

Sexualised behaviour in schools

Identifying concerns and supporting those involved.

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September 2022

def·i·ni·tion

/ defə|niSH(ə)n /

noun: a statement of the exact meaning of a word.

Problematic or harmful sexual behaviours can be defined as any behaviour of a sexual nature expressed by children under 18 years old that:

- Is outside of what is culturally accepted as typical sexual development and expression*
- Is obsessive, coercive, aggressive, degrading, violent or causes harm to the child or others*
- Involves a substantial difference in age or developmental ability of participants (derived from Evertsz & Miller, 2012; Hackett, Holmes & Branigan, 2016)*

NSPCC Learning – Harmful sexual behaviour: labelling actions, not children

Key points to take away

Talking about harmful sexual behaviour rather than young 'abusers', 'child-on-child sexual abuse' or 'peer-on-peer sexual abuse' may:

- draw attention to the harm the behaviour is causing to the child displaying HSB, as well as the person it is directed towards
- prompt professionals to consider the reasons behind the harmful behaviour
- help both the child and the professionals working with them recognise that their behaviour can change over time
- help the child displaying HSB to receive the child protection response they need.

Healthy Sexual Behaviours are...

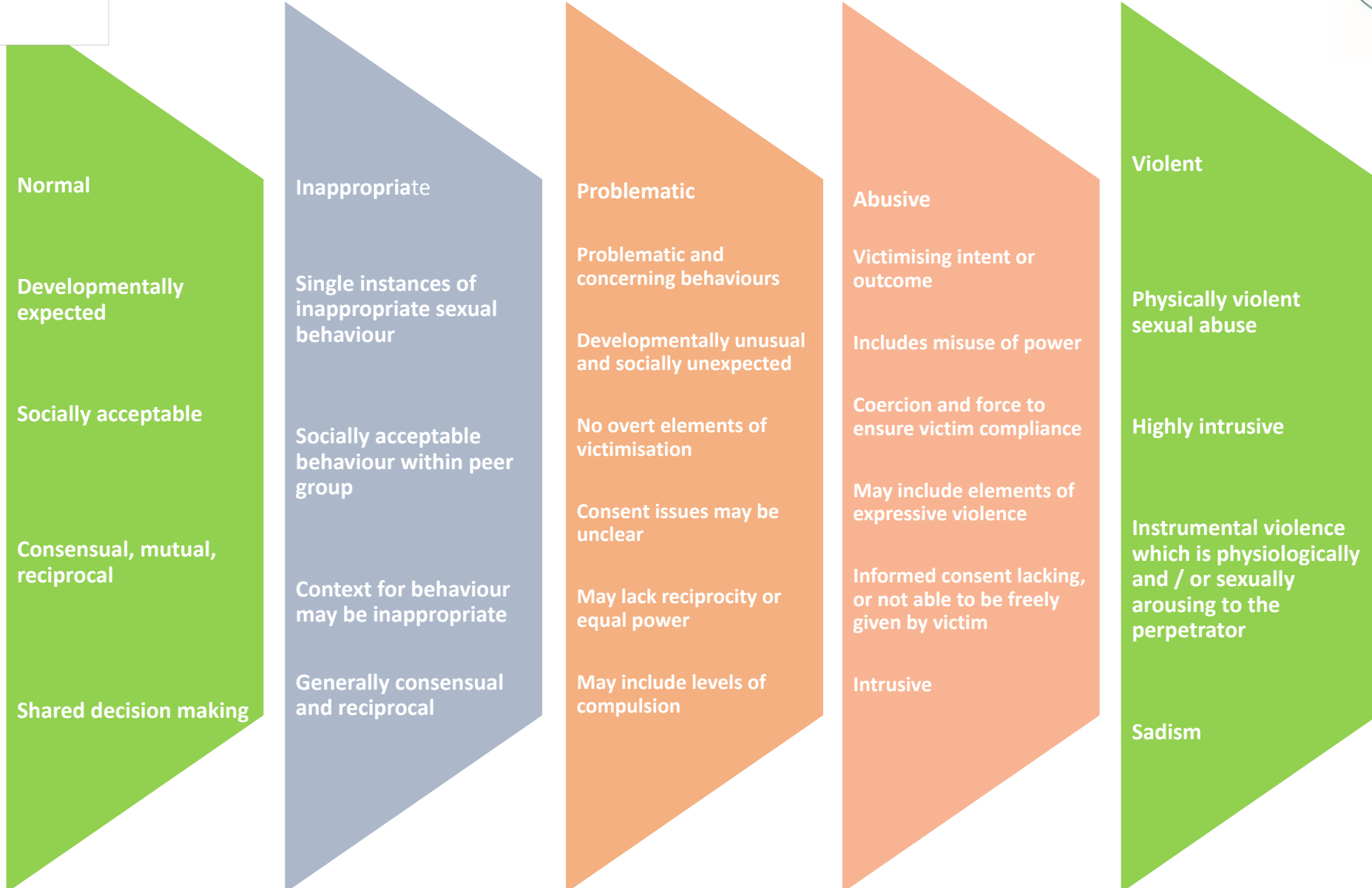
- Mutual
- Consensual
- Choice
- Exploratory
- No intent to cause harm
- Fun
- No power differentials
- <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-health-development/healthy-sexual-development-children-young-people#heading-top>

