



# Children with Problem Sexual Behaviors



## What are problem sexual behaviors?

All parents confront how to deal with their child's sexual development and curiosity. Some sexual play between young children close in age is normal. However, aggressive or intrusive sexual behaviors are concerning and potentially harmful. The sexual behaviors of children take place for many reasons, such as a child feeling anxious or angry, a reaction to a traumatic experience, curiosity after seeing sexual materials, seeking attention, or trying to imitate others. **With support and appropriate intervention, most children do not continue to have problem sexual behaviors.**

## What are some concerning behaviors?

- Repeatedly showing or looking at private parts.
- Extreme or inappropriate masturbation.
- Not recognizing boundaries.
- Aggressive sexual acts.
- Use of force, threats, or bribes in sexual activities.
- Causing harm (physical or emotional) to another child,
- Sexual activity with children of a different age or developmental level.
- Not responding after being told to stop.
- Accompanied with strong, upset feelings such as anger or anxiety.

## What can I do?

**Seek professional support:** Effective treatment actively involves the parents and caregivers. Typically treatment addresses impulse control, decision making, coping skills, boundaries and empathy.

**Close supervision:** Children who have acted out sexually with other children need continuous line of sight supervision with caregivers.

**Clear rules:** It is important that all members of the family know rules about privacy and appropriate sexual behaviors.

**Adults in charge:** Children with problem sexual behaviors should not assume a role of authority over other children.

**No sexually explicit media:** Sexually explicit materials in magazines, videos and movies, computer files, video games, websites, and television programs, should not be available to children.

**Children should sleep in their room alone:** The child with problematic sexual behaviors should not sleep in the same room or bed with other children.

## How should I respond?

1. Try to stay calm.
2. Reassure your child that you care about them.
3. Remember you aren't alone.
4. Find social and professional support.

## What leads to Problematic Sexual Behaviors?

Many factors can contribute to these behaviors, including:

- Seeing violence,
- Experiencing traumatic or scary events,
- Watching sexual acts (such as in a movie or music video),
- Exposure to sexual violence
- Other non-sexual behavior problems such as impulse control and difficulties with boundaries.