



Sexual Behaviors Birth to Age 4



What's typical?

- Explores own genitals and can feel pleasure
- Rubs genital area against objects for self-soothing (ex. pillow, carpet, high chair, car seat)
- Shows interest in or attempts to explore other people's bodies
- Asks questions about bodies, menstruation, and reproduction
- Finds humor in using slang words for body parts or bodily functions
- Notices social norms and differences related to gender, genitals, and nudity
- Enjoys being naked

What's concerning?

- Shows awareness or knowledge of specific sex acts or sexual language (ex. oral or anal sex)
- Initiates or participates in adult-like sexual contact with others
- Forces others to engage in sexual play
- Sexualized play using dolls or toys
- Inserting objects into genital openings
- Does not respond to redirection
- Is secretive about above behaviors

Teachable Moments

- Use accurate words, versus nicknames, for body parts
- Allow them to connect with their body, without introducing shame
- Model consent and body boundaries consistently
- Do not force them to share affection with other people
- Teach about safe/unsafe touch
- Talk openly about feelings
- Explore age-congruent books and resources on consent, bodies, gender, and safety
- Keep open communication with the other caregivers in their world

5 Resources for Birth to Age 4

- *C is for Consent* by Eleanor Morrison (book)
- *These Are My Eyes, This is My Nose, This is My Vulva, These Are My Toes* by Dr. Lexx Brown-James (book)
- *Love Makes a Family* by Sophie Beer (book)
- e2epublishing.info (body safety books and posters)
- amaze.org/jr (videos)

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Sexual Behaviors

Ages 5 to 8



What's typical?

- Asks questions and talks about bodies, reproduction, relationships, puberty, menstruation, and gender
- Explores own genitals or masturbates and can feel pleasure
- Shows interest in or attempts to explore another child's body parts, of same age-group (ex. "playing doctor" or family roles)
- Mimics or uses pretend play to act out relationship or dating behaviors
- More awareness of privacy related to bodies
- May try to use technology or media to seek answers to curiosities

Teachable Moments

- Use accurate words for body parts
- Answer curiosities honestly and in shame-free ways
- Allow them to connect with their body, without introducing shame
- Teach them how to take care of their body
- Reinforce consent and body boundaries consistently
- Help them identify the trusted adults in their safety network
- Build their media literacy skills
- Explore age-congruent books and resources together on consent, bodies, gender, and safety
- Keep open communication with the other caregivers in their world

What's concerning?

- Shows awareness or knowledge of specific sex acts or sexual language (ex. oral or anal sex)
- Initiates or participates in adult-like sexual contact with others
- Forces others to engage in sexual play
- Sexualized play using dolls or toys
- Inserting objects into genital openings
- Behaves sexually in public or via technology (phone, web, video game, social media, etc.)
- Is secretive about above behaviors
- Does not respond to redirection

5 Resources for Ages 5 to 8

- *What Makes a Baby* by Cory Silverberg (book)
- *Consent (For Kids!)* by Rachel Brian (book)
- *It Feels Good to Be Yourself: A Book About Gender Identity* by Theresa Thorn
- e2epublishing.info (body safety books and posters)
- amaze.org/jr (videos)

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Sexual Behaviors

Ages 9 to 12



What's typical?

- Asks questions and talks about bodies, relationships, puberty, menstruation, sex, and gender
- Explores own genitals or masturbates in privacy
- May develop new attractions or relationships with peers
- Increased desire for privacy
- Shows interest in interacting virtually with peers via texting, gaming, or social media
- Increased curiosity in nudity of others or sexual material

What's concerning?