What is harmful sexual behaviour?

Could distinguish between:

- **Contact behaviours** *e.g. touching, masturbation, penetration*
- **Non-contact behaviours** *e.g. grooming, exhibitionism, voyeurism*
- **Technology assisted/online behaviours** *e.g. sexting, distributing images, accessing indecent images of children, abusing children online*

Hackett Continuum



Clarifying degree of concern



When considering how concerned to be about children or young people's sexual behaviour use the following questions to clarify your concerns.

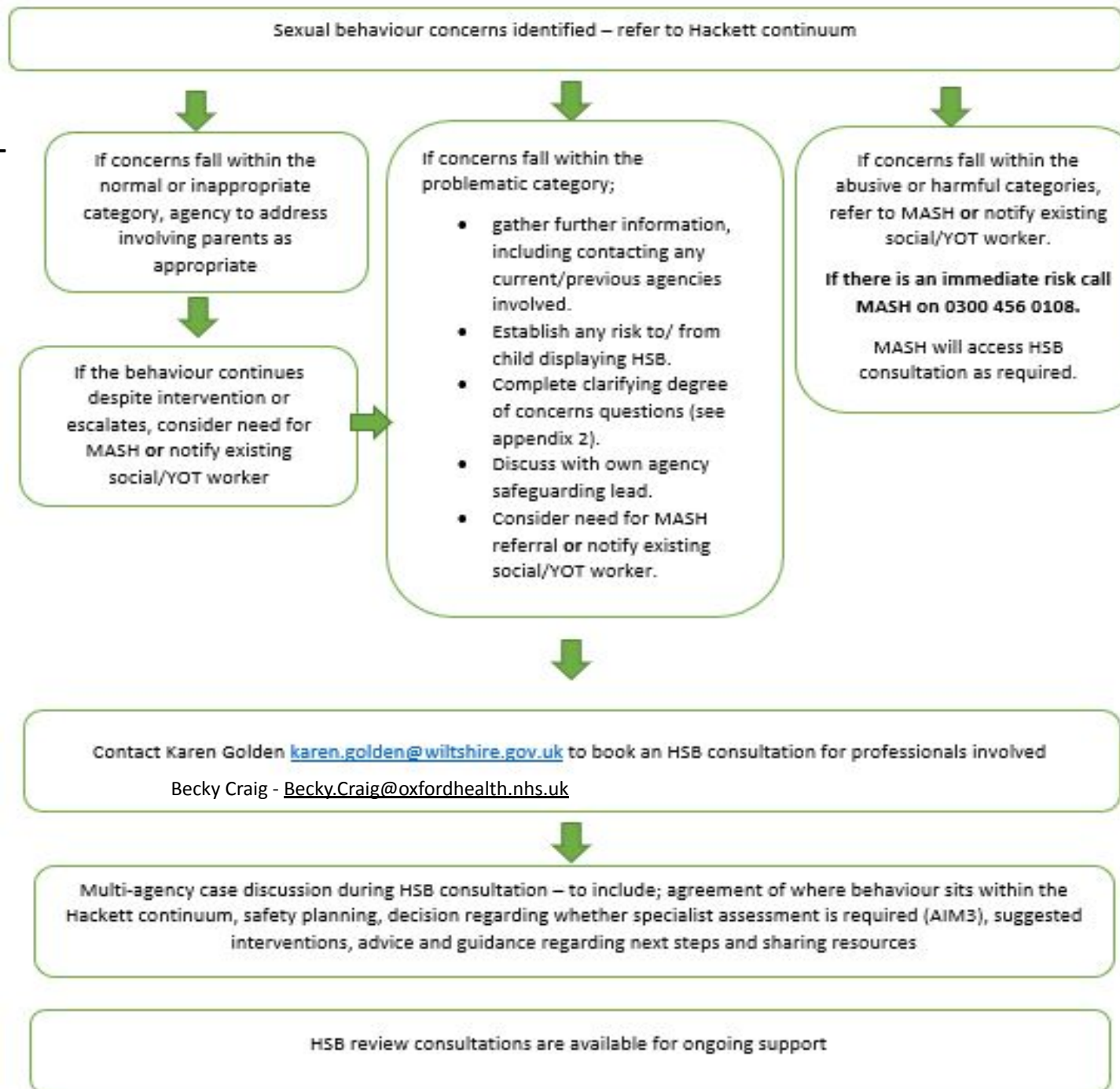
More positive responses entail greater concern, since the harm for both the child carrying out the behaviour and any one experiencing the behaviour is likely to be more significant.

