

Sexual Development, Boundaries & Consent

A Guide for Foster & Kinship Carers

Why this resource?

Children and young people in care may have complex experiences that affect their sexual development. This quick guide helps carers respond confidently, compassionately, and appropriately to questions, behaviours, and situations relating to sexual development, consent, and safety—online and offline.



Understanding Sexual Development

Sexual development is a natural, lifelong process influenced by biology, culture, trauma, identity, and experience. It involves curiosity, learning about bodies, relationships, and eventually intimacy.

So, what's typical behaviour? Noting that for children with a trauma background, different diagnosis connected to their development and neurodiversity, can all alter what is considered 'typical'.

Behaviours that are persistent, aggressive, coercive, secretive, or involve significant age/power differences may indicate concern and require support.

Consider the following guidance from [Berry Street](#) (note this is only a sample below and not a full list):

- ✓ Age-appropriate, mutual curiosity
- ? Concerning, needs guidance
- ⚠ Harmful, requires intervention

✓ Age Appropriate

? Concerning

⚠ Potentially Harmful

Early Childhood
(approx 0-4 years)

- Exploring own body
- Enjoying being nude
- Talking about or showing genitals

- Persistent touching of own genitals.
- Forcing children into sexual play

- Sexual play
- Simulating sex with other children

Middle Childhood
(Approx 5-7 years)

- Exploring own body
- Hearing or telling dirty jokes
- Kissing/holding hands with peers as sign of affection

- Persistent use of sexualised words
- Wanting to play sexualised games
- Wanting to touch others

- Touching themselves persistently in private and public
- Advanced sexual knowledge

Pre-Adolescent
(Approx 8-12 years)

- Occasional masturbation
- 'Show me yours' type games
- Kissing or flirting

- Attempting to expose others genitals
- Preoccupation with masturbation
- Simulating foreplay

- Pornographic interest
- Forced exposure of others
- Repeated behaviour - chronic masturbation, simulating intercourse



Boundaries in the Home

Children need clear, age-appropriate rules to feel safe.

- ✓ Knock before entering bedrooms/bathrooms
- ✓ Rules about nudity and physical contact
- ✓ Talk about safety for visitors and sleepovers

💬 Try: "In our house, we always knock for privacy. Let's practice that together."

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Starting Conversations

Talking about bodies and relationships doesn't need to be awkward. Open, honest, and shame-free conversations help children learn boundaries, consent, and safety.





- Use correct anatomical language
- Reinforce that all bodies are good bodies Praise curiosity
- Avoid shame or punishment

Scenario: A child asks, "Why does my body look different?"


 Try: "Everyone's body is different—and that's what makes us all special."

Navigating Online Safety

Children in care can be more vulnerable to online risks such as sextortion, grooming, and exposure to explicit content.

-  Set clear, age-appropriate tech rules
-  Use parental controls & privacy settings
-  Encourage kids to share anything that feels unsafe
-  Use resources like ThinkUKnow, ACCCE, and eSafety Commissioner



Scenario: A teen receives a message from a stranger.

 Try: "Thanks for telling me—let's check your settings together and talk about how to stay safe online."



Responding to Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB)

It's not about punishment—it's about protection, understanding, and support.

-  If you observe harmful behaviour:
 - Stay calm and non-judgemental
 - Separate children calmly
 - Document what happened
 - Contact your support agency
 - Seek guidance from specialist services
-  Trauma-informed responses matter more than punishment.

Practical Tips for Carers

- ✓ Reflect on your comfort levels and beliefs
- ✓ Model respectful behaviour
- ✓ Use inclusive, positive language
- ✓ Adapt communication for disability, culture, and age
- ✓ Join training, use peer support, and access expert advice
- ✓ Create a safe, shame-free environment
- ✓ Use everyday moments to talk about consent and boundaries
- ✓ Set clear rules—offline and online
- ✓ Seek support early—you're not alone

Further Reading & Resources

- Berry Street - <https://www.berrystreet.org.au/learning-and-resources/fact-sheets/sexual-development>
- Vic Gov: <https://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/our-approach/best-interests-case-practice-model/children-problem-sexual-behaviours-and-their>
- Vic Gov: <https://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/our-approach/best-interests-case-practice-model/adolescents-sexually-abusive-behaviours>