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Is Your Child/Youth Engaged in Sexualized Behaviours? What should you do?

THRIVE Child and Youth Trauma Services
Presentation to Partners in Prevention Symposium

by

Nancy Rumble, MSc, MSW, RSW

Tricia Schinkel, RP, MC:AT

April 11, 2016

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Talking about Sexual Behaviour...

- We might feel like this...



Agenda



- What is problematic sexualized behaviour versus normative sexualized behaviour?
- What factors might lead to problematic sexualized behaviour?
- What parents can do to help?
- What are the resources available to parents?

Quiz – True or False



- ❑ All Sexual Behaviours between children are normal, acceptable play
- ❑ Sexual acts between children are not harmful
- ❑ Children with sexual behaviour problems have been sexually abused
- ❑ Children with sexual behaviour problems should not live in a home with other children
- ❑ Children with sexual behaviour problems should not attend public schools.
- ❑ Children with sexual behaviour problems grow up to be adult sexual offenders

Myths and Facts



- ❑ All Sexual Behaviours between children are normal, acceptable play
 - ❑ Considered problematic when:
 - ❑ a) occurs at a high frequency
 - ❑ b) interferes with child's social or cognitive development
 - ❑ c) occurs with coercion, intimidation, or force
 - ❑ d) is associated with emotional distress
 - ❑ e) occurs between children of significantly different ages and/or developmental abilities; or
 - ❑ f) repeatedly reoccurs in secrecy after intervention by caregivers

Myths and Facts



- Sexual acts between children are not harmful
 - Sexual acts between children can be significantly harmful.
 - Some sexual play between young children close in age, such as playing doctor or looking at private parts, is not considered to be harmful.
 - However, some children display intrusive, aggressive, or coercive sexual behaviors which are potentially harmful to the other children involved.

~National Centre on Sexual Behavior of Youth

Myths and Facts



- Children with sexual behaviour problems have been sexually abused
 - Many children with sexual behaviour problems have not been sexually abused.
 - Highly inappropriate or aggressive sexual behavior is not always an indicator that a child has been sexually abused
 - Children who have been sexually abused have been found to exhibit more frequent and intrusive sexual behaviors than children with no history of sexual abuse
 - Sexual behavior problems in children have multiple origins

Myths and Facts



- Children with sexual behaviour problems should not live in a home with other children
 - ▣ With appropriate treatment and careful supervision, most children with sexual behaviour problems can live safely with other children.
 - ▣ Although research has not directly dealt with this issue to date, clinical experience indicates that many children with sexual behaviour problems can remain in their home or a foster home with other children without problematic sexual behavior
 - ▣ Children who continue to exhibit highly intrusive or aggressive sexual behavior despite treatment and close supervision should not live with other young children until this behavior is resolved

Myths and Facts



- ❑ Children with sexual behaviour problems should not attend public schools.
 - ▣ Most children with sexual behaviour problems can safely attend public schools
 - ▣ Most children can participate in school activities without jeopardizing the safety of other students
 - ▣ Children with serious, aggressive sexual behaviors may need a more restrictive educational environment

Myths and Facts



- Children with sexual behaviour problems grow up to be adult sexual offenders
 - ▣ Future SBPs by children appears to be low
 - ▣ Most adults who sexually offend do not report a childhood onset for their behaviour
 - ▣ Not been documented in the research to date

When is sexualized behaviour considered normal?

- ❑ It is between children of similar age, and developmental level
- ❑ It is between children of similar size
- ❑ It is Unplanned or Spontaneous
- ❑ Exploratory
- ❑ It happens Irregularly
- ❑ Both are agreeing
- ❑ No Force, threats, or violence is used
- ❑ When kids aren't tricked
- ❑ When kids don't feel anger, fear, or strong worries after
- ❑ When it's not done in secret
- ❑ When it doesn't have very "adult" sexual behaviours



