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1. Purpose of this booklet

The booklet has been compiled from a review of the literature drawn together from several sources and authors both within and outside the UK and in consultation with a number of people working in health and education in Devon. The booklet has sought to amalgamate previous publications on ‘Sexual Development in Primary Aged Children’ and ‘Sexual Development in Secondary Aged Children’ published by Devon County Council into one body of reference. A section has been added that includes the use of social media. The remit for the booklet has also been widened to include other agencies working with children and young people.

Children and young people often show their needs through their behaviour. Understanding the reasons behind a young person’s sexual behaviour is critical. The purpose of this publication is to provide information to settings, in order to support their professional judgements regarding the appropriateness and inappropriateness of a young person’s sexual behaviour. As such, it is not meant to be a definitive text but more as a guide for professionals in understanding the issues and difficulties that can occur as a key part of a young person’s sexual development. It will help staff and volunteers across agencies in Devon to develop a consistent approach to dealing with children’s sexual development.

The question of ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ sexual behaviour has become increasingly relevant and one which professionals working with children and young people may have to address from time to time.

The purpose of the booklet is to seek to reduce the uncertainty in interpreting behaviour by increasing the awareness of psycho-sexual development of young adults. In doing this, the key stages of ‘typical’ sexual development in children and young people will be looked at as well as sexual behaviour that might cause concern.

The concept of ‘normal’ behaviour with regard to sexual development is taken to be as a result of natural human biological and psychological development processes. In contrast, ‘abnormal’ or ‘atypical’ behaviour is taken to describe behaviour where something has happened to disrupt the process of expected sexual behaviour and development.

Expressing sexuality through sexual behaviour is natural, healthy and a basic aspect of being human. On the other hand, sexual behaviours that are abusive or leave children and young people vulnerable or cause harm, require adults to intervene. It is worth noting that any serious concern regarding children’s sexual behaviour should be dealt with in accordance with Devon Safeguarding Children Board procedures.
# The way the booklet is organised

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## 2. Interactive factors framework for developing an understanding of sexual development

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<td>Staying in charge of body weight</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Style of functioning</td>
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<td>- Parenting style</td>
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<td>- Parental relationship</td>
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<td>- Separation and divorce</td>
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<td>- Parental use of alcohol, drugs and presence of own sexuality</td>
<td>- Verbal ability</td>
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<td>- Consistency of placement</td>
<td>- Non-verbal reasoning</td>
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<th>Social factors</th>
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<td>Sense of identity and group belonging</td>
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<td>- Containment</td>
<td>Relationship with own sexuality and orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>- Sexual education</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Behaviour management in school</td>
<td>- Self-esteem in face of abandonment / rejection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Staff training and support</td>
<td>- Managing dangers and risks of tobacco, drugs, alcohol</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community environment</th>
<th>- Engaging in risky behaviour</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Peer groups</td>
<td>- Sexual bullying: power, consent &amp; coercion</td>
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<td>- Formal social groups</td>
<td>- Use of social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Behaviour with groups and risk-taking</td>
<td>- Child sexual exploitation</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Communication across all environments</td>
<td>- Coping and managing with power and authority</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work environment</th>
<th>Emotional factors</th>
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<td>- Acting on impulse</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Lack of work, routines, structure</td>
<td>- Regulation</td>
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<tr>
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<th>Moral factors</th>
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<td>- Awareness</td>
<td>- Demands of majority culture / minority culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Managing romance</td>
<td>- Reconciling social and religious beliefs with peer pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Taking responsibility</td>
<td>- Emotional flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Emotional flexibility</td>
<td>- Social environment</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social environment</th>
<th>- Gender demands different for young women and men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Risks of contracting sexually transmitted diseases or becoming pregnant</td>
<td>- Moral factors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Children & Young People’s age development

Children’s development follows a broad pathway and can sometimes be viewed in stages. Some children mature faster or slower than others. In pre-school, attachment behaviours to principle caregivers will be much in evidence. There will be emerging and ongoing development of gross and fine motor skills; it will be a time where communication and early language is developing and the beginning of expressions of a range of emotions. The self as an individual person will begin to emerge. Children at this age will begin to develop greater self-control and compliance.

As children approach school age, there begins to develop a greater degree of socialisation; children beginning to demonstrate more advanced physical capabilities and co-ordination. In school, they are more capable of sustaining longer periods of concentration; their moods become more stable and they will begin to have a greater capacity for empathy and worry. They will also develop a stronger sense of fairness; a greater sense of regulating behaviour; and a greater ability to communicate ideas and wishes.

As children approach adolescence, there are greater changes in a number of areas – physical, cognitive, sexual, social, emotional, moral – all combining into a continually emerging self. There are physical changes and these can differ greatly from one young person to another. Young people become capable and confident with abstract thought; they begin to experiment sexually and to practise relationships; they are highly likely to be very influenced by their peers (though they may deny this), seeking different kinds of friendship and working out the rules for membership; they have a great range and lability of emotions (at the same time denying emotional feelings in adults); they are testing boundaries in their moral world as well as declaring independence and all the while struggling to develop a sense of completeness so as to become a reasonable citizen.

“Adolescents are excessively egotistic, regarding themselves as the centre of the universe and the sole object of interest, and yet, at no time in later life are they capable of so much self-sacrifice and devotion. They form the most passionate love relations, only to break them off as quickly as they began them. On the one hand, they throw themselves enthusiastically into the life of the community and, on the other, they have an overpowering need for solitude. They oscillate between blind submission to some self-chosen leader and defiant rebellion against any and every authority. They are selfish and materially-minded and at the same time full of lofty idealism.” (Freud, 1966).
During adolescence, young people come to learn a great deal about themselves including an understanding of their own sexual identity and sexual orientation. It is likely that, like gender identity, adolescents’ sexual orientation typically evolves throughout the different phases of adolescence.

