

An overview of responses to Reactive and Harmful Sexual Behaviours



Somerset
Council

What are sexualised behaviours?

- Sexualised behaviours are one of the many types of behaviours that children can and will display throughout their lives and developmental journey.
- All adults, and our children explore themselves, their identity and bodies, especially throughout childhood as we develop, learn and respond to our hormones and stimulators.
- Almost all sexual and sexualised behaviours are **HEALTHY NORMAL TYPICAL APPROPRIATE SAFE**

What ISN'T **harmful** sexualised behaviour?

- Sexual Abuse (Intra & Extra familial) *Why isn't intrafamilial sexual abuse harmful sexual behaviour?*

Intra-familial sexual abuse is not classified as harmful sexual behaviour because it does not involve overt elements of victimization or abuse. Intra-familial sexual abuse, while serious, does not meet the criteria for HSB due to the absence of overt victimization or abuse. CSA Centre

- Child sexual exploitation
- Appropriate developmental behaviours
- Most problematic behaviours

Some behaviours can be problematic, depending on motivations, intentions and impact, it does not mean they are harmful.

What is harmful sexual behaviour?

- Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) is developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour displayed by children and young people which is harmful or abusive (Hackett, S. 2014)
- Children and young people typically display a range of sexualised behaviours as they grow up, and some behaviours may be deemed developmentally appropriate.
- However, some may display problematic or abusive sexualised behaviour. This is harmful to the children who display it as well as the people it's directed towards. [[NSPCC](#)]
- Hackett's Continuum presents sexualised behaviour as a range from 'normal' to 'inappropriate', 'problematic', 'abusive' and 'violent' (Hackett, 2010) (see Appendix A).
- There are no official agreed ways of describing sexualised behaviours which cause concern.

What is harmful sexual behaviour?

All behaviours must be considered in a holistic context and looked at in respect of:

- Their understanding, age and stage of development
- Risk and safety to themselves and others
- Motivations and drivers
- Impact and Harm

Responding to children who display sexualised behaviour

It's important to be able to distinguish developmentally typical sexual behaviours from those that may be problematic or harmful, and make sure children get appropriate support. Always consider the child's holistic needs and safeguarding concerns alongside any sexualised behaviour and follow due procedures accordingly. This guide is a tool to support objective decision making about a child or young person's sexual behaviour and does not replace professional judgement or policy and legislation. Visit nspcc.org.uk/hsb for more information.

Need advice?

Contact our helpline for advice and support:

- Call **0808 800 5000**
- Email help@nspcc.org.uk
- Visit nspcc.org.uk/helpline

Childline

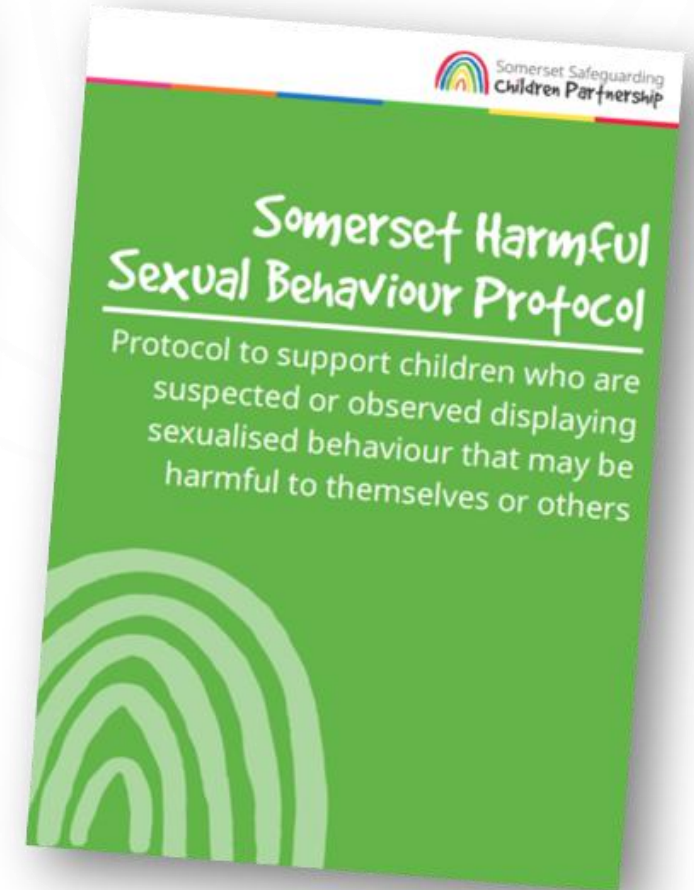
For children who need further support our free, confidential helpline is available 24/7:

