

## Harmful Sexual Behaviour Policy

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|---------------|-------------------|
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| Owner         | Safeguarding Team |
| Approver      | Academy Council   |

### Introduction

Developing their sexuality is part of a child's development and young people's sexual exploration will generally take place within the context of consensual and age appropriate behaviour. However, some children may display sexualised behaviour that is outside that for their age-group and which could potentially be harmful to them or other children.

Some young people's harmful sexual behaviour may lead to them being arrested and charged with a criminal offence. Research shows that a quarter of those convicted of sexual offences are under the age of 18 and a third of sexual offences against children are carried out by other children.

Many of the children and young people who exhibit harmful sexual behaviour are likely to have a high level of needs themselves and may have experienced neglect and abuse. They may also demonstrate poor social skills, social isolation, conduct disorders and high levels of stress and trauma. These children may come from families facing multiple problems and may live in a home environment where there is a lack of boundaries around sexual behaviour. Some may already be known to children's social care

### Definitions

Children's sexual development can cover a continuum of behaviours ranging from those that are typical to their age group up to abusive and needs to be understood within the context of behaviour that is appropriate to the child's age and stage of sexual development.

Harmful sexual behaviour is a wide-ranging term used to describe behaviours initiated by a child that are developmentally inappropriate and may be harmful to the child or others. A child's sexual behaviour is considered to be harmful if it:

- occurs at a frequency greater than would be developmentally expected
- interferes with the child's development
- occurs with coercion, intimidation or force
- is associated with emotional distress
- occurs between children of divergent ages or developmental abilities
- repeatedly recurs in secrecy after intervention by caregivers.

There are varying degrees of harmful sexual behaviours:

**Inappropriate sexual behaviour** is defined as single instances of sexual behaviour where the context of the behaviour gives concern and if unchecked may escalate.

**Problematic sexual behaviour** is defined as behaviour that may not involve victimisation of anyone but may have an adverse effect on the development of the child causing them distress or rejection. It may be a reaction to a traumatic event and is commonly associated with pre-adolescence.

**Abusive sexual behaviour** involves victimisation that includes an element of coercion or manipulation or circumstances involving a power imbalance where the victim is not able to give informed consent and where the behaviour could cause physical or emotional harm. Power imbalances may be due to differences in age, intellectual ability or physical strength and is more likely to be associated with adolescence.

**Sexual abuse** is defined as committing a sexual act against the victims will without consent and in an aggressive, exploitative or threatening manner. Such acts are likely to constitute a criminal offence.

### **Recognising harmful sexual behaviour**

All professionals and agencies that work directly with children must be able to recognise and respond appropriately to incidents of harmful sexual behaviour and make appropriate referrals.

In order to judge whether and to what degree a child's sexual behaviour is harmful, professionals need to compare that behaviour to what would be expected sexual behaviour for that child's age and stage of development. The Brook traffic lights tool (shown at appendix 1) sets out a range of indicative behaviours covering typical, problematic and abusive behaviours. Airedale Junior School use this tool to measure the extent to which the child's behaviour differentiates from the norm. This supports our Safeguarding Team to take appropriate action.

Young people display a spectrum of sexual behaviours, most of which would be considered age-appropriate and healthy. Some of the spectrum of worrying and harmful behaviours are represented in the descriptions below.

- lower level behaviours, for example sexual language, some one off actions
- some serious behaviours which may be self-directed such as persistent masturbation or focus on masturbatory activities
- behaviours directed at others such as touching other children, but where there are balancing factors, for example, lack of intent to cause harm; or the level of understanding of the child/young person about the behaviours in which they are engaging; or there is acceptance of responsibility for the behaviour and some remorse shown.

- behaviours that are serious and cause physical and emotional damage to self or others, and where there are little or no balancing factors, for example they are repetitive, planned, involve the use of force, they are denied and no empathy or remorse are shown etc.
- behaviours that would fall within the definition of a sexual offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003

### **Procedure for working with and support children who display concerning behaviours**

The following key principles should underpin all work with children who display problematic or harmful sexual behaviour.

