



Understanding normal vs problem sexual behaviour 0-4yrs

To know what sexual behaviour is problematic, we need to first understand what is normal for each age and stage of child development

Age appropriate sexual behaviours

0 – 4 years; Pre-school

- Touching/rubbing his/her own genitals
- Likes to be rude
- Showing others his/her genitals
- Playing doctors and nurses
- Playing house; Mummies and Daddies
- Touching or looking at private parts of familiar children or adults
- Using slang words/dirty language for bathroom and sexual functions

Concerning Sexual Behaviours

0 – 4 years: Pre-school

- Persistent masturbation
- Forcing another child to engage in sexual play
- Sexualised play with dolls
- Touching private parts of adults not known to Child Wise
- Chronic peeping behaviour

Very Concerning Sexual Behaviours

0 – 4 years: Pre-school

- Persistently touches or rubs self to the exclusion of normal childhood activities; hurts own genitals by rubbing or touching
- Simulating sex with other children with or without clothes on
- Oral sex
- Sexual play between children involving forceful anal or vaginal penetration with objects.

Situations of sexualised behaviour and peer sexual play which causes concern (Tony Cavanagh Johnson, 1994)

- The children engaged in the sexual play do not have an ongoing mutual play relationship
- The children engaged in the sexual play/behaviour are of different ages or developmental levels
- Any sexual play/behaviour which continues in spite of consistent and clear requests to stop
- Sexual behaviours which occur in public or other places where the child has been told they are not acceptable
- Sexual play/behaviour which is eliciting complaints from other children or adversely affecting them
- Sexual behaviour which progresses in frequency, intensity or intrusiveness over time
- Sexual behaviour that is associated with fear, anxiety, deep shame or intense guilt
- Children who manually stimulate or have oral or genital contact with an animal
- Sexual behaviours which cause physical or emotional pain to self or others
- Children who use sex to hurt others
- When verbal and/or physical expressions of anger precede, follow or accompany the sexual behaviour
- When coercion, force, bribery, manipulation or threats are associated with sexual behaviours

Considerations

- Is the observed sexual behaviour age appropriate or concerning?
- What is the context of the sexual play?
- Age difference and relationship between children/young people
- Do not over or under react **Gil (1993)**

