It’s important for health practitioners to be able to distinguish normal sexual behaviours from those that may be inappropriate, problematic or harmful, and make sure children get the appropriate support. Use this guide alongside the resources at nsppcc.org.uk/hsbhealth to help you decide what kind of sexualised behaviour a young person is displaying, and respond in the right way.

### How to respond

**Normal**
- Developmentally expected and socially acceptable behaviour
- Consensual, mutual and reciprocal
- Decision making is shared

**Inappropriate**
- Single instances of developmentally unusual and socially unexpected sexualised behaviour
- Behaviour that is socially acceptable within a peer group
- Generally consensual and reciprocal
- May involve an inappropriate context for behaviour that would otherwise be considered normal

**Problematic**
- 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

**Abusive**
- Intrusive behaviour
- May involve a misuse of power
- May involve an element of victimisation
- May involve coercion and force
- May include elements of expressive violence
- Informed consent has not been given (or the victim was not able to consent freely)

**Violent**
- 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**
- Amber behaviours should not be ignored
- Listen to what children and young people have to say and respond calmly and non-judgementally
- 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 designated health safeguarding lead who can be notified and will provide support
- Consider whether the child or young person needs therapeutic support and make referrals as appropriate

Contact the NSPCC helpline on **0808 800 5000** or by emailing **help@nspcc.org.uk** for advice and support. Our trained professionals will talk through your concerns with you, give you expert advice and take action to protect the child as appropriate.

Remind children and young people they can contact Childline for free if they need confidential help and advice by calling **0800 1111** or visiting **childline.org.uk**