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AN OVERVIEW OF HEALTHY CHILDHOOD SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

Stage of development	Common behaviors	Encouraging healthy development
Infancy (Ages 0-2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curiosity about their bodies that can include genitals • Touching their genitals • No inhibitions regarding nudity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach correct names for body parts such as penis and vagina • Help children begin to understand how to interact respectfully with peers of the same age
Early Childhood (Ages 2-5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occasional stimulation of genitals (masturbation). Focus more soothing behavior rather than any sexual connotation. • Consensual and playful exploration with children of the same age including games such as dr-dr or house-house • May ask questions about reproduction • May show curiosity in regard to adult bodies • Continued lack of inhibition regarding nudity • May use slang terms for body parts or bodily functions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide basic simple answers to questions about body, body functions and reproduction; • Encourage basic understanding of privacy and when things are appropriate vs inappropriate; • Explain the differences between wanted and unwanted touch • Promote choices and teach boundaries. Let children know that their bodies belongs to them and that they can say no to unwanted touch.
Middle childhood (Ages 5-8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued use of slang words, potty humor or jokes to describe body parts and functions • Deeper understanding of gender roles. May act more gendered mannered as expected behaviors and norms associated with gender are learned • Activities that explore bodies may occur with same and opposite sex friends • Stimulation (masturbation) of the genitals may still occur although more often privately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote solid understanding of gender and how children experience their gender identity • Depending on emotional maturity and questions may need to explain the basics of human reproduction • Enforce boundaries and privacy • Educate on personal rights and responsibilities also related to sexuality (treating everyone equal, respect ext)



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<p>Late Childhood (Ages 9-12)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As puberty begins an increase need for privacy and independence is often expressed • May express curiosity about adult bodies • May express curiosity about sexual intimacy and reproduction • As social norms and boundaries become clearer, stimulation of genitals (masturbation) are likely to occur in private 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information about the physical aspects of puberty and changes in their bodies; • Educate children on the social and emotional aspects of puberty. Normalize emotions and needs they may be experiencing • Provide age-appropriate sexuality information and basic information about sexual behavior and sexually transmitted infections • Encourage critical thinking and building skills to differentiate fact from fiction in media images and representations of sexuality • Support them in understanding that they have both rights and responsibilities • Encourage healthy friendships with the opposite sex.
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Behavior falling within healthy sexual development has the following characteristics:

- Playful, curious, mutual consent with the focus on age-appropriate exploration;
- With a child of similar age and development and not with a much older or much younger child;
- No threat, intimidation, bribery or aggression involved;
- Occurs occasionally and does not interfere with other activities or developmental tasks;
- When boundaries are placed on the behavior or adults ask children to stop they usually do and the behavior decrease;
- Behavior does not cause any physical or emotional harm to self or others.



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