



Community Tool Kits

“Normal” and “Abnormal” Sexual Behaviors in Children

Children begin exploring their bodies from a very young age — sometimes as early as **2 years old**. Some behaviors are a **normal part of development**, but others may be **warning signs** that a child has been exposed to sexual content, unhealthy influences, or abuse.

Normal / Common (Ages 2–6) - (Use as teaching moments — not punishable actions)

- Touching or rubbing own genitals (in public or private)
- Looking at or touching peer/sibling genitals
- Showing genitals to peers
- Standing or sitting very close to others
- Trying to see peers or adults naked
- Behavior is **infrequent** and child is **easily distracted**

Less Common - (Monitor closely — use to teach body safety)

- Rubbing body against others
- Trying to kiss with tongue
- Touching peer/adult genitals
- Mimicking sexual movements crudely
- Behaviors are occasional but **disruptive**
- Moderately responsive to distraction

Uncommon (Concerning) - (Seek professional help — may indicate deeper issues)

- Asking peers/adults to participate in specific sexual acts
- Inserting objects into genitals
- Explicitly imitating sexual intercourse
- Touching animal genitalia
- Frequent, disruptive behaviors **resistant to distraction**

Rarely Normal (High Concern) - (Immediate professional intervention and investigation recommended)

- Sexual behaviors between children **4+ years apart in age**
- Multiple sexual behaviors **every day**
- Acts causing **emotional distress or physical pain**
- Behaviors linked with **aggression or coercion**
- Persistent acts where child becomes **upset or angry if stopped**

How Parents & Caregivers Can Respond

- Use **correct anatomical names** for body parts
- Teach **body safety rules** (“No one should look at or touch your private parts, and you should not look at or touch someone else’s”)
- Reinforce that **sexual behaviors are private** and not for public or group settings
- **Avoid shaming or punishing** — instead, guide and educate