Some of these matters are explored further in this booklet, but all should be held in mind as much as possible because of the challenges they hold for children and young people trying to cope with their own development.

4. Age development quick checklists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Adolescent</th>
<th>Adult</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cognitively</strong></td>
<td>• Concrete thinking</td>
<td>• Abstract thought</td>
<td>• Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexually</strong></td>
<td>• Inquisitive</td>
<td>• Experimentation</td>
<td>• Key relationships and sexual identity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Egocentric</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Masturbation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Changing anatomy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socially</strong></td>
<td>• Family orientation</td>
<td>• Peer orientation</td>
<td>• Self orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Play</td>
<td>• Membership of</td>
<td>• Interdependence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Taking turns</td>
<td>groups</td>
<td>• Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Learning to</td>
<td>• Friendships</td>
<td>• Social dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>negotiate</td>
<td>• Competition</td>
<td>• Mutuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Egocentricity</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Maturity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotionally</strong></td>
<td>• Mediated by</td>
<td>• Lability and</td>
<td>• Dynamic stability and support</td>
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<td></td>
<td>others</td>
<td>range</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Morally</strong></td>
<td>• Obeys to avoid</td>
<td>• Approval and</td>
<td>• Respects – conscience and rights; own</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>consequence –</td>
<td>rules – rebels to</td>
<td>responsibility</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>punishment and</td>
<td>show independence;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>reward; parental</td>
<td>peers versus</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>responsibility and</td>
<td>parents and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>support</td>
<td>teachers – testing</td>
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<td>boundaries</td>
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5. Stages of sexual development in Children & Young People

There is a normal process by which children develop sexually and emotionally. This takes place from infancy. A key aspect of this process is children’s curiosity. Children have a natural desire to learn about their bodies, their emotions and those of others. All who work in a school need to understand that much of the sexual behaviour that takes place between the children in the school is normal. It is important, therefore, not to think of all sexual behaviour as a ‘sign of abuse’. The following table lists normal stages of child sexual development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Age: Children’s sexual development: what is seen to be normal</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 months</strong></td>
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</table>
| **9-12 months** | Handles genitals when clothes are off  
| | May be beginnings of masturbation (manipulation is the preferred term)  
| | Wants to be changed when in wet/soiled nappy  
| | Girls look at main caregiver and smile when urinating |
| **1 year** | Affectionate towards main caregiver when tired, wet or troubled; hugs and shows affection towards dolls and teddies |
| **2 years** | Kisses at bedtime  
| | May find it hard to go to toilet in unfamiliar places  
| | Aware of own genitals, may handle when unclothed  
| | Beginnings of interest in physical differences between sexes  
| | Shows interest in different postures for urinating and watching others in bathroom going to toilet undressing |
| **3 years** | Talks about physical differences between sexes and different postures for urinating  
| | Girls may try to urinate standing up  
| | Interest in own genitals, showing and touching them  
| | Wants to look at and touch adults  
| | Wants to look at and touch mother’s breasts |
| **4 years** | Extremely conscious of navel  
| | Under social stress may grasp genitals and may need to urinate  
| | May play game of ‘show’ by showing genitals or urinating before another child  
| | Interest in other people’s bathrooms  
| | Demands privacy for self, but extremely interested in bathroom/ toilet activities of others  
| | Verbally expressive about elimination |
| **5 years** | Aware of genitals and boy/girl differences but lessening of interest in anatomical differences  
| | Masturbation/genital manipulation  
| | Less ‘sex play’ and games of show, lessening interest in unfamiliar bathrooms  
<p>| | More modest, less exposing of self |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| 6 years   | • Marked awareness of interest in differences between sexes in body structure – boys ask factual questions about their testicles  
• Mild sex play or exhibitionism, ‘doctors and nurses’  
• Some children are subjected to sex play by older children; the age and power differences between the children are critical factors in defining this as normal sex play and exploration or a cause for concern. |
| 7-8 years | • Less interest in sex – some mutual exploration, experimentation and sex play, but less than earlier  
• Know about social relations, sexual intercourse, sperm and egg but generally not combined to make a whole picture |
| 8 years   | • Know more about physiology and how the body works  
• Interest in sex rather high but exploration and play less than at six years  
• Interest in smutty jokes, giggling  
• Children whisper or write ‘elimination’ words or ‘sex words’ |
| 9 years   | • May talk about sex information with friends of same sex. Seeks out pictures in books, sex swearing, sex poems  
• Interest in details of own organs and function |
| 10 years  | • Considerable interest in ‘smutty’ jokes |
| Puberty through to adolescence | • During adolescence ‘normal’ sexual experiences are open to wide interpretations dependent on values, background, gender, culture, etc.  
• Early writers described differences between boys and girls which were mainly felt to be biological. Current thought on sex differences in behaviour favours more the effects of social factors, sex-role expectations, and conditioning from an early age |
### Secondary Age: Children's sexual development: what is seen to be normal

**Pubescence to early adolescence – approx. from 13-15 years**

- Early adolescence is marked by the early onset of puberty
- There may be rapid growth spurts, secondary social characteristics develop, and there is an increased awareness of the physical self and its impact on others
- The young person can become concerned with their psychosocial identity. Such questioning can lead to misunderstandings that others are preoccupied with his or her appearance and behaviour. Such self-consciousness can lead to a desire for greater privacy and independence
- At this time, there can be increasingly stronger connections made with peers and a corresponding separation from family. At the same time, there may be increasingly stronger sexual attractions. Sexual behaviour can become very strong and as with other adolescent behaviour can show poor social judgment, high risk and lack of discrimination