- Call **0800 1111**
- Visit childline.org.uk

Developmentally typical	Problematic		Harmful	
Hackett Continuum				
Normal	Inappropriate	Problematic	Abusive	Violent
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developmentally expected and socially acceptable behaviour• Consensual, mutual and reciprocal• Decision making is shared	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Single instances of developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour• Behaviour that may be socially acceptable within a peer group but not in wider society• May involve an inappropriate context for behaviour that would otherwise be considered normal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developmentally unusual and socially unexpected behaviour• May be compulsive• Consent may be unclear and the behaviour may not be reciprocal• May involve an imbalance of power• Doesn't have an overt element of victimisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intrusive behaviour• May involve a misuse of power• May have an element of victimisation• May use coercion and force• May include elements of expressive violence• Informed consent has not been given (or the victim was not able to consent freely)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physically violent sexual abuse• Highly intrusive• May involve instrumental violence which is physiologically and/or sexually arousing to the perpetrator• May involve sadism
How to respond <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Although green behaviours are not concerning, they still require a response• Listen to what children and young people have to say and respond calmly and non-judgementally• Talk to parents about developmentally typical sexualised behaviours• Explain how parents can positively reinforce messages about appropriate sexual behaviour and act to keep their children safe from abuse• Signpost helpful resources like our 'Talk PANTS' activity pack: nspcc.org.uk/pants• Make sure young people know how to behave responsibly and safely	How to respond <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Amber behaviours should not be ignored• Listen to what children and young people have to say and respond calmly and non-judgementally• Consider the child's developmental age as well as their chronological age, alongside wider holistic needs and safeguarding concerns about the problematic sexualised behaviour• Follow your organisation's child protection procedures and make a report to the person responsible for child protection• Your policy or procedure should guide you towards a nominated child protection lead who can be notified and will provide support• Consider whether the child or young person needs therapeutic support and make referrals as appropriate		How to respond <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Red behaviours indicate a need for immediate intervention and action• If a child is in immediate danger, call the police on 999• Follow your organisation's child protection procedures and make a report to the person responsible for child protection• Your policy or procedure should guide you towards a nominated child protection lead who should be notified and will provide support• Typically referrals to children's social care and the police would be required. Referrals to therapeutic services should only be made once statutory services have been informed and followed due procedures	

What is harmful sexual behaviour?

How do we as professionals decide if it is RaHSB or not?



[Sexual Health & Wellbeing – Brook](#)

[Lucy Faithfull Foundation - Preventing child sexual abuse](#)

How and when to respond?

We have a duty to respond to the needs of children. We must ensure we do not forget victims, especially as they may not need the intervention from children's services but from other services.

When the needs are complex or acute we have a duty to respond and offer a proportionate service, intervention and response.

When behaviours are identified as Harmful this is an **ACUTE Needs**. **Appropriate safety planning** may reduce the immediate risk, but we should remain involved until an assessment is completed and agreed level of intervention

COMPLEX NEEDS

ACUTE NEEDS

DISPLAYED BEHAVIOURS (1.3.4)

The child/young person is involved in harmful behaviours or exhibits persistent aggressive, bullying or destructive behaviours which impact on others and places them at risk of exclusion from mainstream services or criminality.

The child/young person exhibits harmful behaviours, persistently aggressive, bullying or destructive behaviour which places themselves or others at risk of significant harm and impacts on the health/safety of others.

RELATIONSHIPS (1.5.3)

One or both children or young people is/are in a physically, emotionally abusive or coercive and controlling relationship.

The perpetrator/s show limited or no commitment to changing their behaviour and little or no understanding of the impact of their violence/abuse on the other person.

One or both children or young people is/are a perpetrator/s of persistent and/or serious physical or sexual violence or coercive and controlling behaviour which may also be increasing in severity, frequency, or duration.

This places either one or both parties at risk of significant harm.

SEXUAL ABUSE / SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (2.2.6)

There are concerns that the child/young person is exposed to inappropriate sexual behaviour (including online).

There are concerns that the child/young person is being groomed and parents/carers do not understand the risks or are not being protective.

