Identifying and responding to problematic sexual behaviours

Scenarios

Cassie, 7 years, regularly masturbates in class. She has been spoken to about her behaviour and the frequency does reduce for a short period of time. However some days she is constantly masturbating and other children around her notice this and are either uncomfortable or make fun of her.

Kai, 10 years, is constantly looking up girls’ uniforms and crawling under desks to do this. He has been spoken to about this behaviour, he says he is just joking and playing a game, however the girls in his class are getting annoyed with his behaviour.
Identifying and responding to problematic sexual behaviours

Case study

Nico, aged 5, hides behind the equipment shed (or other buildings in school), pulls down other boys’ pants and his own. There have been attempts to redirect his behaviour but it does not seem to stop him. He gets angry when he is spoken to about this.

Yesterday he pulled down the pants of another boy, pulled down his own pants and told him to touch his private parts and “not tell”.

Questions

What action do you take to:

1. protect and reassure the child or young person who has been harmed
2. respond to the child or young person who has harmed
3. manage the incident
4. support and protect other children or young people who may have been harmed
5. communicate with parents?
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**Scenarios**

Lily, 12 years, is observed on Monday morning, proudly showing off a large love bite on her neck after being at a weekend party.

Ben, 15 years and Rosie 13 years, have a close sibling relationship, always looking out for each other and for their younger siblings. Both their parents have a long history of alcohol misuse and there has been involvement with a range of services over the years, including all the children having short stays in care. Rosie’s friend has come to see you as she is worried because Rosie told her that Ben gives her money if she lets him touch her private parts.
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Case study

There is a commotion in the corridor, and there is a group of Year 9 students gathered around. One of the girls tells you that Rob, also in Year 9, has just ‘attacked’ Mira, pushing her up against a wall and touching her private parts. Mira is quite distressed and is being comforted by her friends. Rob has left the scene.

Questions

What action do you take to:

1. protect and reassure the child or young person who has been harmed
2. respond to the child or young person who has harmed
3. manage the incident
4. support and protect other children or young people who may have been harmed
5. communicate with parents?
3. RESPOND

When you can to address the child’s needs

All behaviour has a function. When adults understand why the behaviour may be occurring, they can respond in effective ways. Behaviour usually reflects a range of needs. Many strategies may be required to respond to children with concerns or frightening behavious. It is also important to address the needs of people who may have an impact on the lives of children and young people about harmful behaviours. 

Red light behaviours are more common. They include the need to get attention, avoid rejection, seek power, seek control, and provide reassurance or comfort. Red light behaviours are seen as unsafe and may require help and support. 

Green light behaviours are less common. They include the need to explore beginning to use/abuse substances, seeking a sense of identity and achievement. Green light behaviours are seen as safe and do not require help and support. 

Orange light behaviours are less common. They include the need to fit in with peers, to be in the group, to be popular, to avoid rejection, to seek power, and to provide reassurance or comfort. Orange light behaviours are less common and may require help and support.

How similar is the behaviour? 

If sexual behaviour raises concern or involves harm to the individual, contact children protection services or the police.

When masturbating he will often expose his penis to the internet. The more they chat, the more Alex feels attracted to ‘Sexy Boy’, and they start spending more time together online. Alex talks to her friend about it.

Talking action 

Most sexual behaviours are normal and healthy and will vary from child to child. When these behaviours are very extreme, they can become a problem for the child and young person in effective ways. 

WHAT DO YOU THINK? green, orange or red?

Use the traffic lights framework to identify these scenarios

1. Harry, aged 4, masturbates for most of the day at school. He is very focused on this behaviour and focuses on the child or young person in effective ways. 

2. Teresa, aged 12, spent a lot of time in her bedroom in the dark. When her mum knocked on the door to talk to her about it, she claimed she was looking for something.

3. Gayle, aged 12, often tries to sit on the lap of her mum’s friends. When the woman is visiting, she often asks her if she can sit on her lap. She also does this for her mum and says she is being a pop star.

4. Alex, aged 11, spends lots of time chatting to friends on the internet. Recently, she made a new friend. They met in a cafe. The more they chat, the more Alex feels attracted to ‘Sexy Boy’, and they start spending more time together online. Alex talks to her friend about it.

