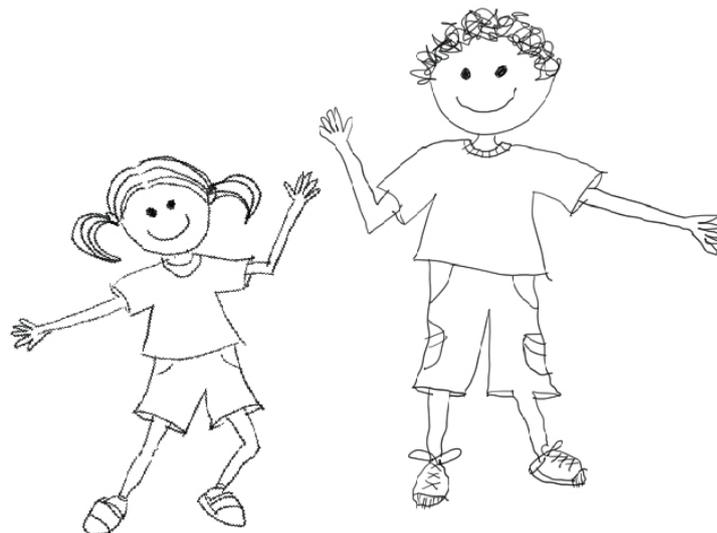


STOP Children's Service

Normal, Healthy Sexualised Play & Behaviour in Children & Adolescents

2018

TALK
PLAY
AND
STAY
SAFE
OK!



CHILDREN'S SERVICE

stop
A community Free
from Sexual Abuse
He Hapori Waatea/Taitookai

Sexualised Play and Behaviour in Children & Adolescents

Children may engage in sexualised play and behaviour from a young age.

Sexualised play/behaviour is a normal healthy aspect of growing and learning about their bodies and playing safely

It is important for parents/caregivers to support and give guidance to children about their body, healthy touch and playing safely

Safe, calm and clear adult responses when incidents of sexualised play and behaviour occur are important as it gives guidance and supports children to understand the rules about safe touch and how to play safely with others

The following are some guidelines to help parents/caregivers and whanau appreciate the range of normal developmentally age appropriate sexualised behaviour that children *may* engage in

It is important to acknowledge and respect differences in family dynamics, context & values

A child may have learned about sexual knowledge or behaviour from a range of people, peers & situations

*Please note the following resource is a guide
Individual circumstances need to be considered*

Infancy: Age 0 – 2 years

Children at this stage have intense curiosity about the world around them and about their bodies.

Touching their own sexual body parts normally begins in early infancy and continues through the pre-school years as a self-soothing behaviour. During this time children are generally not discreet and touch themselves in front of others.

Behaviours May Include:

- Touches own genitals when nappies are being changed
- Explores differences between boys and girls, males and females
- Touches the genitals and breasts of familiar adults and children
- Interested in watching people doing toilet and bathroom functions
- Interested in doing and watching breast-feeding
- Interested in own faeces
- Likes to be nude and run around with no clothes on
- Learns to name body parts
- Looks at own genitals in bath or when getting changed
- Talks about differences between gender e.g. “mummy has boobies, breasts?”, “Daddy has a willy, penis?”
- Notice differences in boys and girls private parts. Interested in looking at other children with no clothes on (in the bath, getting changed)
- Experimenting with toilet training. Proud of toilet activity. Big girl/boy behaviour, transition from nappies to under-wear
- May want to change own nappy, underwear or go to toilet on own

Pre-School: Age 3 – 4 years

- Touches, rubs own genitals
- Explores differences between males and females
- Interested in looking at nude persons
- Asks about genitals, breasts, babies
- Likes to be nude. May show others his/her genitals
- Interested in watching other people doing bathroom functions
- Interested in having a baby
- May use “slang” words for bathroom functions
- Interested in own faeces and orifices
- Plays doctor, interested in looking at others’ bodies
- Plays house, acting out roles of mother and father
- Interested in different positions for urinating
- Interested in toilet behaviour of others
- May demand privacy for self when toileting
- Sexual exploration games may begin. Showing body parts to peers in a curiosity-seeking way—and respond to adult limits very quickly

To summarise: During this stage, sexual play is part of infants’ and toddlers’ curiosity about the world around them as well as about their own body parts. Sexual play can be considered *abnormal* when curiosity becomes obsessive preoccupation, when exploration becomes re-enactment of specific adult sexual activity, or when children’s behaviour involves coercion toward others or injury to themselves.

School: Age 5 – 7 years

- Increased peer contact. Experiential interactions, inhibition.
- Is likely to be more modest and less willing to expose self
- Less interested in toilet play and unfamiliar toilets
- Asks questions about sexual differences
- Is interested in mutual investigation by both sexes for practical answers to questions about body parts
- Touches own private parts and experiences pleasure from this
- Sex play may invite the game of show or playing doctors and nurses
- Giggles and talks about body parts, swear words, dirty jokes
- Know labels for sexual body parts and may use slang words such as diddle, doodle, willy, boobs, titties, fanny etc
- Understands girls and boys have different private parts
- Limited knowledge and information about pregnancy and childbirth
- Can be repulsed by or drawn to opposite sex
- Kissing and holding hands
- May mimic behaviours they have been exposed to on TV, magazines, videos, DVDs, internet
- Likely to be familiar with but much less interested in differences between sexes.
- Is involved less in the game of “show me yours”.
- Aware and interested in differences in sex
- Asks questions about sexual difference
- Draws genitals on human figures
- Looks at genitals when has opportunity e.g. bathing, showering, getting changed

Age 8 – 10 years

Latency-age children continue to touch their own genitals, evolving into masturbation, and they become more secretive about their self-touching. Interest in viewing others' bodies continues although it changes from curiosity-seeking to game-playing. Latency-age boys also start comparing penis size. During this time children become extremely interested in sex words and dirty jokes. At ages 9 and 10, children begin seeking information about sex and look for books and diagrams that explain their own genitals and functions. "Swearing" begins during this stage. Touching others' genitalia usually takes place in a game-like atmosphere and involves stroking or rubbing.

