



**Bravehearts**  
Educate Empower Protect  
Our Kids

# TIP SHEET

## Sexual behaviours in children

Just as language acquisition, and motor and cognitive development are a natural part of growth and learning in children, so too is sexual development. Children go through a number of different stages of sexual development, most of which are a natural and healthy part of growing up and learning about their bodies and their world.

Sometimes children may display behaviours which appear unusual or concerning. It is important to consider these behaviours within a developmental and social context. The following provides some useful guidance, but when in doubt, talk to your health professional or contact the Bravehearts Information and Support Line on 1800 272 831.

### HEALTHY SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS IN CHILDREN

- Healthy sexual exploration by children is an information gathering process, where children explore the human body and gender roles.
- When this exploration is with children of a similar age, developmental status and participation is voluntary, this can be considered natural and healthy.
- Curiosity in sex and sexuality should be balanced with curiosity with other aspects of their life.
- Children do not feel shame, fear, anxiety or anger during healthy sexual exploration.
- Children are able to stop the behaviour when instructed to.

### SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS COMMON IN ALL CHILDREN

- Trying to look at people who are nude
- Touches own private parts in private
- Interested in the opposite sex

### UNCOMMON SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS IN CHILDREN

- Masturbation with an object
- Specific knowledge of sexual intercourse or attempting to have sexual intercourse
- Touching animals private parts
- Drawing pictures of private parts
- Asking others to perform sexual acts
- Placing objects in the anus or vagina

### SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS

- Children engaged in the behaviours don't have an ongoing friendship
- The sexual behaviour is with younger or older children – generally the wider the age gap the larger the concern
- Sexual behaviours continue in spite of clear, consistent requests to stop.

### Responding to sexual behaviour problems

- Do not shame your child
- Do not call them names or make very negative comments
- Be consistent in your requests
- Communicate calmly that you want them to stop what they are doing, and they are not in trouble.

### Reducing sexual behaviour problems

1. Address behaviour in a short, direct, calm way (e.g. "Hands out of your pants")
2. Redirect behaviour – (e.g. "Would you like to play with your doll here, or your blocks?")
3. Praise for good behaviour - Remember to PRAISE your child when they are NOT displaying sexualised behaviours, so they also receive attention for good behaviour.

If you have any concerns and wish to talk with one of our trained staff, contact the Bravehearts Information and Support Line on 1800 272 831.

NEED SUPPORT OR MORE INFORMATION?  
Bravehearts Information and Support Line  
FREECALL **1800 272 831**  
Mon-Fri 8:30am - 4:30pm AEST

[bravehearts.org.au](http://bravehearts.org.au)

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