



TYPICAL SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT: 0-17

While we hesitate to label behaviors as "normal" or "not normal", there are some typical and expected behaviors across a child's life span.

Sexual development can vary based on a child's culture, age, and exposure

0-4 YEARS

- Curiosity about their body and others bodies
- Showing, exploring and rubbing their genitals
 - Beginning to learn the difference between public vs. private behavior
- Removing clothes/wanting to be naked
- Trying to touch mother's breasts
- Curious to see others naked (parents/caregivers)

NOT COMMON:

- Knowledge of specific sexual acts or sexually explicit language

4-6 YEARS

- Playfully mimicking dating like behaviors (such as kissing or holding hands) with peers (i.e. playing house)
- Exploring genitals with other children ("I'll show you mine, if you show me yours...")
- Masturbation, occasionally in the presence of others (continuing to distinguish private vs. public behavior)
- "Trying out" naughty words, even if they don't know what they mean

NOT COMMON:

- Adult-like sexual interactions

7-12 YEARS

(PRE-HORMONAL PUBERTY)

- Purposeful masturbation in private
- Questions about sexual topics, body changes, menstruation, pregnancy and birth
- Mimicking dating like behaviors with peers, often done in social settings during games (Truth or Dare)
- Desire for more privacy
- Beginnings of romantic and sexual attraction to others
 - Sexual experimentation, usually spontaneous/peer-influenced: open-mouth kissing, touching, fondling

NOT COMMON:

- Planned sexual acts

13-17 YEARS

(AFTER PUBERTY)

- Interest, knowledge and pre-occupation with sexually-charged material
- Desire for even more privacy and boundaries from family
- Continuation of romantic and sexual attraction to others
 - Sexual experimentation such as oral/genital stimulation and intercourse

NOT COMMON:

- Public masturbation
- Consent violations with romantic partners (forcing peers to engage in non-consensual actions)
- Attraction to much younger children

KEEP "THE TALK" GOING

Research shows that children benefit from early and ongoing conversations about sexual health! Here are a few tips on how to navigate those conversations:

- Think of sexual-health conversations like building a house: it's best to start with an early, strong foundation that you can slowly build on over time. Blueprints are good! Asking for help is also encouraged.
- Lead conversations from an open-minded and warm place.
- The goal is honesty, connection, and trust - not perfection. It's okay to feel awkward!
- Do not assume your child's sexual or romantic identity - use gender non-specific terms when talking about crushes or partners
- Use everyday teachable moments (television, movies, etc.) to talk about puberty, attraction, consent and sexual health.

Sources: National Center For Sexual Behavior of Youth, National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Stop It Now

1-800-879-1999

24/7 Sexual Assault Crisis Hotline

615-259-9055

Nashville SAC Office

931-241-4143

Clarksville SAC Office

