



Guidance on children who abuse other children

Rutland
County Council

Rutland County Council (October 2017)

Most people are already aware of the risk of sexual abuse that some adults present to children, and there is a growing understanding that the vast majority of children who are sexually abused, are abused by someone they know, and often trust. Unfortunately, very few adults recognise that children and adolescents also can present a risk to other children. In fact, over a third of all sexual abuse of children is committed by someone under the age of 18 (*Parents Protect*).

This can be a difficult issue to deal with; partly because it is often challenging for adults to think of the children or adolescents we know as capable of sexually abusing others. Also, it is not always easy to tell the difference between natural sexual curiosity and potentially abusive behaviours.

Children, particularly in the younger age groups, may engage in inappropriate interactions with no knowledge that it is wrong or abusive. For this reason, it may be more accurate to talk about sexually harmful behaviour rather than abuse.

It is essential that all adults have the information needed to recognise potentially harmful activities at an early stage and to seek help so the behaviours can be stopped. Every adult who cares about children has an opportunity, as both teacher and role model, to show children how to interact without harming others, either while they are still children, or later, as adults. Adults have the added responsibility of ensuring that all children who have been involved in a harmful sexual situation, whatever their role, are given the help they need to live healthy productive lives.

What is age appropriate/health sexual development?

Children pass through different stages of development as they grow. Like other areas of a child's development, it is normal for children's awareness and curiosity about their own sexual feelings to change as they pass from infancy into childhood, and then through puberty to adolescence.

There is generally an accepted range of behaviours linked to children's changing age and developmental stages. Sometimes, it can be difficult to tell the difference between sexual exploration that is appropriate to a developmental stage and interactions that are warning signs of harmful behaviour.

Disabled children may develop at different rates, depending on the nature of their disability, and they can be more vulnerable to abuse. Children with learning disabilities, for example, may behave sexually in ways that are out of step with their age. Particular care may be needed in educating such children to understand their sexual development and to ensure that they can communicate effectively about any worries they have.

It is important to recognise that while people from different backgrounds have different expectations about what is acceptable behaviour in children, sexual abuse happens across all races and cultures.

Each child develops and at his or her own pace and not every child will show the behaviours described below

Pre-school children (0-5) years commonly:

- Use childish 'sexual' language to talk about body parts
- Ask how babies are made and where they come from
- Touch or rub their own genitals
- Show and look at private parts

They rarely:

- Discuss sexual acts or use sexually explicit language
- Have physical sexual contact with other children
- Show adult-like sexual behaviour or knowledge

School-age children (6-12 years) commonly:

- Ask questions about menstruation, pregnancy and other sexual behaviour

- Experiment with other children, often during games, kissing, touching, showing and role playing e.g. mums and dads or doctors and nurses
- Masturbate in private

They rarely:

- Masturbate in public
- Show adult like sexual behaviour or knowledge

Adolescents:

- Ask questions about relationships and sexual behaviour
- Use sexual language and talk between themselves about sexual acts
- Masturbate in private
- Experiment sexually with adolescents of similar age

NB. About one-third of adolescents have sexual intercourse before the age of 16

Warning signs of sexually harmful behaviour

One of the hardest things for any parent to discover is that their child may have sexually harmed or abused another child. If it is not responded to quickly and sensitively, the effect on the whole family can be devastating. For this reason it is vital to contact someone for advice about what to do as soon as you suspect that something is wrong. The positive message is that early help for the child or young person and their family can make a real difference. Evidence suggests that the earlier children can get help, the more chance there is of preventing them moving on to more serious behaviour. It is important to be alert to the early warning signs that something is going wrong, such as (but not limited to):

- Seeking out the company of younger children and spends an unusual amount of time in their company?
- Taking younger children to 'secret' places or hideaways or plays 'special' games with them (e.g. doctor and patient, removing clothing etc.) especially games unusual to their age?
- Insisting on hugging or kissing a child when the child does not want to?
- Telling you they do not want to be alone with a child or becomes anxious when a particular child comes to visit?
- Frequently uses aggressive or sexual language about adults or children?

What you can do if you see warning signs or suspect that a child is sexually harming another child, or thinking about doing so?

It is very disturbing to suspect that a child may be sexually harming someone or being abused. You may also be worried about the consequences of taking action.

If you are worried that a child may be sexually harming another child, or being abused, action should be taken immediately, by contacting the Rutland County Council RAIS (Duty) service for advice.

**RAIS (Referral, Assessment & Intervention Service - Children's Duty)
01572 758407**

The child's or young person's history, attendance record and consideration of any escalating concern should always be considered when deciding on the use of any action.

Useful Links:

https://www.parentsprotect.co.uk/age_appropriate_sexual_behaviour.htm

<https://www.safersociety.org/uploads/WP075-DoChildren.pdf>

http://www.parentsprotect.co.uk/files/traffic_light_helping_you_understand_the_sexual_development_of_children_5-11.pdf

http://www.parentsprotect.co.uk/files/traffic_light_helping_you_understand_the_sexual_development_of_children_5-11.pdf

<http://www.brook.org.uk/index.php/traffic-lights>

http://www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk/young_people.htm