**11-12 years**

- Peer group very important
- Girls can be anti-boy and vice-versa
- Girls have very rapid growth. Breasts fill out. Menstruation starts. Body odour develops
- New awareness of self. Gender specific anatomical differentiation. Emotional swings. More mature boys like to tease girls about their bra size
- Boys interested in sexual jokes and sexually graphic material
- Boys show some physical changes in the penis and pubic hair
- Masturbation increases
- Kissing, frequent change of boy/girlfriend
- Boys tell others about their sexual experiences.
- Girls gossip about the sexual experiences of others.
- Homosexual young people become more aware of not being interested sexually in their opposite sex peers

**13-14 years**

- More critical of adults
- Sensitive to criticism
- Preoccupation with personal appearance
- Girls can be child/woman in appearance
- More rapid growth spurt in boys so the voice deepens
- Erection and ejaculation more frequent
- Strong peer group identification
- Girls physically mature and more likely to masturbate
- Sometimes more stable pairing between boys and girls
- Boys continue growth spurt

**15 years**

- Need for increasing independence
- Same sex friends very important
- Homosexuals understand their sexuality
- The management of partner sex is very important

**Mid to late adolescence – approx. from 16-17 years**

- The growth rate slows, so that by the end of this stage, most teenagers will have completed puberty and physical transitions from childhood to adulthood
- Hormonal balance is achieved and social behaviour is likely to develop within the context of a relationship
- Although adolescents continue to be influenced by their peers, the power of peer pressure tends to be less and there is a greater tendency to become self-sufficient, more self-assured and pairing more stable
## Summary of sexual development in adolescents/teenagers

### 13-17 years old

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Typical sexual behaviour</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Hormonal changes</td>
<td>• Asks questions about relationships and sexual behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Menstruation in females</td>
<td>• Uses sexual language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Development of secondary sex characteristics</td>
<td>• Talks about sexual acts between each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More self-conscious about body and body changes</td>
<td>• Masturbates in private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased need for privacy around the body</td>
<td>• Experiments sexually with other teenagers of the same age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mood swings</td>
<td>• Consensual experimentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Confusion about body changes</td>
<td>• Digital vaginal intercourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Confusion about self-identity</td>
<td>• Oral sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fears about relationships</td>
<td>• Petting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Doubts about sexuality</td>
<td>• Sometimes consensual sexual intercourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fears about getting pregnant</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Fears about being attractive and finding partners</td>
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</table>
6. Stress makers for Children & Young People

Young people live and grow in a number of overlapping ‘environments’. Within these environments there are many opportunities but for some, or many young people, there are grave challenges which may be highly stressful. The usual but challenging progress through adolescence can then become distorted or seemingly impossible. Here are some of them:

The family environment
- The style of functioning may be very different from that of the majority.
- Parenting style may be too harsh or too lax.
- The parental relationship may itself be under pressure, creating anxiety and fear.
- Separation and divorce of parents can impact negatively on young people in particular.
- Separated adults may reform families with a resultant myriad of relationships and complex issues of loyalty and disloyalty.
- Parents may be inappropriate or worse in their use of alcohol, drugs and the presence of their own sexuality.
- There may be domestic violence.
- Cultural/racial issues/differences may cause additional pressure.

The educational environment
- A fearfulness about the risk of failure may prevent risk-taking and exploration.
- While the experience of failure can help young people develop resilience; for some it can create despair and distress.
- Homework!
- Managing power and authority of others can cause difficulties as can own power and authority.

The community environment
- As young people reach adolescence, their peer groups become more important to them and can play a significant role in their development.
- Belonging to a new social group helps form their new identity and may influence all forms of behaviour.
- Social groups might include formal groups such as sports clubs, cadets, scouts, drama, community groups, as well as informal groups such as groups of friends and gangs.
- Research suggests that young men in particular can engage in more risky behaviour as part of a group. However, it can also be a factor for building resiliency, a sense of belonging and emotional well-being. It can also act as a conduit in transitioning towards adulthood and increased independence.
The work environment

- In the work field there is pressure to behave in an adult manner and the requirement to fit work in with the demands of the education system and social life.
- Learning to manage money and time.
- Manage no work, little or no money and little structure and routines.

The environment of relationships

- Managing romance (within which young people are challenged because early relationships are temporary, unstable and create feelings of vulnerability).
- Keeping up with exploration and experimentation is stressful.
- As is trying to recover self-esteem in the face of rejection and abandonment.
- The scary experience of taking responsibility for life decisions.

The sexual environment

- There are the demands of our majority culture (blame and accusation) as well as challenges for members of minority cultures.
- Social and religious beliefs may be difficult to reconcile with peer pressure.
- Developing a relationship with own sexuality and orientation may be stressful.
- There are different demands on young women compared to young men.
- These are compounded by the risk of contracting sexually-transmitted diseases or becoming pregnant.

Finally we have the big HAZARDS of adolescence. These are:

- Managing the demands/expectations parents have in the face of peer and other demands.
- Struggling with the issue of continuing membership or exclusion from groups/ gangs.
- Managing the dangers and risks of tobacco, drugs, and alcohol.
- Staying in charge of body weight.
- Keeping healthy.
- Acting on impulse
- Engaging in risky behaviour

Adolescents are less likely to:

- Think before they act
- Pause to consider the potential consequences of their actions
- Modify their dangerous or inappropriate behaviours
7. Children’s and Young People’s sexual behaviour

Sexual behaviour of children and young people falls into four groups. This might be helpful in contributing towards your whole school approach to handling sexual behaviour and the guidelines and ideas for handling healthy / sexually reactive / sexually secretive children and those who abuse others, are the same. However, you will want to base this approach on an understanding of sexual development in different ages.