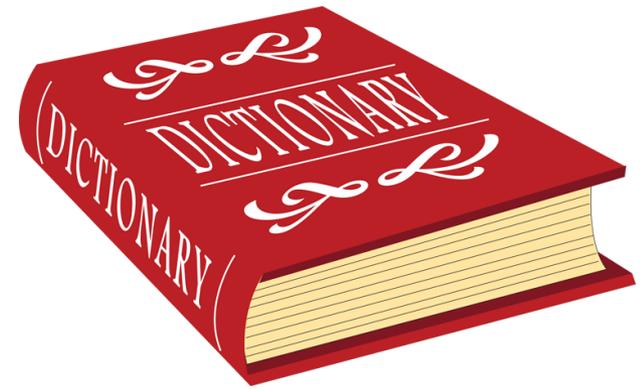
▣ Adapted from: Bonner, Friedrich, Cavanagh Johnson

What is problematic sexualized behaviour?

□ General Definition

- Children initiated behaviours that involve sexual body parts (i.e. genitals, anus, buttocks, or breasts) in a manner that is developmentally inappropriate and potentially harmful to themselves or others
- Although the term sexual is used, the intentions and motivations for these behaviors may or may not be related to sexual gratification or sexual stimulation. The behaviors may be related to curiosity, anxiety, imitation, attention-seeking, self-calming, or other reasons

(Silovsky & Bonner, 2003).



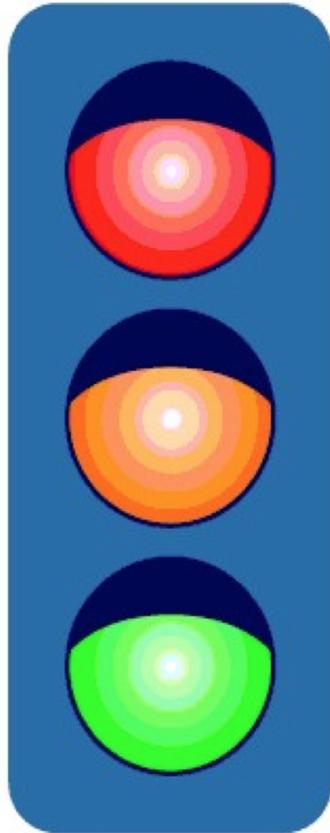
Sexual Behaviours are Problematic When...

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- (1) Use of threats, force, or violence are used to involve the victim or maintain the victim's silence
- (2) Sexual behaviour is considered to be contextually inappropriate (e.g. public versus private)
- (3) Sexual behaviours are viewed as being developmentally inappropriate (e.g. penetration by a 6 year old)
- (4) Notable difference exists in the age, size, intellectual functioning/developmental stage, or status of the children involved
- (5) Attempts to redirect the sexual behaviours (i.e. whether self-directed or directed at others) have been unsuccessful

Curwen, T. and Costin, D. (2009). Toward assessing risk for repeated concerning sexual behaviour by children with sexual behaviour problems: What we know and how to apply this knowledge. In D. Prescott (Ed.), *Knowledge and Practice: Challenges in the Treatment and Supervision of Sexual Abusers*.

Traffic Lights Framework



RED

is for harmful or problem sexual behaviours that indicate a need for **immediate protective intervention and intensive follow-up support**

ORANGE

is for sexual behaviours outside the norm that **require further observation and targeted support**

GREEN

is for normal, developmentally appropriate sexual behaviours **all children benefit from information and learning relevant to their age and stage**

Green Light Behavior

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- Exploration with children of similar age and size; usually not siblings
- Voluntary, spontaneous - usually not shame, fear or anxiety
- Sexual behavior balances with curiosity about rest of their world
- Responds to redirection or distraction

May still need limits or intervention (Just because it's normal doesn't mean it's OK)

Yellow Light Behavior

Sexual behaviours raise concern when...

