



HOW TO DIFFERENTIATE NORMAL SEXUAL BEHAVIORS

Expressing sexuality through sexual behavior is natural, healthy and human. Children may lack the language or understanding to ask for help and much can be learned from their behaviors, including signs that adult intervention with support and protection is needed. Use this reference to better interpret a child's sexual behavior. When sexual behaviors seem concerning or harmful, consider why the child is showing the behavior and how to intervene with helpful support.

HEALTHY

Sexual behaviors that are part of routine, healthy development are:

- Curious, playful, easily diverted, mutual and consensual.
- Appropriate for the child's age.
- Part of play or activity with others the same age, size and abilities.
- Used to understand and gain information, balanced with curiosities about other parts of life.

These behaviors are great opportunities to talk, explain and support.

CONCERNING

Sexual behaviors that may be cause for concern are:

- Consistent with knowledge and activities for the age and stage of development, but concerning in persistence, intensity or frequency.
- Between children unequal in age, size, power or developmental ability.
- Risky to the health and safety of the child or others.

These behaviors signal a need to watch, provide extra body safety and privacy education; treatment by a child behavior professional.

HARMFUL

Sexual behaviors that indicate harm, or cause harm are:

- Excessive, compulsive, coercive, forceful, degrading or threatening.
- Secretive, manipulative or involve bribery or trickery.
- Not appropriate for the age or stage of development.
- Between children with a significant difference in age, developmental ability or power.

These behaviors signal a need to step in with immediate protection and treatment.