

What are age-appropriate sexual behaviours?



Sexual behaviours are part of normal childhood development. Kids display their emerging sexuality in a range of ways including sexual play and exploration.

Sexual Play

Sexual play supports positive development for pre-pubescent children. It involves consensual experiences between kids of similar ages. Sexual play is generally game based and includes 'doctor and nurses', 'show me yours and I'll show you mine', or 'kiss and catch'.

Sexual Exploration

Once kids reach adolescence they typically no longer engage in sexual play, but rather sexual exploration. This is a consensual experience between same-aged peers, which includes a range of increasingly intimate behaviours like hand holding, kissing, touching, oral sex and intercourse.

Age-appropriate sexual behaviours

Kids engage in sexual behaviours, including sexual play and exploration, as a normal part of development. If you discover these behaviours, how can you tell if they are age-appropriate behaviours or concerning? Age-appropriate sexual behaviours are:

- non-coercive
- spontaneous
- mutual, causing no emotional distress
- easily redirected by an adult
- based on age-appropriate knowledge
- based on curiosity and exploration.

What can I do?

It's important to support kids' sexuality to reduce the likelihood of problematic and harmful sexual behaviours developing by:

- providing kids with age appropriate sex education
- having ongoing conversations about consent, relationships, and safety
- providing supervision and support around technology
- encouraging critical thinking by discussing things like:
 - the difference between fantasy and reality
 - the fact that pornography is performed by actors
 - the impact of pornography on real relationships

You've Got This!

LINKS Training and Support

- seeking knowledge and resources from your caseworker. You should also identify other trusted adults who may provide support.

If you're concerned about any behaviours you have seen or heard about, it's important to seek support. Talk to your caseworker or, if you don't currently have one, refer to <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/children-and-families/links-training-and-support.html> for a list of relevant supports.