- Incidents of harmful sexual behaviour should be dealt with under Child Protection procedures which recognise the Child Protection and potentially criminal element to the behaviour.
- Professionals should consider the needs of the children and young people who display harmful sexual behaviour separately from the needs of their victims
- An assessment should be carried out in each case of harmful sexual behaviour, appreciating that children who display harmful sexual behaviour may have unmet developmental needs and may have suffered considerable disruption in their lives, been exposed to violence within the family, may have witnessed or been subject to Physical Abuse or Sexual Abuse, have problems in their educational development and may have committed other offences. Such children are likely therefore to be Children in Need; some will / may have suffered Significant Harm and be in need of protection themselves.
- Children who display harmful sexual behaviour should be held responsible for their abusive behaviour while being identified and responded to in a way which meets their needs as well as protecting others
- Early and effective, intervention with children and young people who display harmful sexual behaviour can play an important part in protecting children, by preventing the continuation or escalation of abusive behaviour.

Airedale Junior School will take all incidents of harmful sexual behaviour seriously. We will:

- Ensure all allegations of harmful sexual behaviour are investigate fully by an appropriately trained member of staff (Designated Safeguarding Lead/Headteacher)
- Ensure that the schools Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy is followed at all times
- Use the Brook Traffic Light Tool Kit and consult with external professionals to ensure an appropriate response
- Make any referrals needed to SCD in a timely manner
- Engage in multiagency work to ensure a coordinated and effective response to keep all children safe

- Complete any risk assessments needed and share these with all appropriate stake holders
- Ensure appropriate support is in place for all children involved in any incidents

## Appendix 1

# Responding to children who display sexualised behaviour

It's important for health practitioners to be able to distinguish normal sexual behaviours from those that may be harmful, and make sure children get appropriate support. Use this guide alongside the resources at [nspcc.org.uk/hsbhealth](https://nspcc.org.uk/hsbhealth) to help you respond in the right way.

### Need advice?

Contact our helpline for advice and support:

- Call 0808 800 5000
- Email [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)
- Visit [nspcc.org.uk/helpline](https://nspcc.org.uk/helpline)

### Childline

For children who need further support our free, confidential helpline is available 24/7:

- Call 0800 1111
- Visit [childline.org.uk](https://childline.org.uk)

| Normal   | Inappropriate   | Problematic   | Abusive   | Violent   |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developmentally expected and socially acceptable behaviour</li> <li>• Consensual, mutual and reciprocal</li> <li>• Decision making is shared</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single instances of developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour</li> <li>• Behaviour that is socially acceptable within a peer group</li> <li>• Generally consensual and reciprocal</li> <li>• May involve an inappropriate context for behaviour that would otherwise be considered normal</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developmentally unusual and socially unexpected behaviour</li> <li>• May be compulsive</li> <li>• Consent may be unclear and the behaviour may not be reciprocal</li> <li>• May involve an imbalance of power</li> <li>• Doesn't have an overt element of victimisation</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intrusive behaviour</li> <li>• May involve a misuse of power</li> <li>• May have an element of victimisation</li> <li>• May use coercion and force</li> <li>• May include elements of expressive violence</li> <li>• Informed consent has not been given (or the victim was not able to consent freely)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physically violent sexual abuse</li> <li>• Highly intrusive</li> <li>• May involve instrumental violence which is physiologically and/or sexually arousing to the perpetrator</li> <li>• May involve sadism</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>How to respond</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although green behaviours are not concerning, they still require a response</li> <li>• Listen to what children and young people have to say and respond calmly and non-judgementally</li> <li>• Talk to parents about developmentally typical sexualised behaviours</li> <li>• Explain how parents can positively reinforce messages about appropriate sexual behaviour and act to keep their children safe from abuse</li> <li>• Signpost helpful resources such as our PANTS activity pack: <a href="https://nspcc.org.uk/pants">nspcc.org.uk/pants</a></li> <li>• Make sure young people know how to behave responsibly and safely</li> </ul> | <p><b>How to respond</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amber behaviours should not be ignored</li> <li>• Listen to what children and young people have to say and respond calmly and non-judgementally</li> <li>• Follow your organisation's child protection procedures and make a report to the person responsible for child protection</li> <li>• Your policy or procedure should guide you towards a designated health safeguarding lead who can be notified and will provide support</li> <li>• Consider whether the child or young person needs therapeutic support and make referrals as appropriate</li> </ul> | <p><b>How to respond</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Red behaviours indicate a need for immediate intervention and action</li> <li>• If a child is in immediate danger, call the police on 999</li> <li>• Follow your organisation's child protection procedures and make a report to the person responsible for child protection</li> <li>• Your policy or procedure should guide you towards a designated health safeguarding lead who should be notified and will provide support</li> <li>• Refer the child or young person for therapeutic support</li> </ul> |   |   |

**NSPCC**  
Learning<sup>1</sup>

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