An allegation (this could be current or historic) that the child has been sexually abused by a parents/carers/member of the extended family which requires investigation under Section 47 of the Children Act.

The family home is used for drug taking and or dealing, prostitution and illegal activities.

Effective
support
document

New HSB referral process for Partners

1. Identified needs to be assessed using the EHA and Brook traffic light tool/Lucy Faithfull traffic light tool, to consider sexualised behaviours in a holistic context
2. If needs identified are complex or acute the request to be submitted to Somerset Direct for Family Front Door for review and triage
3. FFD to determine most appropriate service to respond for assessment (within CSC)
4. IF does not meet threshold step down plan agreed by FFD

Following assessment:

- If harmful behaviours are identified the assessing team to identify a resource to complete an AIM 3 assessment
- Case should remain open based on need and impact during assessment/intervention and not closed while harmful and impactful problematic behaviours are present
- If appropriate, normal step up/down pathways should be followed for all teams

New HSB process (Internal)

If Sexualised Behaviours are identified within your case:

1. Discuss in supervision, complete Brook traffic light tool/Lucy Faithfull traffic light tool and apply threshold
2. If escalating, problematic or harmful this requires a targeted safeguarding response
3. Consider need for an AIM 3 assessment for harmful behaviours
4. If an AIM 3 assessment is required consult with the HSB Lead and agree internal resource/ allocation with OM
5. Unless in exceptional circumstances, the AIM 3 assessor should not be the allocated worker
6. AIM 3 assessments require 2 people to complete, the second worker does not have to be trained, could be the allocated worker if in the best interests of the child.
7. An HSB trained supervisor must be allocated to over see the work and complete AIM 3 supervision

Resources to support:

Tools and resources:

[Somerset-Harmful-Sexual-Behaviour-Protocol-2023 December.pdf](#)
(somersetsafeguardingchildren.org.uk)

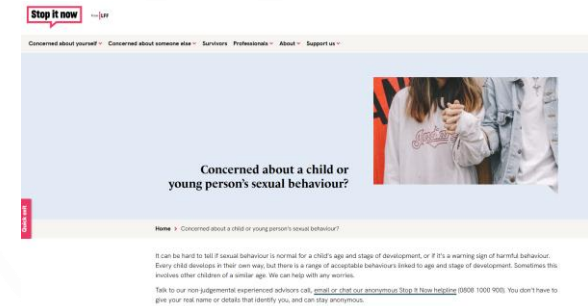
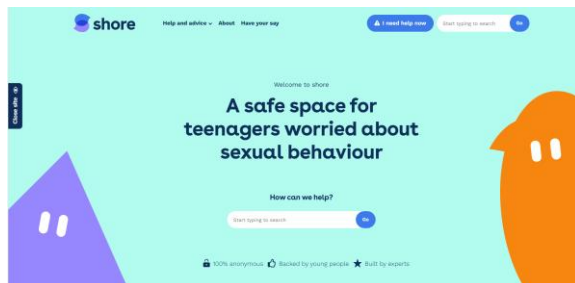
[Research & Resources — VictimFocus](#)

[Home – Shore](#)

Government guidance: [Offending behaviour programmes and interventions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

NICE Guidelines: [Harmful sexual behaviour among children and young people \(nice.org.uk\)](#)

[Children and young people who display harmful sexual behaviour | CSA Centre](#)



Resources for Families/Parents:

[Worried about a young person or child's sexual behaviour - Stop It Now](#)

[Understanding Sexual Behaviour in Children | NSPCC](#)



Resources to support:

Prevention: (Green and amber)

[Worried about a young person or child's sexual behaviour - Stop It Now](#)

[Understanding Sexual Behaviour in Children | NSPCC](#)