Sexual penetration, genital kissing or oral copulation, and simulated intercourse would be considered abnormal at this age.

(When children abuse- Cunningham and MacFarlane)

- Learn correct names for genitals but use slang terms
- Have increased knowledge about masturbation, intercourse and pregnancy
- Understand the physical aspects of puberty by age 10
- Touches self and others
- Mooning or "down trou" may occur
- Kissing and girlfriends/girlfriend relationships may begin
- Rubs genitals against objects
- Wants privacy when in bathroom changing
- Engages in games with same-aged children related to sex and sexuality (kiss and catch etc)
- Talking about sex with friends, talks about having a girl/boy friend
- Shows others his/her genitals
- Plays doctor, inspecting others' bodies
- Uses dirty or slang words for bathroom functions, genitals and sex
- Interested in watching people doing bathroom functions
- Asks about genitals, intercourse, babies
- Draws genitals on human figures
- Explains differences between male and female bodies
- Takes opportunities to look at nude child or adult
- Kisses familiar adults and children
- Interested in breeding behaviour of animals
- May attempt to put something in own genitals or rectum

Age 10 – 12 years

Pre-adolescence or tweens

Masturbation continues as a sexual behaviour for preadolescents. Developmentally, preadolescents are focused on establishing relationships with peers. Many preadolescents, and certainly adolescents, engage in sexual activity with peers, including kissing, touching genitals and maybe include sexual penetration. While most of these experiences are heterosexual, it is common for preadolescents and adolescents to have some same-gender sexual experiences (Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin and Gebhard, 1953)

During this time, there may be intense interest in viewing others' bodies, especially members of the opposite sex. This may take the form of looking at photographs or published material, including pornography (Sgroi, 1988). However, Sgroi concludes that it is highly unusual for preadolescents and adolescents to become involved in sexual play with younger children (Cunningham and MacFarlane)

- Touches self and others more likely in private
- Kissing and dating
- Passionate kissing
- Interested in sexual content in media
- Looks at nude pictures
- Interested in opposite sex
- Shy about undressing
- Makes sexual sounds
- Masturbates in private
- May engage in mutual digital, vaginal intercourse or oral genital contact with same age peer

It is important that people are aware the legal age of consent in New Zealand is 16

Age 13 – 15 years

Adolescent sexuality is a stage of human development in which adolescents experience and explore sexual feelings. Interest in sexuality intensifies during the onset of puberty, and sexuality is often a vital aspect of teenagers' lives.^[1] In humans, sexual interest may be expressed in a number of ways, such as flirting, kissing, masturbation, or having sex with a partner. Sexual interest among adolescents, as among adults, can vary greatly, and is influenced by cultural norms and mores, sex education, as well as comprehensive sexuality education provided, sexual orientation, and social controls such as age of consent laws (from Wikipedia).

Given the brain is not fully mature until age 25 the challenge in adolescence is to make safe choices based on not only physical and sexual feelings but on emotional maturity and readiness to engage in mutual, consensual sexual behaviour. Ideally this will be supported by safe adults, parents and caregivers in the adolescents' lives. It is a developmental stage when self-control, linking consequences to behaviour, delayed gratification and risk management are not fully developed. The following behaviours may occur at this stage:

- Sexual innuendo and flirting
- Masturbation in private
- Kissing, hugging, holding hands
- 'Going out' & 'Hooking up' and relationships with same age peers
- Having a crush on someone
- Sexual thoughts about same age peers
- Curiosity in looking at sexual images
- Obscenities and jokes within the cultural norm
- Reluctant to talk about bodies and sexuality issues with parents/caregivers
- Increased sense of privacy from adults
- Seeking sexual information from peers or online
- Consensual range of sexual activity with same age peer
- May choose to have exposure to R13 material
- Making connections with the peers they are attracted to via social media
- May engage in mutual digital, vaginal intercourse or oral genital contact with same age peer

It is important that people are aware the legal age of consent in New Zealand is 16.

Age 16 – 18 years

As a young adult it is very normal to be experiencing sexual feelings and engaging in sexual behaviour both alone and with a partner. This is developmentally normal and part of being a young adult. As an adolescent reaches adulthood, their relationships may begin to extend in more of the physical and sexual aspects of a growing intimate relationship. This might evolve from hugging, holding hands, and kissing to more intimate behaviour such as touching, experimenting in a range of consensual sexual behaviour. Many young adults may choose to be sexually active with same age peers at this stage and many may not. Young adults benefit from continued guidance and support in making decisions about the physical and emotional readiness of the consensual sexual behaviour they may engage in with same age peers.

Sexuality is a combination of gender, sexual feelings for others, feelings about one self as a sexual being, sexual orientation and sexual behaviour. Exploring and discovering sexuality can be confusing, exciting, difficult and wonderful. Having support through this developmental stage is important.

Many of the behaviours from age 13-15 may continue through this developmental age and stage along with the following behaviour.

- Seeking sexual intimacy
- Sexual explicit conversations with peers
- May choose to have exposure to R16/R18 material
- Young adults may start to develop a deeper, intimate and more adult relationship with peers that extend to include more of a longer term emotional, cognitive, physical and sexual connection
- May engage in mutual digital, vaginal intercourse or oral genital contact with same age peer

It is important that people are aware the legal age of consent in New Zealand is 16.