- Initiates or participates in adult-like sexual contact with others
- Forces others to engage in sexual experimentation or sexting
- Masturbation frequency that interrupts commitments or daily responsibilities
- Expresses or displays disregard for other's bodies or boundaries
- Accessing pornography
- Behaves sexually in public or via technology (phone, web, video game, social media, etc.)
- Is secretive about above behaviors

Teachable Moments

- Use accurate words for body parts
- Model (and honor) consent, body boundaries, and privacy
- Help them explore their developing values and goals
- Serve as a mentor (versus gatekeeper) for their media use, literacy, and decision making
- Provide age-congruent books and resources on consent, bodies, gender, sexual identity, and safety
- Discuss sex in the context of pleasure and consent, not just reproduction
- Keep open communication with the other caregivers in their world

5 Resources for Ages 9 to 12

- *Sex is a Funny Word* by Cory Silverberg (book)
- *The Every Body Book* by Rachel E. Simon, LCSW (book)
- *Vaginas and Periods 101: A Pop Up Book* by Christian Hoeger and Kristen Lilla (book)
- everybodycurious.com (web series)
- amaze.org (videos)

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Sexual Behaviors Teens



What's typical?

- Explores relationships, identity, body changes, and sexual decision making
- Masturbates in privacy
- May have first sexual experience or sexual experimentation
- Curiosity in nudity of others and sexual material
- May have no interest in intimate or sexual relationships
- Interacts virtually with peers via texting, gaming, or social media

Teachable Moments

- Foster skills for accessing sexual healthcare and contraception options
- Discuss sex in the context of pleasure and consent, not just reproduction
- Talk about sexual communication and sexual decision making
- Help them explore their developing values and goals
- Avoid making assumptions about their identities and preferences
- Serve as a trusted mentor and support
- Share relatable stories to strengthen your connection

What's concerning?

- Sexual interest in younger children
- Forces or coerces others to engage in sex, relationships, sexual experimentation, sexting, or sharing of sexual images
- Masturbation frequency that interrupts commitments or daily responsibilities
- Expresses or displays disregard for other's bodies or boundaries
- Behaves sexually in public or via technology (phone, web, video game, social media, etc.)
- Is secretive about above behaviors

5 Resources for Teens

- *Wait, What?: A Comic Book Guide to Relationships, Bodies, and Growing Up* by Heather Corinna (book)
- *In Case You're Curious* by Planned Parenthood (book)
- *Trans+: Love, Sex, Romance, and Being You* by Kathryn Gonzales, MBA and Karen Rayne, PhD (book)
- scarleteen.com (website)
- amaze.org (videos)

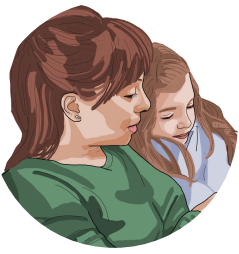
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When Behaviors Are Concerning



Taking Action

- **First, breathe.** Sexual behaviors in childhood can be triggering for many adults, especially if you're a survivor of childhood sexual abuse or trauma. The more calm and less reactive you feel, the better you're able to respond effectively.
- **Talk with the child about the behavior.** Create a space that's safe for them to share their feelings and experience, without fear of judgment or punishment.
- **Listen to understand.** No matter their age, children are learning and developing skills for safe decision making. Treat the behavior as a teachable moment and opportunity to mentor and guide them.
- **Normalize their curiosities.** Some sexual behaviors can stem from a desire to gain access to information or experiences related to bodies or sex. It's okay to be curious. This is an opportunity to direct them to safe ways to get answers.
- **Establish clear expectations and agreements** that provide the child or children involved with a clear, safer alternative and path for support.
- **Check for understanding**, and be available for questions they may have.
- **Avoid the temptation to remain silent**, when other children or families are involved. If it's safe to, connect with the other caregivers to create a safety plan and align strategies for supporting the children's wellbeing.
- **Use resources** like books, videos, educational podcasts, or activities that engage their curiosities and reinforce the messages you want them to learn. Our website has a database full of options, sorted by age, topic, and type of resource at sexpositivefamilies.com/resources.
- **If there is a concern for a child's safety**, or if a disclosure of abuse occurs, contact your local authorities, child protection agency, or a trained provider to support you in next steps.
- **Connect with a trusted space to process your own feelings.** Support can help you stay clear about the steps you're taking and know that you're not alone.

Helpful Resources

- consentparenting.com
- parentingsafechildren.com
- stopitnow.org
- safelyeverafter.com
- cfchildren.org
- rainn.org
- National Abuse Hotline
1-800-656-4673

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