

2018



Youth with Problematic Sexual Behaviors:  
**A RESOURCE GUIDE**  
for Foster Families

## OVERVIEW

This guide offers helpful information for caregivers of youth with problematic sexual behaviors.

Sexual development starts at birth and continues over time. There are some sexual behaviors that are NORMAL. Children are curious and exploring is a normal part development. Some sexual behaviors can be problematic. Behaviors are problematic when they happen often and/or are harmful to the youth involved.

Youth with problematic sexual behaviors often need more skills (Silovsky, Ciesar, Ralston, & Day, 2018). Many caregivers know to teach children how to read and do math. Caregivers may not know that it is also important to teach kids about healthy relationships and sexuality.

Caregivers of foster youth with problematic sexual behaviors often feel overwhelmed and fear that their licenses will be threatened by these behaviors. This resource guide was developed to address these fears and to prevent unnecessary placement changes.

\*The term "caregivers" includes parents, guardians and foster caregivers.

# What's the difference?

## HOW DO WE KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PROBLEMATIC AND NORMAL SEXUAL BEHAVIOR?

Normal sexual play happens every once in a while. It also happens when youth are curious. The behavior might be problematic if it happens often or it takes up a lot of the youth's time. Normal sexual play often seems "out of the blue", or unplanned. Sexual behaviors may be problematic if youth put more thought or planning into the action. Normal sexual play is not forceful or threatening. When sexual behaviors include force or threats, they are considered problematic. Normal sexual play occurs between youth of similar ages, sizes and development. Gaps in age, size and development can mean that the sexual behavior is problematic.



*When things happen, especially with kids that you've known for a while, it just feels so personal. It's not personal. It's not.*

- Foster Caregiver

Finding out about a child's sexual behaviors can be upsetting for caregivers. It is common for caregivers to feel many strong emotions such as: shock, anger, confusion, shame, denial and many more (Silovsky, 2009). Caregivers may also feel alone.

# Myth or Fact?

**Myth:** Problematic sexual behaviors are caused by sexual urges.

**Fact:** Problematic sexual behaviors among youth are NOT usually caused by sexual urges (Silovsky, 2009).

**Myth:** Problematic sexual behaviors are caused by childhood sexual abuse.

**Fact:** Childhood sexual abuse is a risk factor for problematic sexual behaviors. MOST children with problematic sexual behaviors have never been sexually abused (Allen, 2017).

**Myth:** Youth with problematic sexual behaviors will act out sexually when they are adults.

**Fact:** With care and treatment, most youth with problematic sexual behaviors do NOT act out sexually when they are adults (Caldwell, 2016).

## FACTS ABOUT PROBLEMATIC SEXUAL BEHAVIORS

One third of all sexual offenses against children are committed by other youth. A quarter of sexual offenses committed by youth are with family members (Silovsky et al., 2018). Youth often act out sexually with children they know and see often such as siblings, friends, classmates or neighbors (Silovsky et al., 2018). Children from all different races, genders, families and backgrounds can have problematic sexual behaviors (Silovsky, 2009).

### **Risk Factors for problematic sexual behaviors:**

- History of abuse or neglect
- Living in an unsafe home or community
- Seeing sexual acts such as viewing pornography or witnessing other youth or adults do sexual things
- Lack of supervision in the home (Silovsky, et al., 2018)

**GOOD NEWS:** Studies show that only a very small percentage of youth with problematic sexual behaviors act out sexually again.

# WHAT WE CAN DO

## Sexual Behavior Rules

Caregivers can teach youth the following sexual behavior rules:

- 1** It's not okay to look at other people's private parts.
- 2** It's not okay to show other people your private parts.
- 3** It's not okay to touch other people's private parts.
- 4** It is okay to touch your own private parts as long as you are in private and do not take too much time.
- 5** It's not okay to use sexual language or gestures.

(Parents, n.d.)

# Impulse Control Skills

Many youth with problematic sexual behaviors have a hard time controlling their impulses. Caregivers can help youth control their impulses by teaching them three simple steps: Stop, Think and Act.



## STOP

It is easier to make good decisions when we STOP and take a breath.



## THINK

Once we have stopped, we now have time to THINK about our options and ask some important questions. Is what I'm thinking about doing going to break a rule? Will my actions hurt someone else? What will happen if I do this?



## ACT

After thinking about all our options, we pick the best choice and DO IT!

# SUPERVISION

## LINE OF SIGHT SUPERVISION

Supervising youth closely is one of the best ways to prevent problematic sexual behaviors.

Line of sight supervision is the act of keeping youth with problematic sexual behaviors where you can see them at all times. Line of sight supervision allows caregivers to watch their children's behaviors with other youth and their use of technology.

Line of sight supervision is hard. Caregivers have many duties, and homes are full of activity. We encourage caregivers to keep trying line of sight supervision so that all children can be kept safe.