If there are immediate / ongoing significant risks for the child experiencing the behaviour, the child displaying the behaviour and / or any other child in the network refer to MASH immediately.

1. Is the behaviour occurring more often than would normally be expected for the developmental stage?
2. Is the behaviour getting in the way of the child's development? In what ways, and to what degree (be specific)?
3. Did or does the child use coercion, intimidation or force in the process of carrying out the sexual behaviour?
4. Were or are any of the children involved emotionally distressed by what has happened?
5. Did or does the behaviour occur between children of divergent ages or developmental abilities?
6. Has the behaviour persisted even after intervention from staff or caregivers?

Wiltshire Harmful Sexual Behaviour Protocol – October 2021

Wiltshire Safeguarding Vulnerable People Partnership (SVPP) - Policies and guidance (wiltshiresvpp.org.uk)



Understanding the function of the behaviour

Understanding this from the child's perspective helps to identify how this need can be met in a safer way.

- What need could this behaviour be meeting?
- What is the child trying to communicate?
- Potential needs might be:
 - Sexual
 - Attachment seeking
 - Curiosity
 - To elicit a certain response
 - Communicating experiences

Safety planning

Education is a key protective factor for C/YP who have displayed HSB and it is important that continuity of education provision is promoted, with individualised support as needed. A multi-agency approach is required to ensure risk is managed and support is put in place within school to reduce the likelihood of further concerns and to enable the C/YP to remain in the school in a safe manner.

- Collaborative safety planning with the child and their parents/carers is best practice in prompting meaningful engagement with the plan – include positive behaviours
- External controls may be needed to promote the safety of all involved.
 - Identify trusted adults and safe spaces to support the child/ren displaying the behaviour and the child/ren experiencing the behaviour
 - Parent / carer to accompany the child into school and collect them at the end of the day
 - Consider appropriate restrictions relating to technology
 - Adapt time-tables
 - Increased supervision at required times / places (break times, transition times, toilets, class room)

Resources available

- [Harmful sexual behaviour \(HSB\) or peer-on-peer sexual abuse | NSPCC Learning](#)
- [Harmful sexual behaviour framework | NSPCC Learning](#)
- [Beyond Referrals Toolkit- Schools | Contextual Safeguarding](#)
- [Preventing harmful sexual behaviour in children - Stop It Now](#)
- [Careageous Kids: Keeping your Body Safe; Colouring Workbook - Free Social Work Tools and Resources: SocialWorkersToolbox.com](#)
- [My body is mine - A coloring & read-with-me book for safety smart kids - Free Social Work Tools and Resources: SocialWorkersToolbox.com](#)