



# SEXUALIZED BEHAVIOURS

## Guidance for the Education Sector

According to Alberta Health Services, sexual play among same-age children may be considered developmentally normal. Problematic Sexualized Behaviour (PSB), also known as Harmful Sexualized behaviour (HSB), refers to sexual behaviour exhibited by children under twelve that may include behaviours that are intrusive, repeated, aggressive, or coercive that can cause harm. These behaviours are learned and, in most cases, can be unlearned.

**Sexual behaviours, and particularly PSBs, should not be considered a diagnosis but rather a description of a certain type of behaviour or action. It is crucial to shift the focus onto the behaviour and distinguish it from the student. Children who exhibit sexual behaviours are first and foremost children. Their actions should not be equated to those of adults. They are students demonstrating concerning behaviour, not predators, offenders, or criminals.**

Understanding developmentally typical sexual behaviours is critical in identifying whether a student is demonstrating PSBs. However, an immediate, consistent response with clear, natural, and logical consequences delivered without blame or shame is crucial to reducing PSB and ensuring safe learning environments for all students.

### Concerning sexual behaviours involve:

- Potentially harmful, injurious behaviours
- Threats for the victim to not tell
- Developmentally inappropriate behaviour, gap in age or cognitive development between the children involved
- Contextually inappropriate for example, in public vs private
- Illegal: violates the laws of consent or anytime a video, or camera is involved
- Harm: force, coercion, fear, anxiety release, injury, or anger
- Frequency: excludes all other play. Does not decrease in response to adult interventions

### You may need more resources if:

- Redirection has been unsuccessful over a long duration of occurrence
- Behaviours are interfering with social development

### Protective factors for students at-risk of displaying sexual behaviour

- Education about social skills, healthy relationships and sexual development
- Trauma-sensitive environments
- Adult supervision and guidance
- The availability of a reliable adult to share open dialogue about their feelings, successes, and relationships

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- Redirection has been unsuccessful over a long duration of occurrence.
- Behaviours are interfering with social development.

### Sexual Development Education for All Students

- Educate students on privacy and personal boundaries
- Provide the proper names for sexual anatomy
- Establish clear guidelines and regulations regarding privacy and physical contact
- Instruct students on how to identify and respond to unacceptable sexualized behaviour
- Minimize stigmatization for students requiring corrective guidance

While students who have difficulty with impulse control, have experienced trauma, or have lagging social skills present with PSB at a higher rate, there is not a singular type of student who engages in these behaviours.

### Situations that may require additional supervision:

- Contact sports
- Technology access
- Areas of the school that are not highly visible
- Unstructured time including recess, lunch assemblies, and field trips
- School Bus

When behaviour involving sexual body parts is problematic, the motivation is rarely arousal-based.

### Resources and References:

- [AHS MORE](#)
- [NSPCC Learning](#)
- [Canadian Centre for Child Protection](#)
- [Luna Child & Youth Advocacy Centre](#)



# RESPONDING TO PROBLEMATIC SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS (PSB)

Historically, the approach to managing sexual behaviour in children has been punitive, restrictive, or ignored. To ensure safe learning environments for all students, it is crucial to instead provide an immediate, consistent response that includes clear consequences for the behaviour, delivered without blame or shame.

**It's important to recognize that most sexual behaviour in children is developmentally appropriate and does not need intensive adult attention. When addressing students, it is reasonable and appropriate to offer educative feedback or redirect them away from the behaviour.**

**However, when behaviour is concerning, it is important to identify and intervene early. Students who engage in Problematic Sexualized Behaviour (PSB) rely on informed and caring adults to intervene and respond in a protective manner.**

Consistent non-judgmental and caring responses from adults at school and at home will support the child in recognizing and changing their behaviour.

## Response Guidance for staff who encounter an incident of PSB

- Manage your reaction
- Defuse the students behaviour by telling them to stop
- Describe the behaviour specifically and clearly to students
- State rules and expectations regarding the behaviour
- Redirect students or enforce consequences

## Caregivers benefit from a trusting relationship with school staff. Demonstrate that you care about their child as a person.

- Coach caregivers on how to respond to PSB, to promote learning for the adults. (parenting support)
- Convey the need to intervene to mitigate future behaviour problems
- Model clear rules, consequences, and supervision in response to PSB
- Articulate that PSB is a serious behaviour that must be addressed
- Remain sensitive to cultural factors and offer hope
- Avoid labels (criminal/offender) when referring to their child
- Provide information about community support for the child and caregiver


## Initial response to PSB

- A caring non-judgmental response is essential. Gently ask about the child's understanding of what they are doing
- Document responses in the student's own words. What were you doing? How did you get that idea?
- When communicating with the student and caregivers offer hope with messaging such as "We can get through this together"
- Stay Calm: When adults come across as angry or upset students are more likely to shut down. Calmly stop the behaviour and redirect the child
- Teach safe boundaries for touching and body rules
- Tell the student that their behaviour is inappropriate and unacceptable and inform administration

Source: Canadian Centre for Child Protection. (2021). Sexualized Behaviour in Children: A Guide to Understanding Normal Versus Concerning Behaviour in Children 12 Years Old and Under (p. 8). Winnipeg, MB: Canadian Centre for Child Protection Inc.

## Considerations for Creating a PSB Safety Plan

- Realize the impact of PSB on all students
- Recognize the characteristics of PSB
- Responses should align with the severity of the behaviour following progressive discipline
- Consider staff training and communication
- Refer/Report to professionals who can provide assessment and or treatment
- Schedule regular reviews of the safety plan

 When students exhibit sexualized behaviour, it's vital to react with a balanced approach; not overreacting or underreacting, and without shaming or embarrassing the child or their family.