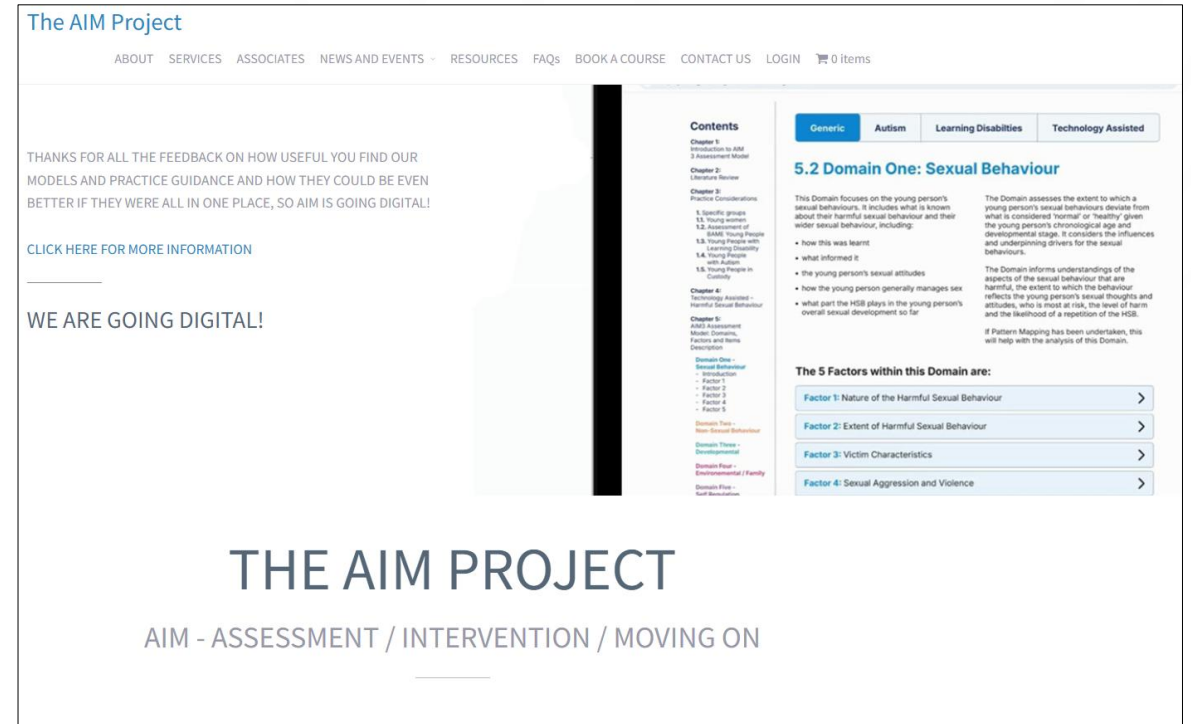
[Harmful sexual behaviour \(HSB\) or peer-on-peer sexual abuse | NSPCC Learning Change for Good | Harmful sexual behaviour \(HSB\) intervention | NSPCC Learning](#)

NICE Guidelines: [Harmful sexual behaviour among children and young people \(nice.org.uk\)](#)

[How to tell if a child's sexual behaviour is appropriate for their age - Stop It Now interventions-for-harmful-sexual-behaviour-safety-plans-and-direct-work.pdf \(proceduresonline.com\)](#)

Harmful: (Red)

[The AIM Project – The AIM Project](#)



The AIM Project

ABOUT SERVICES ASSOCIATES NEWS AND EVENTS RESOURCES FAQs BOOK A COURSE CONTACT US LOGIN 0 items

THANKS FOR ALL THE FEEDBACK ON HOW USEFUL YOU FIND OUR MODELS AND PRACTICE GUIDANCE AND HOW THEY COULD BE EVEN BETTER IF THEY WERE ALL IN ONE PLACE, SO AIM IS GOING DIGITAL!

CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFORMATION

WE ARE GOING DIGITAL!

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5.2 Domain One: Sexual Behaviour

This Domain focuses on the young person's sexual behaviours. It includes what is known about their harmful sexual behaviour and their wider sexual behaviour, including:

- how this was learnt
- what informed it
- the young person's sexual attitudes
- how the young person generally manages sex
- what part the HSB plays in the young person's overall sexual development so far

The Domain assesses the extent to which a young person's sexual behaviours deviate from what is considered 'normal' or 'healthy' given the young person's chronological age and developmental stage. It considers the influences and underpinning drivers for the sexual behaviours.

The Domain informs understandings of the aspects of the sexual behaviour that are harmful, the extent to which the behaviour reflects the young person's sexual thoughts and attitudes, who is most at risk, the level of harm and the likelihood of a repetition of the HSB.

If Pattern Mapping has been undertaken, this will help with the analysis of this Domain.

The 5 Factors within this Domain are:

- Factor 1: Nature of the Harmful Sexual Behaviour
- Factor 2: Extent of Harmful Sexual Behaviour
- Factor 3: Victim Characteristics
- Factor 4: Sexual Aggression and Violence

THE AIM PROJECT

AIM - ASSESSMENT / INTERVENTION / MOVING ON