



**Guidance on distinguishing between healthy
and
harmful sexual behaviour**

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Introduction

This guidance has been developed to support multi-agency professionals working with children and young people, in helping them understand what healthy sexual development is and what behaviours are outside of safe and healthy behaviour.

The guidance is based on the Brook Behaviours Traffic Light Tool. The tool categorises sexual behaviours as green, amber or red to support professionals in identifying behaviours in children and young people and understanding what distinguishes healthy and harmful behaviours.

WHAT IS A GREEN, AMBER OR RED BEHAVIOUR?

Green behaviours reflect safe and healthy sexual development. They are:

- Displayed between children or young people of similar age or developmental ability.
- Reflective of natural curiosity, experimentation, consensual activities and positive choices

Amber behaviours have the potential to be outside of safe and healthy behaviour. They may be:

- Unusual for that particular child or young person.
- Of potential concern due to age, or developmental differences.
- Of potential concern due to activity type, frequency duration or context in which they occur.

Red behaviours are outside of safe and healthy behaviour. They may be:

- Excessive, secretive, compulsive, coercive, degrading or threatening.
- Involving significant age, developmental, or power differences.
- Of concern due to the activity type, frequency, duration or the context in which they occur.

Children aged 0 to 5 year

GREEN BEHAVIOURS	AMBER BEHAVIOURS	RED BEHAVIOURS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding or playing with own genitals. • Attempting to touch or curiosity about other children's genitals. • Attempting to touch or curiosity about breasts, bottoms or genitals of adults. • Games, e.g. mummies and daddies, doctors and nurses. • Enjoying nakedness. • Interest in body parts and what they do. • Curiosity about the differences between boys and girls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preoccupation with adult sexual behaviour. • Pulling other children's pants down / skirts up / trousers down against their will. • Talking about sex using adult slang. • Preoccupation with touching the genitals of other people. • Following others into toilets or changing rooms to look at them or touch them. • Talking about sexual activities seen on TV / online. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistently touching the genitals of other children. • Persistent attempts to touch the genitals of adults. • Stimulation of sexual activity in play. • Sexual behaviour between young children involving penetration with objects. • Forcing other children to engage in sexual play.

Children aged 5 to 9 years

GREEN BEHAVIOURS	AMBER BEHAVIOURS	RED BEHAVIOURS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling and touching own genitals. • Curiosity about other children's genitals. • Curiosity about sex and relationships, e.g. differences between boys and girls, how sex happens, where babies come from, same-sex relationships. • Sense of privacy about bodies. • Telling stories or asking questions using swear and slang words for parts of the body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions about sexual activity which persist or are repeated frequently, despite an answer having been given. • Sexual bullying face to face or through texts or online messaging. • Engaging in mutual masturbation. • Persistent sexual images and ideas in talk, play and art. • Use of adult slang language to discuss sex. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent masturbation in front of others. • Sexual behaviour engaging significantly younger or less able children. • Forcing other children to take part in sexual activities. • Simulations of oral or penetrative sex. • Sourcing pornographic material online.

Children aged 9 to 13 years

<u>GREEN BEHAVIOURS</u>	<u>AMBER BEHAVIOURS</u>	<u>RED BEHAVIOURS</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solitary masturbation. • Use of sexual language including swear and slang words. • Having girl / boyfriends who are of the same, opposite or any gender. • Interest in popular culture, e.g. fashion, music, media, online games, chatting online. • Need for privacy. • Consensual kissing, hugging, holding hands with peers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncharacteristic and risk-related behaviour, e.g. sudden and / or provocative changes in dress, withdrawal from friends, mixing with new or older people, having more or less money than usual, going missing. • Verbal, physical or cyber / virtual sexual bullying involving sexual aggression. • LGBT (lesbian, gay bisexual, transgender) targeted bullying. • Exhibitionism, e.g. flashing or mooning. • Giving out contact details online. • Viewing pornographic material. • Worrying about being pregnant or having STIs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposing genitals or masturbating in public. • Distributing naked or sexually provocative images of self or others. • Sexually explicit talk with younger children. • Sexual harassment. • Arranging to meet with an online acquaintance in secret. • Genital injury to self or others. • Forcing other children of same age, younger or less able to take part in sexual activities. • Sexual activity, e.g. oral sex or intercourse. • Presence of sexually transmitted infection (STI). <p>Evidence of pregnancy.</p>

Young people aged 13 to 17 years

<u>GREEN BEHAVIOURS</u>	<u>AMBER BEHAVIOURS</u>	<u>RED BEHAVIOURS</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solitary masturbation. • Sexually explicit conversations with peers. • Obscenities and jokes within the current cultural norm. • Interest in erotica / pornography. • Use of internet / e-media to chat online. • Having sexual or non-sexual relationships. • Sexual activity including hugging, kissing, holding hands. • Consenting oral and / or penetrative sex with others of the same or opposite gender who are of similar age and developmental ability. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choosing not to be sexually active. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessing exploitative or violent pornography. • Uncharacteristic and risk-related behaviour, e.g. sudden and / or provocative changes in dress, withdrawal from friends, mixing with new or older people, having more or less money than usual, going missing. • Concern about body image. • Taking and sending naked or sexually provocative images of self or others. • Single occurrence of peeping, exposing, mooning or obscene gestures. • Giving out contact details online. • Joining adult-only social networking sites and giving false personal information. • Arranging a face to face meeting with an online contact alone. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposing genitals or masturbating in public. • Preoccupation with sex, which interferes with daily function. • Sexual degradation / humiliation of self or others. • Attempting / forcing others to expose genitals. • Sexually aggressive / exploitative behaviour. • Sexually explicit talk with younger children. • Sexual harassment. • Non-consensual sexual activity. • Use of / acceptance of power and control in sexual relationships. • Genital injury to self or others. • Sexual contact with others where there is a big difference in age or ability. • Sexual activity with someone in authority and in a position of trust. • Sexual activity with family members. • Involvement in sexual exploitation and / or trafficking. • Sexual contact with animals. • Receipt of gifts or money in exchange for sex.