Understanding and Managing Sexual Behaviour Problems Displayed by Children and Young People in Educational Settings
To date, there has been little guidance written for staff within educational settings who manage children and young people who display sexualised behaviour or have an identified sexual behaviour problem. In part, this has been due to an underestimation on the very real difficulties staff within such settings face, whether or not other agencies are involved.

As our knowledge and understanding about children and young people who have sexual behaviour problems grows and the importance of trying to manage this particular group of children and young people within the education system is recognised, guidance and information about normal childhood sexual development and the wide range of sexually problematic behaviour as well as guidance about how to deal with such behaviours for staff within these settings is key.

One of the main concerns identified by many professionals in educational establishments is uncertainty about how to determine the level of seriousness of the behaviour they may be observing and what is and what is not age appropriate sexual behaviour.

“Stop it now” (a national charitable campaign) has produced a helpful chart, which has been attached for your use, showing examples of normal and healthy sexual behaviour that we might expect to see in children as they progress through different stages of development from pre-school to adolescence. A second chart has also been produced which may be of some help in identifying behaviours that may give cause for concern.

It is however important to recognise that not every child will show these behaviours, and that each child develops at his or her own pace. Neither chart should therefore be viewed as comprehensive and an element of caution should always be applied.
### What is age-appropriate sexual behaviour?

#### 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 body 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 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

Older children in this age range are also more likely than pre-school children to use sexual words and discuss sexual acts, particularly with their friends

*They rarely:*
- Masturbate in public
- Show adult-like sexual behaviour or knowledge

#### Adolescents (13-16 years) commonly:
- Ask questions about relationships and sexual behaviour
- Use sexual language and talk about sexual acts between themselves
- Masturbate in private
- Experiment sexually with adolescents of similar age
  
  NB. About one-third of adolescents have sexual intercourse before the age of 16.

*They rarely:*
- Masturbate in public
- Have sexual contact with much younger children or adults
### Possible Indicators of sexually harmful or abusive behaviour

- Seeks out the company of younger children and spends an unusual amount of time in their company?

- Takes younger children to ‘secret’ places or hideaways or plays ‘special’ games with them (e.g. doctor and patient, removing clothing etc.) especially games unusual for their age?

- Insists on hugging or kissing a child when the child does not want to?

- Tells you they do not want to be alone with a child or becomes anxious when a particular child or young person is coming to visit?

- Frequently uses aggressive sexual language about adults or children?

- Shows sexual material to younger children?

- Makes sexually abusive telephone calls?

- Shares alcohol or other drugs with younger children or teens?

- Views child pornography on the Internet or elsewhere?

- Exposes his or her genitals to younger children?

- Forces sex on another adolescent or child?
Observing and Recording Behaviours

Accurate and detailed recording of concerns about possible inappropriate sexualised behaviour is essential and in all cases, the designated person for child protection within the school should be informed.

In the initial stages of evaluating concerns, advice from either the Schools Safeguarding Team or the Early Years and Family Support Assessment Team should be sought, thus allowing concerns to be discussed and possible risks/concerns to be identified.

Some sexualised behaviours at the lower end of the continuum can be managed successfully by schools alone, in conjunction with parents/carers. However for more concerning behaviours, Early Years and Family Support Assessment Teams should be involved and depending on the circumstances of the case and initial assessment, support in terms of managing the behaviour will be offered to schools, and if necessary a Risk Assessment undertaken on the child.

Parents/Carers of Targeted Children

The parents/carers of any targeted child (ren) should be made aware of the schools concerns and about the schools plan to manage the risk and meet the needs of all concerned, although personal information about the child whose behaviour is of concern must be kept confidential.