7.1. Healthy sexual behaviour

For Early Years and young primary pupils, normal sexual play tends to be characterised by its voluntary nature. The children are of a similar age and size, and usually friends. The play is light hearted and spontaneous, giggly in nature and the children are embarrassed if caught. They will stop the behaviour if asked. This covers a broad range of behaviours and some children will show them more than others. Interest in sexual play waxes and wanes and children have other activities in which they are equally interested. You may find that this sexual behaviour can increase if parents allow their children to watch inappropriate programmes.

For secondary pupils, sexual development and exploration is also a healthy part of development; key factors in normal sexual behaviour still include voluntary consensual, no-intent to cause harm, no power differential behaviours. It is worth keeping in mind that adolescence especially is a phase of intense sexual interest which leads to role modelling and the acquisition of adult sexual techniques.

Key questions:

For young children, these might include

- Are the children involved of a similar age?
- Are they a mixed group of boys and girls?
- Is the sexual behaviour part of a game, i.e. ‘doctors and nurses’?
- Do they play other games together, football, skipping, etc.?
- Are they generally coping at school?
- Do all the children seem happy to be involved?
- Do they seem embarrassed when an adult intervenes?

For older children, these might include

- Is the behaviour typical of their peers? Are their wider interests healthy and varied? Are they coping well at school?
- Does the behaviour fall into the category of normal for your school (maybe talking with colleagues to find out more)?
7.2. Sexually reactive behaviour

There is a greater focus on sexuality than amongst their peers. The young person may feel shame, guilt and anxiety about their sexuality. They may welcome help. It is possible that the young person has been abused or stimulated by over exposure to sexual material and is unable to cope. The behaviour is often repetitive.

**Key questions:**
- When does the behaviour happen?
- Are adults approached in a sexual way?
- Is the young person motivated to change his or her behaviour?
- Is their behaviour often unsure, wary and isolated?

7.3. Sexually secretive behaviour

Sex can be used as a way of interacting with peers. The behaviour is pervasive and focused on sexuality. The young person will have been physically or sexually abused, abandoned or rejected. Through these experiences their understanding of relationships has become distorted.

**Key questions:**
- Are there periods of ‘unaccounted for’ time?
- Are others linked to these absences?
- Is there avoidance at relating with adults?
- Have there been or are there family traumas and/or difficulties?
- Is there diminished emotional reaction when interrupted?
- Do they have knowledge of adult sexual behaviours?

7.4. Young people who sexually abuse others

There will be general behaviour problems at home and school with no outside interests and few friends. Problem-solving skills are lacking and there will be little impulse control. Their sexual behaviour will increase over time and there is impulsive, compulsive and aggressive behaviour. Coercion is ALWAYS a factor. Other young people who are easy to fool, bribe or force are their victims. There is sexual anxiety and they will act out sexually when they feel ‘sad, mad, or bad’. Most report that they feel worse after the behaviour. Almost ALL will have witnessed extreme physical violence between their carers.

**Key questions:**
- Are the behaviours impulsive, compulsive and aggressive?
- Are there vulnerable younger people involved or children?
- Is coercion and force involved?
- Is the behaviour autoerotic or directed mainly at adults?
8. Summary of sexual behaviours causing concern

Summary of atypical and concerning sexual behaviours in adolescents/teenagers 13-16 years old

- Masturbating in public.
- Having sexual contact with much younger children.
- Seeking out the company of younger children and spending an unusual amount of time in their company.
- Taking younger children to ‘secret’ places or hideaways.
- Playing 'special' games with younger children (e.g. ‘Doctors and Nurses’) which are unusual for their age.
- Removing clothes.
- Insisting on hugging or kissing a child when the child does not want to.
- Frequently using aggressive language about adults or children.
- Showing sexual material to younger children.
- Making sexually abusive phone calls.
- Viewing child abuse images on the internet or elsewhere.
- Exposing his or her genitals to younger children.
- Forcing sex on another adolescent or child.
- Threatening or bullying children to keep the ‘secret’.
- Offering bribes such as money or gifts to children to ensure their silence.

Sanderson (2004: 72)

9. Traffic Lights – sexual behaviours from birth to eighteen

When considering the sexual behaviour of children and young people, and whether it might be considered normal, concerning or harmful, it is useful to consider the context in which it occurs both at the level of society, culture and family for those involved. The traffic lights framework lists examples and would need to be judged in context. It will be important to take into account age, ability, development of the young person as well as the location, frequency and nature of the behaviour.

(Source: Family Planning Queensland: www.fpq.com.au
### Expected sexual behaviours at each age range

**Sexual behaviours which are part of normal and healthy development and are:**
- spontaneous, curious, light hearted, easily diverted, enjoyable, mutual and consensual
- appropriate to the child's age and development
- activities or play among equals in terms of age, size and ability levels
- about understanding and gathering information, balanced with curiosity about other parts of life

