly recognised.

The need for respectful relationships is considered during development. Aggressive and humiliating behaviours are unacceptable and require immediate intervention.

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Childhood Sexual Behaviour

Age 12-15 years

A guide for young people with a disability



Sexual behaviour typical of healthy development

Behaviour characteristics

- Curious and information gathering rather than sexual.
- Light hearted and easily distracted.
- Occurs between equals in terms of age, size and cognitive ability.

Typical behaviours may include:

An increased need for privacy in the bathroom and toilet.

An interest in girlfriends/boyfriends.

Viewing pornographic material.

Using sexual language and jokes among peer group.

Masturbating in private.

Flirting with others in the same age or development group.

Online interaction with acquaintances, sometimes randoms (strangers).

Consensual sexual activity e.g. hugging, kissing, foreplay, mutual masturbation or dry humping.

Sexual fantasies or crushes on familiar adults.

Same sex relationships.

Adult response

The reaction of adults is critical and provides an opportunity to give positive feedback and age appropriate information in a calm manner.

Sexual behaviour causing concern

Behaviour characteristics

- Frequent.
- Excessive in duration.
- Unequal in terms of age, size and cognitive ability.
- Showing signs of preoccupation e.g. unable to carry out usual activities due to behaviour.

Adult response

These behaviours are signs of concern. There is a need to observe and gather information to determine the antecedents and implement an appropriate response i.e. redirection, education and counselling.

Behaviours are persistent and include:

Interest in pornography.

Interest in online randoms (strangers) and using social media.

Use of sexual obscenities outside of the peer group.

Engaging in oral sex and/or intercourse (age and development needs to be considered).

Peeping and/or exposing own genitals.

Taking pornographic material to school with the intent of exposing to others.

Creating sexual graffiti which impacts on others.

Sharing of personal details with online randoms (strangers).

Giving false gender, age, sexuality details online.

Fear or anxiety about contracting STI's, own gender and gender role difference.

Sexual behaviour requiring professional intervention

Behaviour characteristics

- Compulsive.
- Predatory.
- Excessive.
- Coercive.
- Threatening.
- Degrading.
- Illegal.
- Occurs between those with a significant cognitive or age difference.
- Increased preoccupation with the behaviour which precedes **all** other usual activities.

Adult response

Immediate intervention and referral is required to appropriate services.

Behaviours are predatory and include:

Masturbating in public.

Repeatedly or chronically peeping and/or exposing.

Taking/sending nude, sexual or offensive images of self and/or others electronically.

Downloading child pornography.

Making sexually explicit threats – written or verbal.

Forcing exposure or touching others' genitals.

Engaging in unsafe sexual activity, including unsafe sex with multiple partners.

Engaging in sexual activity while intoxicated.

Penetrating children, animals or dolls.

Degrading/humiliating self or others using sexual themes.

Arranging face-to-face meeting with strangers alone.