



Healthy Sexual Development in Children

Sexual Development is a part of every human regardless of age. Below is just a partial list of common and uncommon sexual behaviors in children (adapted from Wurtele & Miller-Perrin, 1992):

Pre-school (0-5 years)

- Common: Sexual language relating to differences in body parts, bathroom talk, pregnancy and birth. Genital stimulation at home and in public. Showing and looking at private body parts.
- Uncommon: Discussion of sexual acts. Contact experiences with other children without clothing.



School Age (6-12 years)

- Common: Questions about menstruation, pregnancy, sexual behavior. "Experimenting" with same-age children, including kissing, hugging, holding hands, and role-playing. Genital stimulation at home or other private places.
- Uncommon: Use of explicit sexual words and discussing sexual acts.



Adolescence (13-16 years)

- Common: Questions about decision-making, social relationships, and sexual customs. Masturbation in private. Experimenting between adolescents of the same age, including open-mouth kissing, fondling, and body rubbing. Also, interest in other peers' bodies. Sexual intercourse occurs in approximately one third of this age group.
- Uncommon: Sexual interest in much younger children.



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If you suspect any of these behaviors and do not know how to talk about these issues, or you want further information, please call our Helpline toll-free at 1-888-PREVENT (1-888-773-8368) Monday - Friday from 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. (CST). You can call and have a confidential conversation with a professional about what you are seeing, learn about local resources, and what options are available to you.

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