



# One Minute Guide



## What is Harmful Sexual Behaviour?

Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB) refers to sexual actions by children and young people that are developmentally inappropriate and may be harmful to themselves or others.

It is important to acknowledge that sexualised behaviours are often not harmful, and part of expected development, and therefore we need to understand how children and young people develop and consider the context of a situation to better determine what level of response is appropriate. Harmful Sexual Behaviours include both contact and non-contact behaviours (in person and offline) and are equally as serious.

When considering sexually developmentally appropriate behaviours for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), we need to acknowledge and understand that behaviours can vary widely based on individual developmental stages and specific needs. Our responses must be proportionate and in line with the level of concern raised.

## Why is it Important to Address Harmful Sexual Behaviours

Addressing Harmful Sexual Behaviour is crucial to protect children and prevent behaviour from escalating. Children exhibiting Harmful Sexual Behaviour need to be treated as children, and the behaviour viewed as a concern for both the child who is harmed, and the child whose behaviour is deemed to be harmful. Although an emotive subject, carers need to be curious, measured and proportionate in their responses. However, it is important to address Harmful Sexual Behaviour in the context of the wider spectrum of healthy relationships and consent as a tool for prevention.

## Examples of Harmful Sexual Behaviour

**Physical Contact:** Unwanted touching, assault by penetration. Including assault by penetration (e.g., rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing, and touching outside of clothing

**Non-Contact Activities:** Involving others in looking at sexual images, grooming, or inappropriate sexual talk. Such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse.

## What is not Harmful Sexual Behaviour

**Exploration:** Age-appropriate exploration and curiosity about bodies.

**Consensual Behaviour:** Mutual and consensual behaviour between children of similar ages and development.

**Healthy Development:** Behaviours that are part of normal sexual development and learning about boundaries.

A significant proportion of behaviours that initially come to the attention of authorities are of lower impact in nature, involving children misjudging boundaries or contexts in terms of what is appropriate.

## What Can Parents / Carers Do?

### Prepare

Ensuring body autonomy for children is crucial for their development, self-esteem, and safety. Body autonomy refers to the right of individuals, including children, to have control over their own bodies and to make decisions about their physical selves. Parents and carers can support children's understanding and rights to autonomy by -

**Teaching Consent:** Educating children about the concept of consent from an early age. They should understand that they have the right to say "no" to unwanted physical contact and that their "no" should be respected. Examples of this include not having to give hug or kisses or being tickled. Being clear that they can say no to any behaviours that leave them feeling uncomfortable, and that this will be supported.

**Body Awareness:** Helping children learn about their bodies and the correct names for body parts. This knowledge empowers them and can also be crucial in preventing and reporting abuse. Ensure that from your child's early years you can talk openly and factually about their body and their right to feel safe.

**Listening to Children:** Listening to children's feelings and concerns about their bodies, validating/acknowledging their feelings and encouraging them to share their thoughts. Ensure that children are aware of who they can share any worries, wishes or feelings and encourage them to have a network of varied but trusted adults with who they can do this.

**Respecting Privacy:** Respecting children's privacy and teach them to respect the privacy of others. Examples of this include knocking before entering their rooms and allowing them privacy when dressing or using the bathroom. If you are an adult providing persona; care to a child, ensure you follow your organisations guidance to this, involving the child in the process according to their age and stage of development.

**Providing Information:** Ensure children have access to age-appropriate information about their bodies, relationships, and sexual health. This can include formal education programs in schools as well as informal discussions at home at a factual and age-appropriate level.

**Being Informed:** Keeping up to date with information to support children in your care and the wider context of abuse,

### Respond

Should a child share worries with you, do your best to remain calm and be without judgement. Be clear in telling them that they have acted bravely and correctly in telling someone about their experiences.

Clarify the concerns by repeating back what you've heard, be mindful not to lead, or ask too many questions, instead ask what happened next. Be clear that worries will have to be shared and confidentiality is not possible. Explain what will happen next and how they will be kept safe.

Determine whether the behaviour was harmful, taking advice from school, or other agencies if needed.

Make appropriate steps to inform police, school, other agencies.

### Where can I go to get further Information?

Parents and Carers can keep up to date on the progress of the implementation of changes via the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NYSCP) business unit. Any updates will be shared with you via the monthly NYSCP e-bulletin which can be accessed here [NYSCP \(safeguardingchildren.co.uk\)](https://safeguardingchildren.co.uk)

The North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NYSCP) parents & carers section can be accessed here - [NYSCP \(safeguardingchildren.co.uk\)](https://safeguardingchildren.co.uk)  
[Support & advice for parents | NSPCC](#)

### Other Useful Resources

Please see the NYSCP Sexualised Behaviours Toolkit and Strategy at the NYSCP website.