

Developmentally age expected sexualised behaviour





Sexualised Behaviour

Tamariki (children) may engage in and **explore** sexualised play and behaviour from a young age

Sexualised play/behaviour is a developmentally **healthy aspect** of growing and learning about their bodies and **playing safely**

It is important for parents/caregivers to **support** and give **guidance** to **tamariki** about their body, healthy touch and playing safely

Safe, calm and clear **pakeke** (adult) responses when incidents of sexualised play and behaviour occur are important as it gives guidance and supports **tamariki** to **understand** the rules about **safe touch** and how to **play safely** with others

It is important to acknowledge and **respect differences** in **whānau** dynamics, **context & values**

A **tamaiti** (child) may have learned about **sexual knowledge** or behaviour from a range of people, peers & situations

The following are some **guidelines** to help parents/caregivers and **whānau** appreciate the range of developmentally age appropriate sexualised behaviour that **tamariki** may engage in

Please note the following resource is a guide. Individual circumstances need to be considered



Age 0 – 2 years

Tamariki at this stage have intense curiosity about the world around them and about their bodies.

Touching their own sexual body parts normally begins in early infancy and continues through the pre-school years as a self-soothing behaviour. During this time **tamariki** are generally not discrete and touch themselves in front of others.

Behaviours may include:

- Touching own genitals when nappies are being changed
- Exploring differences between genders
- Curious touching of the genitals and breasts of familiar **pakeke** and **tamariki**
- Interest in watching people doing toilet and bathroom functions
- Interest in doing and watching breast-feeding
- Interest in own faeces
- Likes to be nude and run around with no clothes on
- Looking at own genitals in bath or when getting changed
- If verbal, talking about differences between sexual body parts e.g. "mummy has breasts", "Daddy has a penis"
- Innocently noticing differences in private parts/body parts. Interest in looking at other **tamariki** with no clothes on (e.g. in the bath, getting changed)
- Experimenting with toilet training. Proud of toilet activity. Proud to transition from nappies to underwear
- May want to change own nappy, underwear or go to toilet on own

Age 3 – 4 years

Behaviours may include:

- May touch and/or rub own genitals
- Exploring differences between bodies
- Curiosity at nudity
- Asks about genitals, breasts and babies
- Likes to be nude. May show others their genitals
- Interest in watching other people doing bathroom functions
- Interest in having a baby or how a baby is made
- May use “slang” words for bathroom functions
- Interest in own faeces and orifices
- Playing doctors and nurses, interested in looking at others bodies
- Playing house, acting out parent roles
- Interest in different positions for urinating
- Interest in the toilet behaviour of others
- May demand privacy for self when toileting
- Plays dress ups and non stereo-typical gender roles
- Sexual exploration games may begin; showing body parts to peers in a curious way- and responding to **pakeke** boundaries quickly
- May attempt to put things into their vagina or bottom – curious about orifices (nose, mouth, ears, bottom, vagina)

During this stage, sexual play is part of infants' and toddlers curiosity about the world around them as well as about their own body parts. Sexual play can be considered abnormal when curiosity becomes obsessive preoccupation, when exploration becomes reenactment of specific **pakeke** sexual activity, or when **tamariki** behaviour involves coercion toward others or injury to themselves.



Age 5 – 7 years

Behaviours may include:

- Increased peer contact, experiential interactions and inhibition
- Is likely to be more modest and less willing to expose self
- Less interested in toilet play
- Is interested in mutual investigation by different genders for practical answers to questions about body parts
- Touching own private parts and experiences pleasure from this
- Play may invite the game of “show and tell” or playing doctors and nurses
- Giggling and talking about body parts, using swear words and telling jokes



- Knows labels for sexual body parts and may use slang words such as diddle, dick, doodle, willy, boobs, titties, fanny etc
- Understanding girls and boys have different private parts
- Has limited knowledge and information about pregnancy and childbirth
- Can be not interested by or drawn to other gender
- Kissing and holding hands
- May mimic behaviours they have been exposed to on TV, social media, videos, DVDs and the internet
- Is likely to be familiar with, but much less interested in differences between sexes
- Is involved less in the game of “show me yours”
- Asks questions about sexual differences
- Drawing genitals on human figures
- Curious in looking at genitals when has opportunity e.g. bathing, showering, getting changed

Having older siblings or cousins and **whānau** will influence the level of **tamariki** knowledge. If you are the oldest sibling you may not have had so much exposure to talk and behaviour about sexuality themes, language, music etc. than if you are the youngest sibling in the **whānau**.

Age 8 – 10 years

In the lead up to puberty **tamariki** may continue to touch their own genitals, evolving into masturbation, and they become more secretive about their self-touching. Interest in viewing others' bodies continues although it changes from curiosity-seeking to game-playing. Latency-age boys also start comparing penis size. During this time **tamariki** become extremely interested in sexualised language and jokes. At around 9 and 10, **tamariki** begin seeking information about their sexuality, genitalia and their functions. Touching others' genitalia usually takes place in a game-like atmosphere and involves stroking or rubbing.

