





Appropriate and Inappropriate Sexual Behavior of Children



Sexual Knowledge

- Birth to 2 years
 - Origins of gender identity
 - Learns labels for body parts – including genitals
 - Uses slang labels for body parts
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Sexual Behavior

- Male babies capable of penile erections at birth; female babies capable of vaginal lubrication
- Genital stimulation to orgasm-like responses reported from 5 months of age
- Infants respond with great pleasure when they touch their genitals
- Infants have the capacity to respond sexually; earliest sexual behavior appears to be more reflexive and is associated with body exploration





Sexual Knowledge

- 3 to 5 years
 - ▶ Gender permanence is established
 - ▶ Gender differences are understood
 - ▶ Limited information about pregnancy and childbirth
 - ▶ Knows labels for sexual body parts, but uses slang
 - ▶ Uses elimination functions for sexual parts





Sexual Behavior

- 3 to 5 years
 - ▶ Sexual and genital interest increases considerably from age 2 to 5
 - ▶ Gender role behaviors are observed by age 1 and well delineated by age 3 or 4
 - ▶ Same gender preference develops earlier and more strongly in boys than girls
 - ▶ Gender identity is developed before child is fully aware of the genital basis of sexual identity
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Sexual Behavior

- 3 to 5 years
 - ▶ Masturbates for pleasure, may experience orgasm
 - ▶ Sex play with peers and siblings; exhibits genitals, exploration of own and others genitals, attempted intercourse
 - ▶ Enjoys nudity, takes clothes off in public
 - ▶ Uses elimination words with peers
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Sexual Knowledge

- 6 to 12 years
 - Genital basis of gender
 - Correct labels for sex parts, but uses slang
 - Sexual aspects of pregnancy
 - Increasing knowledge of sexual behavior: masturbation, intercourse
 - Knowledge of physical aspects of puberty by age 10



Sexual Behavior


- 6 to 12 years
 - Boys and girls socialize with own gender; sexual activity more concealed within this age group
 - Documented increase in masturbation in boys
 - 10% at age 7
 - 14% at age 8
 - 85% at age 13
 - Parental attitudes, peer group attitudes, and societal values toward sex have been found to influence child's attitudes

Sexual Behavior

- 6 to 12 years
 - Sex games with peers and siblings
 - Shows modesty, embarrassment: Hides sex games from adults
 - May fantasize or dream about sex
 - Interested in media sex
 - Uses sexual language with peers





Sexual Knowledge

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- 13 + years
 - Sexual intercourse
 - Contraception
 - Sexually transmitted diseases



Sexual Behavior

- 13 + years
 - ▶ Pubertal changes continue:
 - Most girls menstruate by age 16
 - Most boys capable of ejaculation by age 15
 - ▶ Sexual contacts are common: mutual masturbation, kissing, petting
 - ▶ Sexual fantasy and dreams
 - ▶ Sexual intercourse may occur in up to 75% of adolescents by age 18
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Continuum of Sexual Behavior


Sex Play

- Sexual behavior is...
 - Exploratory
 - Spontaneous
 - Intermittent
 - By mutual agreement
 - With children of similar age, size and developmental level
 - Not accompanied by strong feelings of anger, fear and/or anxiety





Problematic Sexual Behavior in Boys and Girls

- Aggressive sexual behavior: forcing younger children to undress; kiss and to sexually experiment with peers and siblings
- Excessive masturbation
- Sexual preoccupation
- Age-inappropriate knowledge of sexual behavior
- Professionals now recognize that these signs are most often indicative of a child who has been sexually abused




Signals for Parents and Counselors

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- Responds emotionally to sexual topics
 - Unusual toileting behaviors
 - Drawings depict genitals as major feature
 - Sexual behavior with animals
 - Painful and/or continuous erections; vaginal discharge




Signals for Parents and Counselors

- Unusual sexual knowledge or focus
- Exaggerated interest in sexual activities
- Sexual play with older/younger children
- Approaches unfamiliar children for sex play
- Bribes or forces children into sexual behavior



Signals for Parents and Counselors

- Confusion regarding rights of others
 - Tries to get children/adults to touch genitals
 - Harms own genitals
 - Children complain about child's sexual behavior
 - Continues behavior after being told to stop
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