These behaviours provide opportunities to talk, explain and support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Expected Sexual Behaviours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Birth-4 years</strong></td>
<td>Comfort in being nude, Body touching and holding own genitals, Unselfconscious masturbation, Interest in body parts and functions, Wanting to touch familiar children’s genitals during play, toilet or bath times, Participation in make believe games involving looking at and/or touching the bodies of familiar children, e.g. ‘show me yours and I’ll show you mine’, playing ‘family’, Asking about or wanting to touch the breasts, bottoms or genitals of familiar adults, e.g. when in the bath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5-9 years</strong></td>
<td>Increased sense of privacy about bodies, 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, e.g. ‘show me yours and I’ll show you mine’, playing ‘family’, 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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10-13 years</strong></td>
<td>Growing need for privacy, Masturbation in private, Curiosity and seeking information about sexuality, Use of sexual language, Interest and/or participation in girlfriend or boyfriend relationships, Hugging, kissing, touching with known peers, Exhibitionism amongst same age peers within the context of play, e.g. occasional flashing or mooning, Use of mobile phones and internet in relationships with known peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>14-17 years</strong></td>
<td>Need for privacy, Masturbation in private, Accessing information about sexuality, Viewing materials for sexual arousal, e.g. music videos, magazines, movies, Sexually explicit mutual conversations and/or use of humour and obscenities with peers, Interest and/or participation in a one on one relationship with someone of the same or other sex, Sexual activity with a partner of similar age and developmental ability (ability to consent must be considered), Use of mobile phones and internet in relationships with peers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Amber level outlines sexual behaviours that may be indicative of behaviours that cause concern because of:

- persistence, intensity, frequency or duration of behaviours
- the type of activity or knowledge for the age and stage of development
- inequality in age, size, power or developmental ability
- risk to the health and safety of the child or others
- unusual changes in a child’s behaviour

These behaviours signal the need to monitor and provide extra support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth-4 years</th>
<th>5-9 years</th>
<th>10-13 years</th>
<th>14-17 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masturbation in preference to other activities</td>
<td>Masturbation in preference to other activities, in public, with others and/or causing self injury</td>
<td>Masturbation in preference to other activities, in public and/or causing self injury</td>
<td>Sexual preoccupation which interferes with daily function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupation with sexual behaviours</td>
<td>Explicit talk, art or play of sexual nature</td>
<td>Persistent explicit talk, art or play which is sexual or sexually intimidating</td>
<td>Intentional spying on others while they are engaged in sexual activity or nudity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistently watching others in sexual activity, toileting or when nude</td>
<td>Persistent questions about sexuality despite being answered</td>
<td>Accessing age restricted materials, e.g. movies, games, internet with sexually explicit content</td>
<td>Explicit communications, art or actions which are obscene or sexually intimidating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit sexual talk, art or play</td>
<td>Persistent nudity and/or exposing private parts in public places</td>
<td>Persistent expression of fear of sexually transmitted infection or pregnancy</td>
<td>Repeated exposure of private parts in a public place with peers, e.g. flashing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following others into private spaces, e.g. toilets, bathrooms to look at them or touch them</td>
<td>Persistently watching or following others to look at or touch them</td>
<td>Marked changes to behaviour e.g. older or adult flirting behaviours, seeking relationships with older children or adults in preference to peers</td>
<td>Unsafe sexual behaviour, including unprotected sex, sexual activity while intoxicated, multiple partners and/or frequent change of partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulling other children’s pants down or skirts up against their will touching the genitals/private parts of other children in preference to other activities</td>
<td>Pulling other children’s pants down or skirts up against their will</td>
<td>Engaging in sexual activities with an unknown peer, e.g. deep kissing, mutual masturbation</td>
<td>Presence of sexually transmitted infection or unplanned pregnancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempting to touch or touching adults on the breasts, bottom, or genitals in ways that are persistent and/or invasive</td>
<td>Persistently mimicking sexual flirting behaviour too advanced for age, with other children or adults</td>
<td>Oral sex and/or intercourse with a known partner of similar age and developmental ability</td>
<td>Oral sex and/or intercourse with a known partner of more than two years age difference or with significant difference in development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touching the genitals/private parts of animals after redirection</td>
<td>Use of mobile phone and internet with known and unknown people which may include giving out identifying details</td>
<td>Using mobile phones and internet with unknown people which may include giving out identifying details</td>
<td>Arranging a meeting with an online acquaintance accompanied by a peer or known adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Using mobile phones and internet to send or receive sexually explicit photos of another person with their consent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Red level is indicative of sexual behaviours that are of concern. Sexual behaviours which indicate or cause harm because they are:

- excessive, compulsive, coercive, forceful, degrading or threatening
- secretive, manipulative or involve bribery or trickery
- not appropriate for the age and stage of development
- between children with a significant difference in age, developmental ability or power

These behaviours signal the need to provide immediate protection and follow up support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth-4 years</th>
<th>5-9 years</th>
<th>10-13 years</th>
<th>14-17 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compulsive masturbation which may be self injurious, of a persistent nature or duration</td>
<td>Compulsive masturbation, e.g. self-injuring, self-harming, seeking an audience</td>
<td>Compulsive masturbation, e.g. self-harming, seeking an audience</td>
<td>Compulsive masturbation, e.g. self-harming, in public, seeking an audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent explicit sexual themes in talk, art or play</td>
<td>Disclosure of sexual abuse</td>
<td>Engaging vulnerable others in a process to gain sexual activity by using grooming techniques, e.g. gifts, lies, flattery</td>
<td>Preoccupation with sexually aggressive and/or illegal pornography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure of sexual abuse</td>
<td>Persistent bullying involving sexual aggression eg pulling/lifting/removing other children’s clothing, sexually threatening notes, drawing, text messages</td>
<td>Forcing or coercing others into sexual activity</td>
<td>Sexual contact with others of significant age and/or developmental difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulation of sexual touch or sexual activity</td>
<td>Sexual behaviour with significantly younger or less able children</td>
<td>Oral sex and/or intercourse with a person of different age, developmental ability and/or peer grouping</td>
<td>Engaging others in a process to gain sexual activity by using grooming techniques, e.g. gifts, manipulation, lies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistently touching the genitals/private parts of others</td>
<td>Accessing the rooms of sleeping children to touch or engage in sexual activity</td>
<td>Presence of sexually transmitted infection or pregnancy</td>
<td>Deliberately sending and/or publishing sexual images of another person without consent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forcing other children to engage in sexual activity</td>
<td>Simulation of, or participation in, sexual activities, e.g. oral sex, sexual intercourse</td>
<td>Deliberately sending and/or publishing sexual images of self or another person</td>
<td>Arranging a meeting with an online acquaintance without the knowledge of a peer or known adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual behaviour between young children involving penetration with objects, masturbation of others, oral sex</td>
<td>Presence of a sexually transmitted infection</td>
<td>Arranging a face to face meeting with an online acquaintance</td>
<td>Sexual contact with animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of a sexually transmitted infection</td>
<td>Persistent sexual activity with animals</td>
<td>Sexual contact with animals</td>
<td>Sexual activity in exchange for money or goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using mobile phones and internet which includes giving out identifying details or sexual images</td>
<td>Using mobile phones and internet which includes giving out identifying details or sexual images</td>
<td>Sexual activity in exchange for money or goods</td>
<td>Possessing, accessing or sending child exploitation materials, e.g. photos or videos of children naked or doing sexual activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Possessing, accessing or sending child exploitation materials</td>
<td>Forcing or manipulating others into sexual activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Possessing, accessing or sending child exploitation materials</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. Information gathering