- Preoccupation with sexual themes
- Attempts to expose other's genitals
- Sexually explicit conversation, graffiti, innuendo
- Precocious sexual knowledge or language
- Preoccupation with masturbation
- Mutual/group masturbation

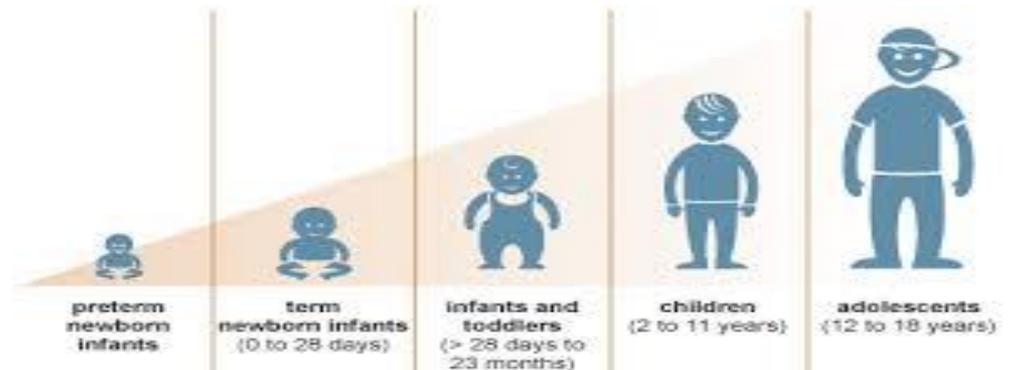
RED LIGHT BEHAVIOR

- ❑ Sexually explicit conversations with others of significant age difference
- ❑ Touching genitals of others
- ❑ Degradation/humiliation of self or others with sexual themes
- ❑ Forced exposure of others (hazing)
- ❑ Inducing fear/threats of force
- ❑ Sexually explicit proposals/threats
- ❑ Compulsive masturbation
- ❑ Repeated or chronic peeping, exposing, pornographic interest, rubbing genitals against others or objects
- ❑ Female masturbation that includes vaginal or anal penetration
- ❑ Simulated intercourse with dolls, peers, animals, or younger children
- ❑ Oral, vaginal, anal penetration of dolls, children, animals
- ❑ Forced touching of genitals
- ❑ Simulating intercourse with peers (nude)

Developmental Perspective

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- Critical to understand sexual behaviours from a developmental perspective, i.e. what is normal for a preschooler may be abnormal for an older child



- Good Resources:
 - Understanding Children's Sexual Behaviours: What's Natural and Healthy by Toni Cavanagh Johnson, Ph.D.
 - <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au> (Department of Human Services, Victoria, Australia)
 - National Child Traumatic Stress Network

Understanding children who engage in problematic sexualized behaviours

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It depends!

(Jim Worling)

We may never know where the behaviour came from

Problematic behaviour is learned, and therefore can be “unlearned”

What can parents do to help?

- Understand Your Own Perceptions of Sexualized Behaviour
 - Own bias
 - Knowledge base
 - Personal Sexual History
 - Parental histories of child sexual abuse may be triggered and can add complexity to the work
 - Parents may need to get their own therapist to early traumatic experiences
- Past Experiences



Parental involvement is essential to positive outcomes

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- Parents need to feel they have the knowledge and skills to manage their child's behaviour
- Parents provide the safe environment to manage the behaviour, provide appropriate supervision, teach healthy coping skills
- Parents need to be supported



Typical Parental Responses



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- ❑ There's been some mistake. My child would never do something like that.
- ❑ It's not our fault. There's so much sex on t.v. and everywhere else these days.
- ❑ Kids will be kids. What's the big deal?
- ❑ I'm so ashamed. My son is a pedophile, Where did I go wrong?
- ❑ I'm so angry I want to kill her.
- ❑ I feel so helpless. Everyone else is calling the shots now. So many other people are involved.
- ❑ We don't need any help. We always handle our own problems as a family. We can put this behind us in no time.

□ Managing Reactions

- Need to deal with their own thoughts and feelings if they are going to be able to support their child
- Parents may feel guilt, shame, fear, anger, embarrassment, numb, hurt...
- Need to address parents beliefs about sexual abuse and those who sexually victimize



It is about SEX.....

- What is your comfort level?
- What are your beliefs about people who sexually victimize?



Managing problematic behaviours

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- Your son Sam, 8 yr old boy has a problem with hitting when he gets angry. He has been expelled from school. Sam has a friend over and they are playing upstairs in his room. You go to offer them a drink, and walk in as Sam punches his friend and makes him cry. How would you deal with this situation at the time?



- What are your thoughts and feelings?
- What would you do?
- What would you do the next time Sam wants to have his friend over?