5. Kevin, aged 12, spends a lot of time online in his bedroom. He is often in the dark, and his parents have found him in the bedroom in the dark. Every morning.

6. Marley and Ashmita, both aged 4, are playing in the cubby house and have both taken their underpants off. They are walking around each other’s genitalia.

WHERE TO GET HELP

Telling about concerns helps prevent harm or abuse

Parents: 1900 30 1300

Lifeline: 13 11 14

www.lifeline.org.au

Relationships Australia: 1300 364 277

Child Safety Services (888): 1800 177 177

Child Safety Services: on your state or territory if a child or adult requires protection from harm.

Contact: Child Protection or Police Services in your state or territory if a child or adult requires protection from harm.

For more information about other traffic lights resources and funding context on:

Phone: 07 3250 0240

www.fpq.com.au

SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS IN CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

A guide to IDENTIFY, UNDERSTAND and RESPOND to sexual behaviours

1. IDENTIFY

Kneading how to identify and respond to sexual behaviours in children and young people helps adults to support the development of healthy sexuality and protect young people from harm or abuse.

Sexuality is an intriuc, complex and life-long phenomenon. When using the traffic lights framework to identify whether there are sexual behaviour problems, it is important to consider the current social, cultural and religious context. 

The chart on the next page lists specific examples of green, orange and red light behaviours at various ages. These are examples and must be considered in context. Take into account the age and level of the child, young person and others involved as well as the frequency and nature of the behaviour.

Sexual behaviours that are problematic or harmful, forceful, coercive, or degrading are the result of physical or sexual abuse and require immediate attention and protection.

Contact: Child Protection or Police Services in your state or territory if a child or adult requires protection from harm.

Talking about concerns helps prevent harm or abuse

Parents: 1900 30 1300

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Relationships Australia: 1300 364 277

Child Safety Services (888): 1800 177 177

Child Safety Services: on your state or territory if a child or adult requires protection from harm.

For more information about other traffic lights resources and funding context on:

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(SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS IN CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE)
2. UNDERSTAND

What the behaviour is telling you

Children show their needs and wants through their behaviour. Understanding the reason a child behaves in this way is the way to begin to understand what is going on for the child and indicate what is needed.

What might these concerns indicate?

• developmental, cognitive or physical disability
• lack of information about the risks of the behaviour
• lack of information about the situations that may be contributing to the behaviour
• confusion and anxiety about sex
• confusion about sexuality, relationships and sexual activity
• lack of support or protection
• lack of adult supervision
• lack of consistency across environments
• lack of experience, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect
• physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect

What is the behaviour saying?

• expressing anxiety about adult or family relationships or neglect
• curiosity about sexuality e.g. questions about sexual behaviour or development
• feeling or getting involved in a process to gain understanding and information
• attending a meeting with someone of the same or opposite sex
• use of mobile phones and internet to access age restricted materials e.g. movies, internet with known and unknown people which may include giving out identifying details
• sexual contact with others of significant age or developmental difference
• preoccupation with sexually aggressive and/or developmentally age appropriate peer e.g. deep kissing, mutual masturbation
• involving penetration with objects, of a persistent nature or duration
• sexual activity with animals
• preoccupation with sexually aggressive and/or developmentally age appropriate peer e.g. deep kissing, mutual masturbation
• oral sex and/or intercourse with a partner of similar age and developmental ability using mobile phone and internet with known and unknown people which may include giving out identifying details
• preoccupation with sexually aggressive and/or developmentally age appropriate peer e.g. deep kissing, mutual masturbation
• exposing to exploitive sexual and/or sexually intimidating material
• accessing information about sexuality
• possessing, accessing or sending child exploitation materials
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3. FOCUS

What the child wants

Children show their needs and wants through their behaviour. Understanding the reason a child behaves in this way is the way to begin to understand what is going on for the child and indicate what is needed.

How can you help?

• express what is needed
• show empathy
• help children to express their feelings
• help children to identify their needs

4. RESPOND

What to do next

• seek professional help
• plan of effective responses
• express sexuality through sexual behaviour is harmful, it is essential to think about why the child or young person is engaging in sexual activity and the way it happens will give you understanding what is going on for the child or young person which is needed to provide immediate protection and support.

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