

Age Appropriate Sexual Behavior

It can be hard to acknowledge that all of us, even children, are sexual beings, have sexual feelings and are curious about sex and sexuality. Children's curiosity can lead to exploring their own and each other's body parts by looking and touching. Stopitnow.com provides the following pointers when assessing appropriate child sexual behavior.

Preschool age (0 to 5 years)

| Common: | Uncommon: |
|---|---|
| Will have questions and express knowledge relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Differences in gender, private body parts; Hygiene and toileting; Pregnancy and birth Will explore genitals and can experience pleasure. Showing and looking at private body parts. | Having knowledge of specific sexual acts or explicit sexual language. Engaging in adult-like sexual contact with other children. |

School-age (6-8 years)

Sexual play is between children who have an ongoing mutually enjoyable play and/or school friendship; are of similar size, age, and social and emotional development. It is lighthearted and spontaneous. The children may be giggling and having fun when you discover them.

| Common: | Uncommon: |
|---|--|
| Will need knowledge and have questions about <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Physical development, relationships, sexual behavior; Menstruation and pregnancy; Personal values Experiment with same-age and same gender children, often during games or role-playing. Self stimulation in private. | Adult-like sexual interactions. Having knowledge of specific sexual acts. Behaving sexually in a public place or through the use of phone or internet technology. Use of sexually explicit words. |

School-age (9-12 years)

Hormonal changes and external influences, such as peers, media and Internet, will increase sexual awareness, feelings and interest at the onset of puberty.

| Common: | Uncommon: |
|--|---|
| Will need knowledge and have questions about <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sexual materials and information; Relationships and sexual behavior; Using sexual words and discussing sexual acts and personal values, particularly with peers Increased experimentation with sexual behaviors and romantic relationships. Self stimulation in private is expected to continue. | Regularly occurring adult-like sexual behavior. Behaving sexually in a public place. Excessive or compulsive masturbation |

Adolescence (13 to 16)

| Common: | Uncommon: |
|--|--|
| Will need information and have questions about <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Decision making; Social relationships and sexual customs; Personal values and consequences of sexual behavior Self stimulation in private is expected to continue. Sexual experimentation between adolescents of the same age and gender is common. Sexual intercourse will occur for approx. 1/3 of teens. | Masturbation in a public place. Sexual interest directed toward much younger children. Prostitution Extreme promiscuity Sexually reckless behavior |