

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.

People 1st Programme (PIP)

70 Roe Street, Northbridge WA 6003
PO Box 141, Northbridge WA 6865

Phone: 08 9227 6414
Fax: 08 9227 6871
info@pip.org.au



people1stprogramme.com.au

*PIP is a project of
The Family Planning Association of WA (Inc.)*

*PIP is on Whadjuk land. We acknowledge the
traditional owners of country across
Western Australia.*

© Family Planning Association of WA (Inc.) January 2017

Childhood Sexual Behaviour Age 5-8 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 increased curiosity about other children's genitals.
- Using 'slang' words for the toilet and/or body parts.
- Stroking, touching, pulling or rubbing of own genitals.
- "I'll show you mine, you show me yours" with other children, usually in private locations.
- Talking about having a girlfriend/boyfriend.
- Telling and listening to age appropriate crude jokes.
- Kissing, hugging and holding hands.
- Drawing genitals on pictures.
- Touching that may result in an erection (sensory).

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:

- Showing/touching of own or others' genitals in public after being told not to.
- Questioning related to genital differences, even after all questions have been answered appropriately.
- Use of adult language to discuss sex e.g. "Look at my dolls, they're screwing", indicating possible exposure.
- Mutual sexual touching.
- Drawing of genitals, often of disproportionate size.
- Fear, confusion or anxiety about sexual topics.
- Anxiety if seen getting undressed.

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:

- Touching of own genitals, especially in front of others.
- Engaging in sex themed talk, play and art etc.
- Sneaking into rooms of sleeping younger children to touch their private parts.
- Engaging significantly younger or less able children in sexual play.
- Engaging in sexual play beyond their age.
- Forcing other children to play sexual games.
- Simulating intercourse or foreplay with peers or dolls.