



# PSYCHOSEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

## Sexuality and development

There is a wide range of sexualized behaviours in children. **These behaviours are part of normal development and change with age.** You've probably seen sexualized behaviours in your child before.

Some stages **are defined according to the age group and the child's level of development.** These stages allow adults who work with children to have a better understanding of their needs and concerns.

The characteristics of children's psychosexual development **must be known and considered** to ensure that the young person is not assigned concerns that do not belong to them or, on the contrary, infantilize them.

They also make it possible to **distinguish between normal or problematic behaviour**, whether the behaviour takes place individually or with other children.



## What to expect as a parent?

Children **need proper guidance when it comes to sexuality.** Although it is not necessary to be an "expert" in the field to intervene with them, it is **important to know certain characteristics of psychosexual development.**

- **Development from 0 to 6 years old**
  - Develops awareness if he is a boy or if she is a girl
  - Looking for models to imitate
  - Curious and interested in sexual functions and reproduction
  - Discovery of the different parts of the body
  - Beginning of the feeling of modesty related to the body and sexuality
  - Can discover genitals as a new source of pleasure
  - May begin showing off their genitals and playing games (play doctor)
  - First questions about sexuality
- **Development from 6 to 8 years old**
  - Discovery of the different parts of his/her body
  - Develops awareness of the world around him/her and socializes
  - Wishes to be a little more autonomous and have more privacy (e.g. wishes to dress alone, choose own clothing)
  - Beginning of the development of moral consciousness: respect for others, collaboration, concern for others
  - Curiosity about sexual functions (conception, pregnancy and birth, etc.)
  - Wonders a lot about the «why» of things





• **Development 8 to 10 years old**

- Strong interest in physical differences between girls and boys
- Modesty associated with physical contact and nudity
- Identity consolidation
- Importance of same-sex group of friends
- Susceptible to gender stereotypes
- Beginning of the development of secondary sexual characteristics for some

• **Development 10 to 12 years old**

- Beginning of physical, psychological and emotional puberty changes
- Curiosity and embarrassment about sexuality
- Several concerns about puberty changes and the concept of normality
- Development of new interests (friends, celebrities, new technologies, etc.)
- Notion of modesty and more importantly intimacy
- First love and awakening of sexual attraction

• **Development 12 to 14+ years old**

- Develops their own way of expressing one's femininity or masculinity
- Desire for acceptance and the connection with others (conformism and loyalty)
- Importance of friends and desire for proximity (friends, lovers)
- Questions about identity (Who am I?)
- Tendency to test limits and authority figures (parents, teachers, stakeholders)
- Growing interest in seduction, romantic relationships and sexual practices
- Often, deliberate contact with pornography

**Sexual behaviours: when do I need to worry?**

Normally, behaviors are healthy when carried out between children of the same age group, cause pleasant sensations and emotions, meet a need for curiosity, exploration and pleasure.

Sexual exploration is a healthy behavior that allows the child to discover who he/she is, what he/she feels and what he/she likes.

Depending on his/her experience, a child can learn to translate his/her anxieties, shame, guilt, fears and traumas through his/her sexuality, and thus, present worries or problematic sexual behaviours.

Problematic sexual behaviours are behaviours, of a sexual nature, manifested by a child, which are considered inappropriate according to his/her age and level of development. They can be harmful to himself/herself or to the other children involved.

Normal	Problematic sexual behaviours	Sexual assault
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age difference acceptable (legally)</li> <li>• Consent</li> <li>• Sharing/exchange</li> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Privacy</li> <li>• Self-abandonment possible</li> <li>• Fun</li> <li>• Without guilt</li> <li>• Without fear and without unpleasant emotion</li> <li>• Desire (I want and I feel like)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difference +/- 2 years</li> <li>• Behaviour outside the healthy stage of development</li> <li>• Confusion, shame, guilt</li> <li>• Concept of secrecy</li> <li>• Threats, blackmail, coercion</li> <li>• Physical pleasure for the child presenting the behaviors</li> <li>• Persistent despite the limitations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age (illegal difference)</li> <li>• Abuse of power</li> <li>• Coercion</li> <li>• Use of force, threat, blackmail, etc.</li> <li>• Meets the needs of the aggressor</li> <li>• May provoke unpleasant emotions in the victim (emptiness, disgust, guilt, fear, anger, etc.)</li> </ul>



**RESOURCES**



[www.marie-vincent.org](http://www.marie-vincent.org)

**Foundation Marie-Vincent:** 514 362-6226

**Services for families and professionals:** 514 285-0505

**Expertise Center Marie-Vincent**

Helps children aged 12 and under who are victims of sexual assault, as well as their parents or loved ones. The mission is to develop cutting-edge expertise in child sexual abuse. To do this, the centre combines police, medical, psychosocial and socio-judicial services with the existing fields of knowledge and research. The centre also offers services to children with problematic sexual behaviours.