Sexual penetration, genital kissing or oral copulation, and simulated intercourse would be considered unusual at this age. (*When Children Abuse- Cunningham and MacFarlane*)

Behaviours may include:

- Learning correct names for genitals but may use slang terms
- Increased knowledge and curiosity about masturbation, intercourse and pregnancy
- Understanding the physical aspects of puberty by age 10
- Touching self and others
- Mooning or "down trou" may occur
- Kissing and exploring friendships may begin
- Rubbing genitals against objects
- Wants privacy when in bathroom changing
- Engaging in games with same-aged **tamariki** related to roles
- Talking about sex with friends, talks about having a girl/boy friend
- Showing others their genitals
- For some, periods may start
- Using slang words for bathroom functions, genitals and sex
- Navigating social media content
- Asking about genitals, intercourse, babies
- Drawing genitals on human figures with a fun, innocent, giggly intent
- Explaining differences between bodies
- Curious and taking opportunities to look at naked bodies
- Kissing familiar **pakeke** and **tamariki**
- Interest in breeding behaviour of animals



Age 10 – 12 years

Being 10–12 years old is a unique age and stage for **tamariki**. It is often referred to as the pre-teens or pre-adolescent stage. Developmentally, this age group are focused on establishing relationships with peers. It is a time when **tamariki** are curious and can begin to engage in sexual activity with peers, including kissing, exploring intimacy, and touching genitals. Another way of exploring sex and sexuality for pre-teens of all genders is self-stimulation and masturbation.

It is a developmental age and stage to notice body changes, experience puberty and awareness of physical, emotional, and sexual feelings. Body changes can create curiosity and at times, anxiety for **tamariki**, especially if they do not know what to expect. Some may also question their gender identity which can make this age and stage a difficult time.

It is an age that **tamariki** may be interested in asking or seeking knowledge and understanding of sexuality issues. There may be a curiosity in viewing others' bodies. This may be looking at images online including pornography to gain an understanding of sex and sexuality. Discovering this knowledge through social media or online information is not always the most helpful. It can be a distressing and confusing time discovering knowledge when not supported by safe **pakeke**, parents, caregivers and **whānau**. Whilst **tamariki** may not initiate conversations, **pakeke** are encouraged to create space to support and encourage **kōrero**.

Tip: Adults be prepared and unshockable! Remember there are no dumb or silly questions when **tamariki** are seeking a safe **pakeke** to talk to. Give yourself time but always get back to them with an age-appropriate and suitable explanation.

Behaviours may include:

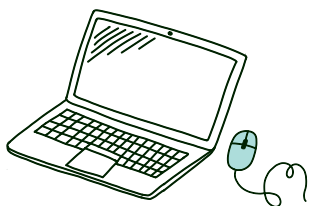
- Touching self and others (more likely in private)
- Kissing and dating
- Passionate kissing
- Is interested in sexual content in media
- Is interested in same age peers
- Is shy about undressing
- Making sexual sounds
- Self-soothing, self-stimulation and masturbation are more likely in private.
- May engage in mutual touching of each others genitals with same age peers
- Noticing sexy physical feelings
- May have crushes towards peers
- May be very private and self conscious about being naked in front of others
- Curious about whether their genitals are the same as others
- Navigating social media and explicit material
- Exploring gender identity
- Uses explicit sexual language without always know the meaning

(It is important that people are aware the legal age of consent in New Zealand is 16.)

Age 13 – 15 years

Rangatahi (adolescent) sexuality is a stage of human development in which **rangatahi** experience and explore sexual feelings. Interest in sexuality intensifies during the onset of puberty, and sexuality is often a vital aspect of teenagers' lives. In humans, sexual interest may be expressed in a number of ways, such as flirting, kissing, masturbation, or having sex with a partner. Sexual interest among **rangatahi**, as among **pakeke**, can vary greatly.

Given the brain is not fully mature until age 25 the challenge in adolescence is to make safe choices based on not only physical and sexual feelings but on emotional maturity and readiness to engage in mutual, consensual sexual behaviour. Ideally this will be supported by safe **pakeke**, parents and caregivers in the adolescents' lives. It is a developmental stage when self-control, linking consequences to behaviour, delayed gratification and risk management are not fully developed.



Behaviours may include:

- Sexual innuendo and flirting
- Masturbating in private
- Kissing, hugging, holding hands
- 'Going out' & 'Hooking up' and relationships with same age peers
- Having a crush on someone
- Sexual thoughts about same age peers
- Curiosity in looking at sexual images
- Obscenities and jokes within the cultural norm
- Reluctance to talk about bodies and sexuality issues with parents/caregivers
- Increased sense of privacy from **pakeke**
- Seeking sexual information from peers or online
- Consensual range of sexual activity with same age peer
- May choose to have exposure to R13+ material
- Making connections with the peers they are attracted to via social media
- May engage in mutual touching of each others genitals with same age peers
- Exploring gender identity

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Age 16 – 18 years

As a young **pakeke** it is very healthy to be experiencing sexual feelings and engaging in sexual behaviour both alone and with a partner. This is developmentally normal and part of being a young **pakeke**. As a **rangatahi** reaches adulthood, their relationships may begin to extend to more of the physical and sexual aspects of a growing intimate relationship. This might evolve from hugging, holding hands, and kissing to more intimate behaviour such as touching and experimenting in a range of consensual sexual behaviour. Many young **pakeke** may choose to be sexually active with same age peers at this stage and many may not. Young **pakeke** benefit from continued guidance and support in making decisions about the physical and emotional readiness of the consensual sexual behaviour they may engage in with same age peers.

Sexuality is a combination of gender, sexual feelings for others, feelings about one's self as a sexual being, sexual orientation and sexual behaviour. Exploring and discovering sexuality can be confusing, exciting, difficult and wonderful. Having support through this developmental stage is important.

Many of the behaviours from age 13-15 may continue through this developmental age and stage along with the following behaviour.

Behaviours may include:

- Seeking sexual intimacy
- Sexual explicit conversations with peers
- May choose to have exposure to R16/R18 material
- Young **pakeke** may start to develop a deeper, intimate and more **pakeke** relationship with peers that extend to include more of a longer term emotional, cognitive, physical and sexual connection
- May engage in mutual consensual sexual intercourse (or oral genital contact) with same age peer
- Develop healthy, mutual, positive sexual relationships

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