## KEEPING AN EYE ON TECHNOLOGY

Technology makes it easy find sexual material. Extra supervision also means seeing which sites children see on their devices. Devices that connect to the internet such as cell phones, tablets, computers and gaming consoles should be closely watched. Caregivers can also talk to youth about how to protect their passwords and identities. These discussions can be a great way to start talking with youth about what to do when they see or find sexual material.

# SEXTING

Sexting is sharing or sending sexual photos, videos or messages. It is common for youth to sext each other. However, caregivers can help youth understand what could happen if they send or receive a sext.

- **Sexual posts can remain on the internet forever.** Even if a post looks like it is deleted, many websites keep permanent records.
- **Privacy is not guaranteed.** You cannot control who sees or shares a sexual photo, video or message after it is sent. Sharing a sexual post can be done with a few simple clicks.
- **Sexting can damage relationships.** Relationships with friends, family or classmates can be harmed when sexual posts are shared.

Caregivers can encourage youth to STOP and THINK before they send a sexual video or message.

## HELP CHILDREN ASK THEMSELVES THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- Would I want my caregivers to see this?
- Would I feel comfortable sharing this with the entire school?
- Is this how I want to remember myself? (Child Sexual Abuse Collaborative Group, NCTSN, 2010)

Caregivers can also use apps to see what youth do, see or say on the internet or with other people. Apps are helpful but talking with youth about their technology use is the best way to keep youth safe.



# PORNOGRAPHY

It is hard for youth to **avoid** seeing pornography, even if they are not looking for it.

## PORNOGRAPHY IS:

Pornography uses makeup and other tools to make bodies look unrealistic.

Pornography often shows women being hurt.

Pornography makes some sex acts look normal even though many people are not comfortable doing them.

## PORNOGRAPHY IS NOT:

Pornography is not like real life.

Pornography does not promote consent or healthy relationships.

Pornography is not the same as sex education.

Youth who watch pornography may try to copy the sexual acts they have seen. Youth may also think that human bodies, sexuality and relationships look like the ones in these videos. These thoughts may make youth feel lonely, shameful, secretive and depressed (“What’s the Issue?,” 2014).

## WHAT CAREGIVERS CAN DO



**Education:** Caregivers can teach youth about the human body and healthy relationships. Caregivers can also help youth know the difference between pornography and real life.

**Respect in relationships:** Caregivers can help youth realize that healthy relationships include respect and consent.

**Thoughtful Viewers:** Caregivers can help youth make thoughtful choices about what they do or do not view.

# CONNECTION



*That's what keeps foster parents going in knowing that they're making a difference and knowing that the things that they're doing are working.*

- Foster Caregiver

## **WAYS TO ENCOURAGE CONNECTION:**

Work together to identify activities you enjoy doing as a family. Explore the possibility of skydiving or other exciting activities. Imagine Mom jumping out of an airplane! Less dramatic options are also worth exploring. Taking family walks, having family movie nights and sharing other enjoyable activities can make families feel more connected and reduce the possibility of problematic sexual behaviors.

**GOOD NEWS!** Problematic sexual behaviors are typically time-limited and can be resolved. With focused care and support, youth and families affected by problematic sexual behaviors can move on to lead safe and full lives.

**IT'S THE HARDEST THING  
YOU'LL EVER DO.**

**YEAH. AND IT'S ALSO  
THE MOST REWARDING.**

- Foster Caregivers

# Resources

## Problematic Sexual Behaviors

<http://www.ncsby.org/>

<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/understanding-and-coping-sexual-behavior-problems-children-information-parents-and>

<http://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/sites/default/files/downloads/2017-PSB-Fact-Sheet-Caregivers-1.pdf>

<http://www.saferociety.org/foundation/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/03/Taking-Action-Children-Web.pdf>

## Sexual Development and Behavior

<https://www.oumedicine.com/docs/ad-pediatrics-workfiles/sexdevbehavnctsnncsby2009.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

## Safe Technology Use & Oversight

<http://www.netsmartz.org/Home>

<http://www.athinline.org/>

## Apps Caregivers Have Found Helpful

- Net Nanny
- Secure Teen
- Our Pact
- Covenant Eyes
- Life 360
- MMGuardian Parent App

## Pornography

<https://fightthenewdrug.org/overview/>

<http://www.itstimewetalked.com.au/>

<https://www.nofap.com/about/>

## Sex Education

<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/parents/sex-and-sexuality>

<http://answer.rutgers.edu/>

<https://amaze.org/>

<http://www.iwannaknow.org/>

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/parents/>

## REFERENCES

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The logo for MOCOSA (Metropolitan Organization to Counter Sexual Assault) features the word "MOCOSA" in a large, bold, blue, distressed font. The letters are thick and have a rough, hand-painted appearance with some white highlights and shadows, giving it a sense of strength and resilience.

Metropolitan Organization to Counter Sexual Assault

3100 Broadway, Suite 400, Kansas City, MO 64111  
[www.mocsa.org](http://www.mocsa.org) • 24-Hour Crisis Line 816-531-0233