

Parents Protect!

Together we can prevent child sexual abuse



Helping you understand
the sexual development
of children aged 5-11



Knowing how to recognise and respond to age appropriate behaviours in children between the ages of 5-11 helps to support the development of healthy sexual behaviour and protect children from harm or abuse

As children grow through their early years and develop into later childhood, they continue to pass through different stages of development. We know that children remain individual and unique throughout their whole childhood and there is a wide range of generally accepted and expected behaviours within this age group.

This leaflet is designed to help give you, as a parent or carer, guidance and information to help you understand more about the difference between healthy and developmentally expected sexual exploration and play in children aged 5-11 years, and behaviour that is not appropriate and can cause harm to others or increase a child's vulnerability.

Children in this age group continue to seek information and understanding about themselves and the world around them through play. They are often interested in pregnancy, birth, gender and differences between gender, which can form part of healthy and developmentally expected sexual exploration.

Whilst most sexual behaviour displayed by children of this age is expected, if you have any concerns, the Stop It Now! helpline on 0808 1000 900 is there to offer you help in deciding how best to support your child.

parentsprotect.co.uk
Stop It Now! helpline
Free and confidential
0808 1000 900

stop it now! UK & Ireland
Together we can prevent child sexual abuse

Identifying the behaviour of children aged between 5-11 years

We have used a traffic light framework to help you in identifying if a behaviour is GREEN, AMBER or RED



These are natural and expected behaviours

This doesn't mean that you would want these behaviours to continue, but they do provide an opportunity to talk, teach, explain about what is appropriate.

- Increased sense of privacy about their body
- Body touching and holding own genitals
- Masturbation, usually with awareness of privacy
- Curiosity about other children's genitals involving looking at and/or touching the bodies of familiar children
- Curiosity about sexuality e.g. questions about babies, gender, relationships, sexual activity
- Telling stories or asking questions using swear words, 'toilet' words or names for private parts
- Use of mobile phones and Internet in relationships with known peers



These can be of concern and have the potential to be outside safe and healthy behaviours if they persist

They require a response from a protective adult, extra support and close monitoring.

- Self masturbation in preference to other activities, whether in private or in public or with peers, and/or causing self injury
- Explicit talk, art or play of sexual nature
- Persistent questions about sexuality despite being answered
- Persistent nudity and/or exposing private parts in presence of others
- Persistently watching or following others to look at or touch them
- Pulling other children's pants down or skirts up against their will
- Persistently mimicking sexual flirting behaviour too advanced for age, with other children or adults
- Touching genitals/private parts of animals
- Covert/secret use of mobile phone and Internet with known and unknown people which may include giving out identifying details
- Attempts to do any of the above in secret



These are outside healthy and safe behaviours

These behaviours can signal a need for immediate protection and support from a childcare professional, e.g. GP or social worker. As a first step the Stop It Now! helpline is one place you could go for advice and guidance. Call 0808 1000 900.

- Compulsive masturbation to the point of self harm or seeking an audience
- Disclosure of sexual abuse
- Persistent bullying involving sexual aggression
- Simulation of, or participation in, sexual activities, including sexual behaviour with younger or less able children, e.g. oral sex, sexual intercourse
- Accessing the rooms of sleeping children to touch or engage in sexual activity
- Presence of a sexually transmitted infection
- Any sexual activity with animals
- Use of mobile phones and Internet for sending or receiving sexual images

Responding to observed behaviour of children aged 5-11 years

Below we have provided some examples of scenarios that fall under the Green, Amber and Red categories of behaviour. We have also provided some suggestions on how to respond to these behaviours. These have been provided as a guide, and it is important to remember that, even if a behaviour falls under the Green category, this doesn't mean that the behaviour should be encouraged. Each behaviour offers an opportunity to talk with children about keeping themselves and others safe and to let them know that you are someone who will listen. It is important to respond calmly.



A 9 year old boy who, whilst reading, puts his hand in and out of his underpants when there are other people present in the room.

Responding to this behaviour:

- Describe the unwanted behaviour clearly
- Explain that there is a time and a place for touching private parts of the body
- Distract him by removing him from the situation



During outside playtime, a 9 year old boy asks two girls aged 5 and 6 years old if they would 'sex' with him and show their 'boobs' to him.

Responding to this behaviour:

- Describe their behaviour clearly
- Remind the children what is appropriate behaviour and that some parts of the body are to remain private
- Explain to the children that the boy's behaviour is not OK and discuss how the girls could respond
- Distract by removing them from the situation



An 8 year old girl prevents a 5 year girl from leaving her bedroom, pulls down her knickers and also shows her private parts to her. The younger girl is frightened. The 8 year old has been heard using sexual language.

Responding to this behaviour:

- Describe her behaviour clearly
- Point out that her behaviour is not acceptable and is impacting on others
- Prohibit the behaviour
- Consider seeking advice and support from a childcare professional, e.g. GP, health visitor or social worker
- Call the Stop It Now! helpline on 0808 1000 900 for advice and guidance

Further information on how to protect children from sexual harm and abuse is available at: stopitnow.org.uk If you are ever in doubt, please seek advice and guidance from the **Stop It Now! helpline on 0808 1000 900**. For further information on sexual development, sex education and healthy sexual behaviour, please visit Parents Protect at: parentsprotect.co.uk

These materials are designed for parents, carers and other protective adults. For materials designed for use with and by professionals please see Brook: brook.org.uk/index.php/traffic-lights