If there are concerns with a child or young person’s safety in terms of sexualised behaviour, you may need to collect information to make an informed decision about the level of vulnerability. You will need to collect information so that you can determine into which of the above groups a young person’s behaviour falls. Ideally this could be done through consulting with key adults who know the young person well and who are in various positions of responsibility. The following questions can be helpful in order to gather information.

Information gathering

Too often adults make decisions about a young person’s sexual behaviour without enough information. Sometimes adults over-react or panic, which can make matters worse, or equally inappropriately, they do nothing because they do not know what to do. The need is to make an informed decision. Robust protocols that are sufficiently safe but do not invade privacy unnecessarily or go beyond the appropriate boundaries of the organisation’s relationship with service users are required.

Use the responses from these sorts of questions to share your views with other staff and decide on a best practice approach to dealing with the young person’s behaviour.

Key information

1. Describe the behaviour you are concerned about.
2. Is someone keeping a record of the behaviour?
3. How often does it occur?
4. How long has it been going on?
5. Is there anyone else involved?
6. If so, are they of a similar age?
7. Has the young person been spoken to about the behaviour?
8. If so, what was his/her response?
9. Has the behaviour continued?
10. Where does the behaviour happen?
11. When does it happen?
12. Could it be happening anywhere else?
13. Is there an element of force involved?
14. Are other children complaining?
15. Are other parents complaining?
16. Could this behaviour be happening in secret?
17. Has the young person a history of this behaviour?
18. Is internet and social media use age appropriate?
19. Are there concerns with coercion linked to social media use?
20. Is there any evidence of cyber-bullying?
21. Are there other behaviours you are concerned about?
22. Has there been any change in the young person’s schoolwork?
23. Has the young person got friends?
24. Has the young person missed a lot of schooling recently?
25. Are there any medical issues?
26. Is the young person’s family known to other agencies, i.e. Social Services?
27. Does the young person take part in out-of-school activities?
11. Sexual behaviour and sexual bullying

Sexual behaviour is part of the continuum of behaviour in your setting and should be dealt with in accordance with your whole organisation approach. Sexual behaviour by young adults exists as a continuum from activities involving mutual consent and experimentation through to harmful exploitation and abuse. However, judging what behaviour is appropriate and what behaviour is harmful is not always straightforward. Critical to this seems to be the notion of power, consent and coercion.

Power

• In abusive situations, the power of the abuser is to deny the victim free choice.
• Some of the principal elements of power differentials in sexual relationships include:
  – Age, gender, race, and culture
  – Physical strength and size
  – Significantly different levels of cognitive functioning and understanding
  – Invested authority (e.g. babysitter, school prefect)
  – Self-image differential (e.g. positive/negative)
  – Arbitrary labels (best fighter, footballer, leader, etc).

Consent

A key part of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 is a judgement about a young person’s level of ‘competence’ to make an informed choice.

• If a child does not have the capacity to say ‘no’ comfortably, then ‘yes’ has no meaning. Equally, if one is unwilling to accept ‘no’ then ‘yes’ has no meaning.
• Interpersonal sexual behaviour which does not involve mutually consenting participants is abusive.
• True consent is only possible where power is shared; ‘consent’ in order to fit or to avoid a negative consequence is not consent.
• Consent requires that there must be an understanding of:
  – What is being proposed, suggested or asked
  – Awareness and understanding about possible consequences
  – Knowledge that choice will not carry with it negative repercussions.

Coercion

• Coercion might take various forms:
  – Manipulation, trickery, peer pressure, bribery
  – Threats of lost relationships, privilege or esteem
  – Threats of force, intimidation or harm
  – Physical restraint, force, weapons or violence.

Source: Lancashire LEA Child Protection Service
Sexual bullying needs to be understood within this policy and to be addressed. In any bullying, which includes sexual bullying, a child is targeted for representing a group, and attacking the individual sends a message to that group. Bullying is therefore likely to hurt not only the child being bullied, but also other pupils from the same group, and their families.

Behaviour policies should cover bullying and all incidents should be recorded. Incidents can include:

- Verbal abuse by name-calling, jokes and offensive mimicry.
- Physical threats or attacks.
- Wearing of provocative badges or insignia.
- Bringing offensive leaflets, comics or magazines.
- Inciting others to behave in a bullying way.
- Graffiti or other written insults, even against food, music, dress or customs.
- Refusing to co-operate in work or in play.
- Looks and comments about appearance, attractiveness, emerging puberty, experiences of sexual abuse.
- Inappropriate and uninvited touching.
- Sexual innuendoes and propositions.
- Pornographic material, graffiti with sexual content.
- In its most extreme form, sexual assault or rape.