Managing sexual behaviours

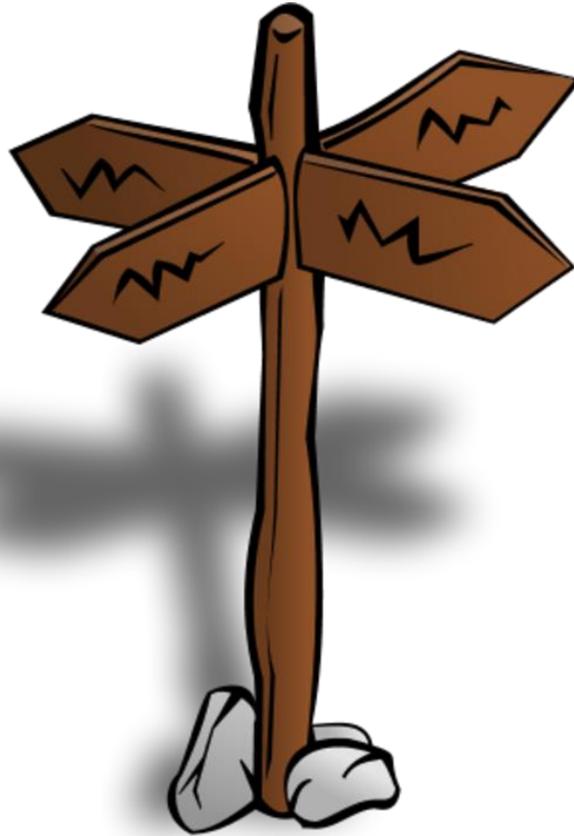
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- Your daughter, age 7, has a same-aged male friend over to play, they have played together often without incident. They are playing upstairs in her room. You go upstairs to offer them a drink and as you walk in, you see your daughter with her mouth on her friend's penis. Both children have their pants down.
- What are your thoughts and feelings/
- What do you do?
- What would you do when your daughter wants to have her friend over again?

