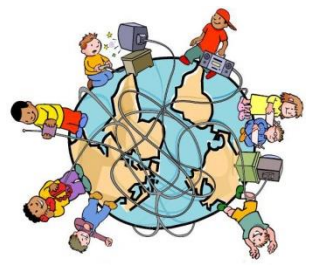


Working Together to keep our children safe



This month's topic is Healthy Sexual Behaviour and uses the information and support from the NSPCC as guidelines which can be found here: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/healthy-sexual-behaviour-children-young-people/>

As children get older, the way they express their sexual feelings changes. There's no doubt that children these days are exposed to sexual images at a far younger age. And in more places than ever before, including music videos, websites and social media. So it's not surprising that sometimes children's sexual development can seem out of step with their age.

It's important that you have a good idea of what's normal sexual behaviour and can also spot the warning signs if something might not be quite right.

The stages of normal sexual behaviour

There are 4 phases of childhood sexual development. Just like every other part of growing up, some children mature sooner or later than others. So, don't be too worried if your child doesn't act exactly as you'd expect.

Children with developmental delays may not stick to these age guides. If you're worried about anything you should speak to a health professional about it.

1. Infancy from 0 to 4 years
2. Young children from 5 to 9 years
3. Pre-adolescents from 10 to 12 years
4. Adolescents from 13 to 16 years

We'll look at Phase 1, remembering that some Reception children have only *just* turned 4 years old in September, and Phase 2.

Infancy from 0 to 4 years

Even at this stage, sexual behaviour is beginning to emerge through actions like:

- kissing and hugging
- showing curiosity about private body parts
- talking about private body parts and using words like poo, willy and bum
- playing "house" or "doctors and nurses" type games with other children
- touching, rubbing or showing off their genitals or masturbating as a comforting habit.



Young children from 5 to 9 years

As children get a little older they become more aware of the need for privacy while also:

- kissing and hugging
- showing curiosity about private body parts but respecting privacy
- talking about private body parts and sometimes showing them off
- trying to shock by using words like poo, willy and bum
- using swear and sex words they've heard other people say
- playing "mums and dads" or "doctors and nurses" type games with other children
- touching, rubbing or showing others their private parts



Other normal behaviours for Phases 3 and 4 can be found here: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/healthy-sexual-behaviour-children-young-people/>

Children, do not however, fit into neat little boxes, phases or categories and therefore there will always be children who one may consider naive compared to their peers and others who may be exposed to more than one may expect; nobody is right or wrong, however if your child does display behaviours or the use of language that is consider much older than their years, we will contact you and let you know.

We'll give some examples; our children are regularly exposed to adults being affectionate and kissing that's often more than a 'peck' on the cheek, whether this be 'in real life' or on TV! It would not be considered developmentally normal for infant children to kiss in any other way than a friendly 'peck' (which we would discourage in school) and we'd let you know. Curiosity over each other's 'privates' we'd expect to see mostly gone by the end of infant school.

How to react to sexualised behaviour

Learning about sex and sexual behaviour is a normal part of a child's development. It will help them as they grow up, and as they start to make decisions about relationships. By knowing what's 'normal' at each particular stage you can be ready for what to expect, even though it might seem a little uncomfortable at times!

The way you respond is important

If you're too disapproving or imply that certain things shouldn't be spoken about then your child may be less likely to come to you with any questions or worries they might have. Of course, this won't be easy for everyone, especially if your child's behaviour seems shocking or morally wrong to you. But try to keep calm. Your body language and tone can make a difference. The way you react can affect how comfortable your child will feel about talking to you about these things in the future.

Warning signs that something's not right

Sexualised behaviour which is significantly more advanced than you'd normally expect for a child of a particular age or which shows a lack of inhibition, could be a cause for concern. For example, a pre-school child who talks about sex acts or uses adult language or a 12 year old who masturbates in public.

Other warning signs include:

- sexual interest in adults or children of very different ages to their own
- forceful or aggressive sexual behaviour
- compulsive habits
- reports from school that their behaviour is affecting their progress and achievement.

What to do if you're worried

Talk to your child about their behaviour. It'll give you the chance to understand their feelings and work out how much they know about sex. It's also a good chance to explain the differences between the things that are OK to do in public and what should be kept private.

Try these tips:

- Tell them that they can always talk to you about sex, and try to have ongoing conversations.
- Look at what may have caused the behaviour. Is there a family member who may have been an influence? Have they been looking at unsuitable websites, music videos or computer games?
- Find out about online safety and what blocks or parental controls you can put on computers, tablets and phones.
- Talk to teachers about whether they've noticed anything at school and to a trusted friend or health professional to ask if they have any advice.

On 14th May, we have invited the NSPCC to come and deliver a 20 minutes assembly for Year 1 and Year 2 children around Speak Out. Stay Safe; you will receive more detailed information nearer the time however in the meantime you might want to visit:

www.nspcc.org.uk/speakout or read

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/advice-and-info/pants/pants-2018/pants-parents-guide-online.pdf>