A range of strategies is available to deal with incidents:

- Ensure that the anti-bullying policy refers explicitly to sexual bullying.
- Put in place effective recording systems, e.g. an incident book containing the name of perpetrators. It might help to have a separate record of sexual bullying so that you can see how much of a problem there is.
- Be aware that even young children can understand the consequences of their actions.
- Listen carefully to pupils and provide opportunities for them to express views and opinions.
- Ensure that the anti-bullying policy refers explicitly to sexual orientation harassment.
- Multi-agency working with police, youth service, housing and others.
- Involve parents and the wider community.
- Use peer mediation to resolve conflict between pupils and theatre-in-education groups to raise awareness, expose the problem, and find solutions.
- Use surveys to find out the extent and nature of the problem.
- Develop understanding of gender relations and suitable strategies through staff training.
- Explore sexism and sexual bullying through the curriculum.
- Recognise and challenge sexual content within verbal abuse.
- Use single-sex groupings to explore sensitive issues.
- Ensure that the site is well supervised, paying attention to areas where pupils may be vulnerable.
Sexual bullying can also be related to sexual orientation. Pupils do not necessarily have to be lesbian, gay or bisexual to experience such bullying. Just being different can be enough.

Factors hindering schools in challenging homophobic bullying include staff inexperience and parental disapproval.

**Strategies for reducing sexual bullying include:**
- Including it in the anti-bullying policy so that pupils know that discrimination is wrong and the organisation will act.
- Covering sexual bullying, including homophobic language and bullying, in training and staff discussions on INSET days.
- Guaranteeing confidentiality and appropriate advice to lesbian and gay pupils.
- Challenging homophobic language.
- Exploring issues of diversity and difference; discussing what schools and society can do to end discrimination.
- Exploring pupils’ understanding of their use of homophobic language – they may not understand the impact.
12. Uses of social media

Being online is now often a normal part of children's life at school and home. Children and young people can learn new things, get help with homework, express themselves creatively and connect with friends and family.

There are also risks, but by understanding and talking about the dangers we can help keep children and young people safe online. Children and young people may regularly engage in activities such as:

- searching for information or content on search engines like Google and Bing
- using social networking websites like Facebook and Twitter
- be sharing images and watching videos through websites or mobile apps like Instagram, Pinterest, Vine and YouTube
- writing or replying to messages on forums and message boards
- playing games alone or with others through websites, apps or game consoles
- chatting with other people through online games, BBM (Blackberry Messenger), game consoles, webcams, social networks and tools like Whatsapp

Preventing children and young people from using the internet or mobile phones won't keep them safe in the long run, so it's important to have conversations that help them understand how to stay safe and what to do if they ever feel scared or uncomfortable.

The NSPCC suggests the following ways to help keep children safe on the internet and social networks:

- It's easier to have conversations about online safety little and often, rather than trying to cover everything at once.
- As children get older, and technology changes, keep talking about what they're doing online and how to stay safe.
- Encourage children and young people to show adults at school and home their favourite things to do online, and show an interest in what they do - just like you would offline. This gives you a way to support and encourage them while learning and opportunities to discuss any concerns.
- Ensure that young people and children understand that it's easy for people to lie about themselves online, for example, their age or gender, because they have never met them.
- Set rules and agree boundaries such as sharing images and videos and how to treat people online and not post anything they wouldn't say face-to-face.
- Check they know how to use privacy settings and reporting tools and remind them to keep their personal information private on games and social media websites.
- Talk to young people about what to do if they see content or are contacted by someone that worries or upsets them. Make sure they know how to use tools to report abuse.

For further information view http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety
13. Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

What is CSE? – the Department of Children, Schools and Families defines CSE as:

Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive ‘something’ (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child’s immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the Internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person’s limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability.

The Department of Children, Schools and Families March 2009: (Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation) offers specific advice covering guidance for safeguarding, roles and responsibilities and preventing sexual exploitation. The paper identifies children and young people that are particularly vulnerable, including children and young people who have a history of running away or of going missing from home, those with special needs, those in and leaving residential and foster care, migrant children, unaccompanied asylum seeking children, children who have disengaged from education and children who are abusing drugs and alcohol, and those involved in gangs.

Sexual exploitation can take many forms, from the seemingly ‘consensual’ relationship where sex is exchanged for attention, affection, accommodation or gifts, to serious organised crime and child trafficking. What marks out exploitation is an imbalance of power within the relationship. The perpetrator always holds some kind of power over the victim, increasing the dependence of the victim as the exploitative relationship develops. Sexual exploitation involves varying degrees of coercion, intimidation or enticement, including unwanted pressure from their peers to have sex, sexual bullying (including cyber bullying), and grooming for sexual activity. Technology can also play a part in sexual abuse, for example, through its use to record abuse and share it with other like-minded individuals.
14. **Dealing with inappropriate and atypical behaviours**

The All Wales Protocol: the management of young people engaged in sexually harmful behaviour suggests:

The boundary between what is abusive and what is part of normal childhood or experimentation can be difficult to determine. It can refer to any child or young person who engages in a sexual act, either against the victim’s will or without informed consent. Young children are unable to give informed consent, although they may comply with behaviour. Compliance may be secured via aggression, manipulation, fear, bribery, etc. We should consider inequalities in relation to age, power, status, physical size, position of authority, etc when determining the potential dynamics of sexual activity and young people.