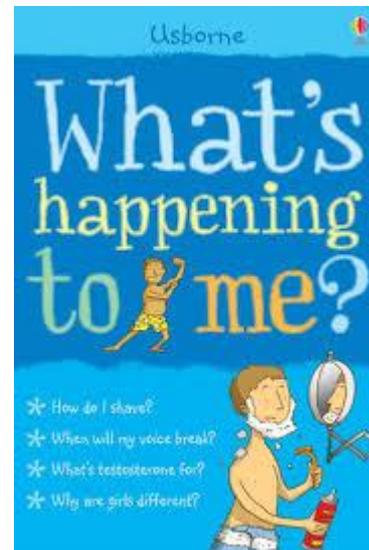
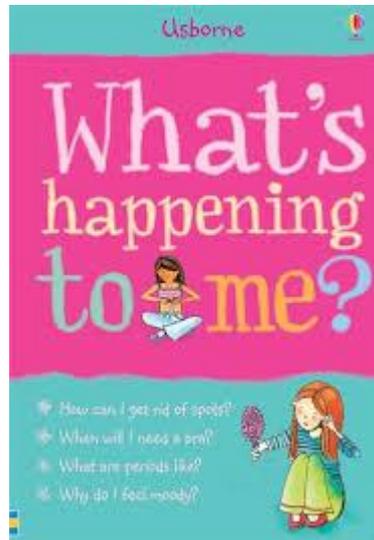
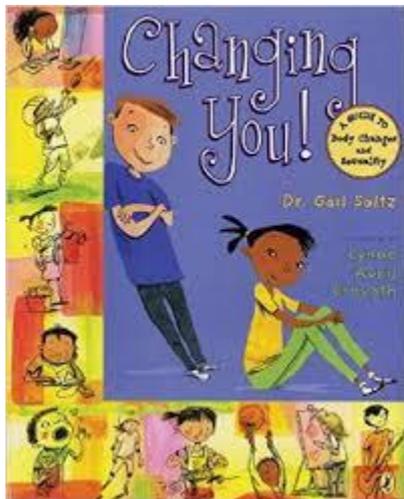
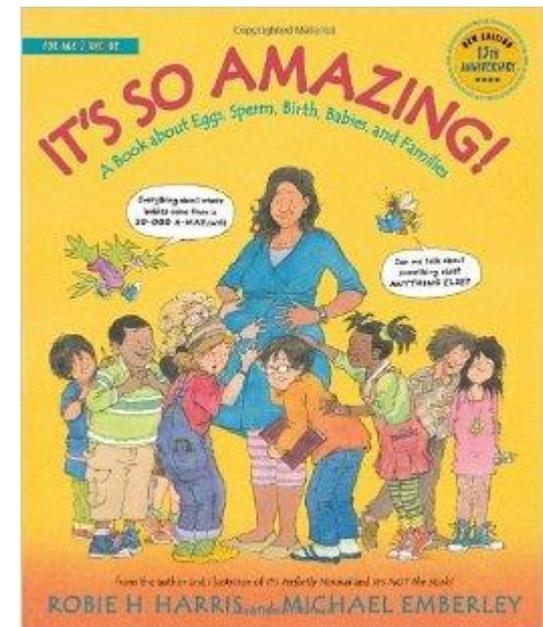
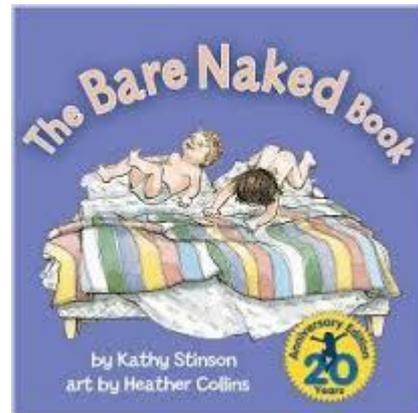
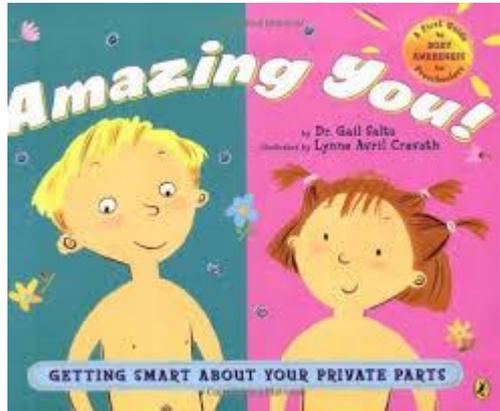
Helping Parents Understand What to do...

- ❑ Stop the behaviour
- ❑ Explain why it is wrong
- ❑ Put a consequence in place (include an apology, or taking accountability)
- ❑ Increase supervision
- ❑ Implement appropriate rules or boundaries in the home/community/school
- ❑ Help the child learn to manage his or her behaviour
- ❑ Monitor behaviour and reward success

What resources are available for parents?



Teaching Healthy Sexuality



On-Line Resources

Conversations That Matter 

How To **Rock the Talk** On Body Safety
and keep kids safe from sexual abuse

#1 KNOW the risk
1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men are estimated to have been sexually abused during childhood.*
Approximately 95% of offenders are people known, trusted, and often related to the child, many whom are juveniles themselves.

#2 Empower Kids
1. Use proper names of body parts.
2. Private parts are special and not meant to be shared.
3. Secrets are not allowed.
4. Support their right to body autonomy - no forced touching!
5. It is important to tell if a rule is broken. The child is never to blame and it is never too late to tell.

#3 Build a Safety Circle
Educate family, friends, caregivers, and community members that your child is in contact with about your family's body safety rules.

Be Vigilant. It's Our Job to Keep Kids Safe.

#4 Minimize Opportunity
The majority of abuse occurs in 1:1 situations - often within the home, while under the authority of another, or in a social setting.
Increasing supervision and being cognizant of these situations can improve protection and deter offenders.

Know the Warning Signs #5
Offenders often use 'grooming' tactics on children and adults to gain trust, control and break down personal boundaries.
Children often respond to the trauma of abuse by regressing, acting out sexually, or with a change in behavior.
Some children will show no signs.

This is only a start. There is much more to learn.

