

## Problematic Sexual Behaviour of Children and Young People

In addition to the risk posed by adults within an organisation, research undertaken by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse suggests that children and young people may experience sexual assault from children and young people.

‘Problematic sexual behaviour’ is a broad term used to describe the sexual behaviour of children and young people that is not age appropriate in its nature, frequency and persistence.

### PROBLEMATIC SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

Problematic sexual behaviour is defined as sexual activity by and between children and young people that involves:

- coercion, bribery, aggression, manipulative or secretive behaviour or violence
- behaviour that is not appropriate to the age and/or developmental capability of the child or young person
- compulsive, excessive, forceful, threatening and/or degrading behaviour
- a substantial difference in age, developmental ability or power between participants (DECS 2013).

It is worth noting that some children who demonstrate problematic sexual behaviour may have experienced abuse.

For example, the behaviour of a 3-year-old child who takes off his clothes at playgroup is consistent with the child’s age and stage of development and is not concerning. By contrast, the behaviour of a 12-year-old who uses aggression and threats to engage others in sexual activity during youth group activities is concerning and requires action.

### USEFUL QUESTIONS

Some useful questions to consider in determining whether you have a duty of care to act. If the answer to any of the following questions is ‘yes’, it is important to act:

- Is the behaviour a concern to others?
- Does the behaviour provide a potential risk to the child?
- Does the behaviour provide a potential risk to others?
- Does the behaviour interfere with the child’s relationships?
- Is the behaviour against the law?
- Is the behaviour against organisational policy?
- Is the behaviour life threatening?

A child or young person who demonstrates problematic sexual behaviour requires support and therapeutic intervention. Clergy, employees and volunteers are required to follow the reporting process if a child or young person engages in harmful sexual behaviour to ensure the child or young person and their family is assisted and others are not placed at risk and/or experience harm.

### USEFUL RESOURCES

Kids First provides useful information sheets for parents and carers of children and young people displaying problematic sexual behaviour.

[www.kidsfirstaustralia.org.au/page/83/childhood-trauma-therapy](http://www.kidsfirstaustralia.org.au/page/83/childhood-trauma-therapy)

## Problematic Sexual Behaviour of Children and Young People

Kids First also runs the Therapeutic Trauma Program for children under the age of 18 who have experienced sexual abuse; children under the age of 10 who have displayed problematic sexualised behaviours; and young people aged 10–17 who have engaged in sexually abusive behaviour.

Phone: 9450 0900

Email: [intake@kidsfirstaustralia.org.au](mailto:intake@kidsfirstaustralia.org.au)

The Raising Children Network provides guidance for responding to children and young people who are engaging in problematic sexual behaviour.

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/development/sexual-development/concerned-about-sexual-behaviour#where-to-get-help-for-concerning-childhood-sexual-behaviour-nav-title>

### REFERENCES

DECS [Department of Education and Children's Services (SA)] 2013, rev., Responding to problem sexual behaviour in children and young people: Guidelines for staff in education and care settings.



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE  
OF MELBOURNE

Version 1: July 2019  
Safeguarding Unit  
[safeguardingunit@cam.org.au](mailto:safeguardingunit@cam.org.au)

*The Archdiocese of Melbourne is committed to the safety, wellbeing and dignity  
of all children, young people and vulnerable adults.*