

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 9-11 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.
- Seeking information about the reproductive process.
- An interest in online pornographic material (some unintentionally accessed).
- Using crude language and jokes among peer group.
- Talking about having a boyfriend/girlfriend.
- Talking to friends about sex.

- Occasional masturbation in private.
- Consensual kissing with known peers.
- Exhibitionism among similar aged peers e.g. mooning or flashing.
- Using social media.
- Feelings of attraction to others.

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.

Behaviours are persistent and include:

- Trying to expose others' or own genitals.
- Associating/socialising with older people of significant age difference.
- Use of sexual language beyond their age, indicating experience.
- Engaging in sexual activity, oral sex and possibly intercourse.
- Changes in usual behaviour and dressing to gain sexual attention.
- Fear, confusion or anxiety about own gender and gender role difference.

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.

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, particularly in front of others.
- Using inappropriate sexual conversation.
- Writing/texting sexually threatening notes.
- Coercing others into sexual activity.
- Bullying involving sexual aggression.
- Taking/sending nude or sexually explicit images to others electronically.
- Arranging face-to-face meetings with online randoms (strangers).
- Displaying sexual maturity beyond age, including dressing with intent.
- Engaging in mutual group masturbation.
- Following others into the toilet to look at or touch them.
- Enticing animals to lick genitals.