

Responding to children who display sexualised behaviour

It's important for health practitioners to be able to distinguish normal sexual behaviours from those that may be harmful, and make sure children get appropriate support. Use this guide alongside the resources at nspcc.org.uk/hsbhealth to help you respond in the right way.

Need advice?

Contact our helpline for advice and support:

- Call **0808 800 5000**
- Email help@nspcc.org.uk
- Visit nspcc.org.uk/helpline

Childline

For children who need further support our free, confidential helpline is available 24/7:

- Call **0800 1111**
- Visit childline.org.uk

Normal

- Developmentally expected and socially acceptable behaviour
- Consensual, mutual and reciprocal
- Decision making is shared

How to respond

- Although green behaviours are not concerning, they still require a response
- Listen to what children and young people have to say and respond calmly and non-judgementally
- Talk to parents about developmentally typical sexualised behaviours
- Explain how parents can positively reinforce messages about appropriate sexual behaviour and act to keep their children safe from abuse
- Signpost helpful resources such as our PANTS activity pack: nspcc.org.uk/pants
- Make sure young people know how to behave responsibly and safely

Inappropriate

- Single instances of developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour
- Behaviour that is socially acceptable within a peer group
- Generally consensual and reciprocal
- May involve an inappropriate context for behaviour that would otherwise be considered normal

How to respond

- Amber behaviours should not be ignored
- Listen to what children and young people have to say and respond calmly and non-judgementally
- Follow your organisation's child protection procedures and make a report to the person responsible for child protection
- Your policy or procedure should guide you towards a designated health safeguarding lead who can be notified and will provide support
- Consider whether the child or young person needs therapeutic support and make referrals as appropriate

Problematic

- Developmentally unusual and socially unexpected behaviour
- May be compulsive
- Consent may be unclear and the behaviour may not be reciprocal
- May involve an imbalance of power
- Doesn't have an overt element of victimisation

Abusive

- Intrusive behaviour
- May involve a misuse of power
- May have an element of victimisation
- May use coercion and force
- May include elements of expressive violence
- Informed consent has not been given (or the victim was not able to consent freely)

How to respond

- Red behaviours indicate a need for immediate intervention and action
- If a child is in immediate danger, call the police on 999
- Follow your organisation's child protection procedures and make a report to the person responsible for child protection
- Your policy or procedure should guide you towards a designated health safeguarding lead who should be notified and will provide support
- Refer the child or young person for therapeutic support

Violent

- Physically violent sexual abuse
- Highly intrusive
- May involve instrumental violence which is physiologically and/or sexually arousing to the perpetrator
- May involve sadism