

Children with problem sexual behaviours - Information for parents & caregivers

Problem sexual behaviours is the term given to children, under the age of 10, who have behaved in a sexual way that may cause harm to themselves or others. Some sexual behaviour is part of a child's normal, healthy development. To help you determine what sexual behaviour is healthy, concerning or problematic please refer to the information booklet for carers and professionals "Age Appropriate Sexual Behaviour in Children and Young People."

When a parent or care giver becomes aware that their child is behaving in a problematic sexual way they may experience;

Thoughts of:

How do I stop this behaviour?
Why did my child do that?
Where did this behaviour come from?
Did I do something wrong?
No, not my child.
It's nobody else's business
What do others think of me and my child?

Feelings of:

Shock
Disbelief
Denial
Fear
Sadness
Anger
Shame
Distress

These thoughts and feelings are normal reactions.

What should I do when my child is behaving in a problematic sexual way?

1. Stay calm. Children often do not understand why they behave this way and may experience feelings of confusion, anxiety, shame and anger regarding their behaviour.
2. Ignore it if it is normal sexual play or exploration
3. Clearly and calmly ask your child to stop the behaviour.
4. Distract your child with a different activity.
5. Talk with your child about the behaviour and discuss privacy and personal boundaries.

When should I seek professional help?

- If you are confused about the problem sexual behaviour, what to do or how to discuss it with your child.
- The behaviour is impacting upon the physical, emotional or social life of your child and family.
- The behaviour continues or escalates despite your attempts to distract your child.
- The child become anxious or fearful when you attempt to intervene in the behaviour.
- The child seems preoccupied with the behaviour.
- The behaviour seems unusual for their age or developmental stage.
- Your child tells you someone has done this to them.
- The behaviours involve other children with a greater than 2 year age difference or cognitive impairment.
- The child believes the behaviours are problematic for them.

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What will be achieved in counselling?

SECASA will conduct an assessment and provide counselling, that is focused on your child's age and developmental stage, to address their problem sexual behaviours.

As part of the therapeutic management plan, SECASA will provide your child with a safe place to explore the basis of: their feelings related to their behaviours; possible triggers for their behaviours; strategies to support your child in addressing their problem sexual behaviours and general protective behaviours education.

SECASA also offers support, information and counselling to parents and caregivers for dealing with thoughts and feelings surrounding your child's behaviours, and strategies to respond to your child's problem sexual behaviours.

Where to get help?

SECASA crisis line (24 hrs)

☎ 9594 2289

secasa@southernhealth.org.au

DHS Child Protection Southern Region

☎ 1300 655 795

DHS Child Protection After Hours

☎ 13 12 78

Additional sources of information

Age Appropriate Sexual Behaviour in Children and Young People

Information Booklet for Carers and Professionals.
June 2007

SECASA

www.secasa.com.au

Net Alert

www.netalert.net.au/

Cybersmart Kids

www.cybersmartkids.com.au/parents/index/html