Sexually harmful behaviour covers a range of behaviours that include exposing genitals, touching, penetrating – penile or objectile – and oral, vaginal or anal. It can also include causing or encouraging children into sexual activity, sexual harassment/threats and accessing indecent images of children. Please refer to Sexual Offences Act 2003.

The Welsh Protocol is being adopted by Devon Safeguarding Children Board.

Please refer also to Devon Safeguarding Children Board: Threshold Tool.

For further information about sexual assault or rape support please also refer to the website for sexual assault referral centres (SARC):

http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk/index.php

http://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search

14.1. **Assess: what is the behaviour communicating?**

Besides looking at the behaviour, it is also important to understand the young person and the context in which the behaviour occurs. For example, the level of development, their understanding as well as anxiety levels, relationships with peers and adults, family history and the environment where the young person lives and grows up, as well as their family situation. When sexual behaviour raises concern or involves harm to others, the behaviour is serious. Thinking about the context in which the behaviour occurs helps to establish the seriousness of the behaviour.

Adults have a duty of care to take action when the answer to any of the following is ‘yes’. Is the behaviour...

- Life threatening?
- A potential health risk to others?
- Against the law?
- A potential health risk to the person?
- Against the policy of the organisation/setting?
- Interfering with the person’s relationships?
- Of concern to others?
Many strategies may be required to respond to the needs reflected in the behaviours. It is also important to address the needs of the people who have an impact on the lives of children/adolescents, e.g. family, carers, teachers and support workers.

14.2. Respond: what can be done to address the young person's needs?
The following may help to serve as a checklist.

Q1. What are the issues or concerns regarding the behaviour?

Q2. What might these concerns indicate?

• Lack of sexual information
• Lack of privacy
• Boredom
• Loneliness
• Family/carer conflict
• Lack of consistency across environments
• Lack of appropriate consequences
• Lack of rules
• Poor boundaries
• Sexual bullying/harassment
• Family/carer information or support needs
• Staffing information/training requirements
• Response to a traumatic sexual experience
• Emotional, physical or sexual abuse or neglect
• Communication difficulties
• Lack of social skills
• Depression
• Sexual excitement
• Curiosity
• Lack of adult supervision and support
• Anxiety/confusion
• Attention needs
• Relationship needs
• Gender issues
• Medical needs
• Need for physical activity
• Grief and loss issues
• Overexposure to explicit sexual activity and materials
The following may also serve as a reminder of other possible strategies to look out for:

- Sexuality education
- Meaningful consequences for appropriate behaviour
- Positive reinforcement for appropriate behaviour
- Consistency between staff and carers across all environments
- Meaningful tasks, e.g. work, volunteering
- Providing activities for redirection
- Behaviour management and support plan
- Staff training and support
- ‘Scripts’ for staff and carers to redirect behaviour appropriately and consistently
- Policy development
- Reducing access to vulnerable people – explain reasons clearly
- Considering environment if abuse is evident
- Therapy services/psychiatric assessment
- Checking for infection/irritation – appropriate medical care
- Monitoring, recording, evaluating and reviewing behaviour and strategies
- Ensuring rules are clear (charts/posters)
- Considering social activities and hobbies
- Supporting relationships, e.g. if child in care/adopted – life story books
- Displaying public/private signs to rooms and referring to them
- Modelling and teaching about everyday privacy
- Supporting sexual wellbeing, e.g. AIDS/condoms
- Referral to specialist services
15. Looking to the future

As adolescents develop they will move towards:
- Accepting their physique and sexual role
- New peer relationships with both sexes
- Emotional independence from parents
- Selecting and preparing for a future occupation
- Civic involvement
- Economic independence
- Social responsibility
- Family life
- Conscious harmonious values

What teenagers want...
- Low visibility
- Confidentiality
- Non-judgmental
- Easy access
- Continuity of professional expertise
- Information
- Respect

What teenagers would really like...
- A cool environment
- Soft music
- Drinks on tap
- Free condoms machine

What teenagers need...
- To get real
- Straight talking with appropriate boundaries

What teenagers can’t manage...
- Being treated as adults
- Lack of clarity
- Too much freedom
- Being ignored
- Absence of ‘carrots’ (positives)
16. Developing a best practice approach to handling sexual behaviour

As part of a common approach, it may be worthwhile to consider how staff might respond to the different levels of concern using a flow chart which could be shared with all adults in the setting.

- **Group 1**
  - Normal sexual behaviour
  - Talk to:
  - Do:

- **Group 2**
  - Sexually reactive children
  - Talk to:
  - Do:

- **Group 3**
  - Sexually secretive children
  - Talk to:
  - Do:

- **Group 4**
  - Children who abuse others
  - Talk to:
  - Do:
17. Parental involvement

If you have serious concerns about a child’s sexual behaviour you must follow the multi-agency child protection procedures. For all other issues in connection with children’s sexual development it is best to involve parents/carers in line with your organisation policy.

- Make contact as early as possible
- Provide information about professional roles and assessment processes
- Affirm importance of the parental role
- Help to process emotional responses
- Listen to the parents’ story
- Be aware that each parent may react differently
- Expect ambivalence, hostility or distress
- Avoid confrontation

And finally...

The Babcock LDP Educational Psychology Service and JACAT (The Joint Agencies Child Abuse Team) and other partnership colleagues are available to work with you to develop your whole school approach. Please talk with your Educational Psychologist for further advice and support.

Please contact:

**Babcock LDP Educational Psychology Service**
2nd Floor, Milford House
Pynes Hill
Exeter
Devon
EX2 5GF
Tel: 01392 287233

**JACAT (The Joint Agencies Child Abuse Team)**
Evergreen House
Victoria Park Rd
Exeter
Devon
EX2 4NU
Tel: 01392 208600
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19. Members of the working party

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