

Sexual behaviour guide—Birth to 18

THIS IS A GUIDE ONLY. It is not exhaustive. All behaviour must be considered in its contexts and these will include a wide variety of cultural, religious and social values. 'Context' also includes factors such as the physical and intellectual capacity or the mental health of the child/young person and these contextual factors must be taken into consideration. Intervention must occur with all sexual behaviour that is considered concerning or serious.

SERIOUS

Serious

- behaviour which is excessive, secretive, compulsive, coercive, degrading or threatening
- significant age, developmental and/or power difference between the individuals involved
- represents a serious risk to the mental or physical health of the individual or others

Response: Immediately intervene, report, monitor and document

Birth to 5 years

- simulation of explicit foreplay or sexual behaviour in play
- persistent masturbation
- persistent touching of the genitals of other children
- persistent attempts to touch the genitals of adults
- sexual behaviour between young children involving penetration with objects
- forcing other children to engage in sexual play

5 to 9 years

- persistent masturbation, particularly in front of others
- sexual behaviour engaging significantly younger or less able children
- sneaking into the rooms of sleeping younger children to touch or engage in sexual play
- simulation of sexual acts that are sophisticated for their age (eg oral sex)
- persistent sexual themes in talk, play, art etc

CONCERNING

Concerning

- outside age appropriate sexual behaviour in terms of persistence, frequency, type
- inequality in age or developmental abilities between the individuals concerned
- behaviour which is unusual or different for a particular individual
- causes discomfort in others

Response: Intervene, plan in consultation with others, refer if appropriate, monitor and document

Birth to 5 years

- preoccupation with adult sexual type behaviour
- pulling other children's pants down/skirts up against their will
- explicit sexual conversation using sophisticated or adult language
- preoccupation with touching another's genitals (often in preference to other child focused activities)
- chronic peeping
- following others into toilets to look at them or touch them

5 to 9 years

- questions about sexual activity which persist or are repeated frequently, despite an answer being given
- writing sexually threatening notes
- engaging in mutual masturbation
- use of adult language to discuss sex (eg 'Do you think I look sexy?' or 'Look at my dolls—they're screwing')
- single occurrence of peeping

AGE APPROPRIATE

Age appropriate

- age appropriate sexual behaviour which is spontaneous, curious, mutual and easily distracted or redirected
- involves equals in terms of age and developmental status
- interest in sexual matters is balanced with interest in other parts of life
- other people are unharmed and unaffected

Response: Use as an opportunity to discuss social expectations regarding appropriate public and private behaviour

Birth to 5 years

- thumb sucking, body stroking and holding of genitals
- wanting to touch other children's genitals
- asking about or wanting to touch the breasts, bottoms or genitals of familiar adults (eg when in the bath)
- games (eg 'doctor/nurse', 'show me yours and I'll show you mine')
- enjoyment of being nude
- interest in body parts and functions

5 to 9 years

- masturbation to self-soothe
- increased curiosity in adult sexuality (eg questions about babies, gender differences)
- increased curiosity about other children's genitals (eg playing mutual games to see or touch genitals)
- telling stories or asking questions, using swear words, 'toilet' words or names for private body parts
- increased sense of privacy about bodies

This guide is adapted, with permission, from the Family Planning Queensland resource *Sexual behaviours in children and adolescents—A guide for adults to identify, assess and respond to sexual behaviours which cause concern* (see <www.fpq.com.au/publications/fsBrochures/Fs_Sexual_Behaviours.php>).

9 to 12 years

- persistent masturbation, particularly in front of others
- sexual activity (eg oral sex or intercourse)
- arranging a face-to-face meeting with an online acquaintance who is not known to or approved by protective parents
- sending nude or sexually provocative images of self or others electronically
- coercion of others, including same age, younger or less able children, into sexual activity
- presence of Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI)

13 to 18 years

- compulsive masturbation (especially chronic or public)
- degradation/humiliation of self or others with sexual themes (eg via threats, phone, e-mail, website, touch)
- attempting to/forcing others to expose genitals
- preoccupation with sexually aggressive pornography
- sexually explicit talk with younger children
- forced sexual contact (touch/assault/rape)
- sexual contact with others of significant age and/or developmental difference
- sending nude or sexually provocative images of self or others electronically
- joining adults-only online sites if under age
- sexual contact with animals
- genital/anal injury to others/self

9 to 12 years

- uncharacteristic behaviour (eg sudden provocative changes in dress, mixing with new or older friends)
- consistent bullying involving sexual aggression
- pseudo maturity, including inappropriate knowledge and discussion of sexuality
- giving out identifying details to online acquaintances
- preoccupation with chatting online outside of familiar peer group
- persistent expression of fear of pregnancy/sexually transmitted illnesses

13 to 18 years

- sexual preoccupation/anxiety which interferes with daily function
- preoccupation with pornography
- giving out identifying details to online acquaintances
- preoccupation with chatting online
- giving false gender, age, sexuality details online in adult chat room
- use of sexually aggressive themes/obscenities
- sexual graffiti (chronic/impacting on others)
- violation of others' personal spaces
- single occurrence of peeping, exposing, non-consenting sexual touch with known peers; mooning and obscene gestures
- unsafe sexual behaviour, including unprotected sex, sexual activity while intoxicated, multiple partners and frequent changes of partner (age of consent in South Australia is 17)

9 to 12 years

- use of sexual language
- having girlfriends/boyfriends
- exhibitionism (eg flashing or mooning amongst same age peers)
- increased need for privacy
- consensual kissing with known peers
- use of internet to chat online with peers

13 to 18 years

- sexually explicit conversations with peers
- obscenities and jokes within the cultural norm
- flirting
- interest in erotica
- use of internet to chat online with peers
- solitary masturbation
- interest and/or participation in a one-on-one relationship (with or without sexual activity)
- sexual activity including hugging, kissing, holding hands, foreplay, mutual masturbation
- consenting oral sex and/or intercourse with a partner of similar age and developmental ability (age and developmental ability to give consent must be considered—age of consent in South Australia is 17)