TheMamaBearEffect.org
U.S. Center for Disease Control Adverse Childhood Experience Study

HOW DOES PREVENTION EDUCATION PROTECT KIDS FROM SEXUAL ABUSE?

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<p> WITH</p> <p>INCREASED AWARENESS that 1:4 girls and 1:6 boys are sexually abused and more than 90% of abusers are known to the victim & their family</p> <p>IMPROVED RECOGNITION of grooming tactics and situations where abusers gain trust of adults & children and access opportunities to perpetrate abuse</p> <p>PROMOTION OF BODY SAFETY Children are educated truthfully and openly about their bodies, what is appropriate behavior, and their right to body autonomy.</p> <p>INCREASED ABUSE DETECTION Adults better able to recognize behavioral signs of abuse in children and are more aware of the possibility that abuse is the cause.</p>	<p> WITHOUT</p> <p>IGNORANCE & MISINFORMATION How many children are affected That stranger danger = protection</p> <p>ENABLING OF ABUSE perpetrators continue to take advantage of trusting adults and gain access to vulnerable children</p> <p>CHILDREN REMAIN IGNORANT Continue to be exploited without understanding that it is wrong, feel they don't have a right to say no or that they can tell someone.</p> <p>MISINTERPRETATION OF SIGNS Children that cannot or are afraid to tell remain in danger and without access to treatment for healing. Abusers remain free to abuse again.</p>
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TheMamaBearEffect.org

<http://themamabeareffect.org/free-downloads.html>

Prevention Education for Children with Sexual Behavior Problems

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- ❑ Teach about Different Kinds of Touch
- ❑ Role-Play and/or Set up a Safety Plan
- ❑ Personal Space and Boundaries
- ❑ Regular Sexuality Education
 - Birth Control Information?
 - STI Prevention Information?



Safety Planning

- Define “privacy” and private parts
- Supervision (eyes on ears on)
- Safe touching rules
- Appropriate touching: If it’s not yours, don’t touch it!
- Learn to recognize the child’s triggers
 - ▣ Who else needs to know



Sexual Behaviour Rules



1. It is not ok to show your private parts to other people
2. It is not ok to look at other people's private parts
3. It is not ok to touch other people's private parts
4. It is ok to touch your private parts as long as it's in private and does not take too much time
5. It is not ok to use sexual language or make other people uncomfortable with your sexual behaviour

Internet Safety

- ❑ Parents need to develop and implement a safety plan for the Internet
- ❑ Have parental controls in place on all devices
- ❑ Check the history
- ❑ Do not permit Facebook or other social media for children under 12 without strict supervision
- ❑ Keep the dialogue open
- ❑ <http://www.thedoorthatsnotlocked.ca>



Thrive Child and Youth Services

Parent Group Programs

□ Courage to Tell

- 2 evening psycho-educational groups for parents/caregivers of children and youth who have been sexually abused

□ Keeping Safe

- 3 evening psycho-educational groups for parents/caregivers of children under 12 who have engaged in problematic sexual behaviour

□ Moving Towards Healing

- 10 week process group for parents of children and youth engaged in treatment for sexual victimization

Sexual Abuse Assessment and Treatment Program (SAAT)

- ❑ Children and Youth up to 18 years of age who have experienced sexual abuse
- ❑ Children under 12 who have engaged in problematic sexual behaviour
- ❑ Sibling sexual abuse where both the child who has victimized and the child who has been victimized are under 12
- ❑ Intrafamilial sexual abuse where a youth (12-18) has offended against a child within a family context



Referral Pathways

- SAAT
 - ▣ Direct Referrals from Child Welfare (CAS/CCAS)
 - ▣ Contact Hamilton



Emphasis is on minimizing the impact of the referral process, ie the response of retelling the traumatic experience at intake

In Summary...

- ❑ We don't need to understand the why?, it's complicated....
- ❑ We can stop the behaviour in a way that helps the child feel good about him/herself.
- ❑ Problematic sexual behaviour is learned, and it can be unlearned.
- ❑ Having a reaction is normal, planning your response is essential.
- ❑ The goal is to ensure that our children move on to enjoy sexual health as adults.
- ❑ There are resources available to help!



Questions/Comments



thank
you!