“She did WHAT?”
“He said WHAT?”

How to Respond to Children’s Sexual Behaviors

By Anne Douglass, PhD, with partial funding from the MA Department of Public Health.
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Introduction

This training presents strategies to educate and empower early childhood professionals to become more intentional about addressing sexual development and sexual abuse prevention in their work with children. Early education and care (EEC) professionals are in a unique position to promote the healthy sexual development of young children and prevent sexual abuse. EEC staff and teachers have daily contact with children and families. Research shows that sexual behaviors are common among young children both at home and in early education settings. This presents an opportunity to model responses that promote healthy development.

The learning objectives for the training include the following:

1. Understand the benefits of strengthening communication about sexual behaviors with young children and adults.

2. Identify children’s sexual behaviors on a developmental continuum, including identification of problematic behaviors.

3. Demonstrate a model for responding to sexual behaviors to promote healthy child development and prevent child sexual abuse.

This training draws upon the latest research on child sexual abuse prevention to provide new information and strategies about how to increase EEC professionals’ skills and confidence in responding proactively to issues of sexual development and sexual abuse. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, child sexual abuse has reached epidemic levels, affecting an estimated 1 in 4 girls, and 1 in 6 boys. Past prevention efforts in EEC focused largely on organizational liability and victim identification. This training will introduce the latest efforts to promote the primary prevention of victimization and to prevent the development of sexually abusive behaviors in children.

This training is structured to facilitate practical application of the “take home messages.” It utilizes adult learning principles to engage participants, build upon prior knowledge, and give participants practice translating new skills and knowledge to their own work. The training includes the use of Power Point with photos and other visual aids. Participants will engage in active learning techniques throughout the training, which will include small group problem-solving with scenarios, large group discussion, and group activities. In addition, participants will receive a list of resources to utilize when incorporating child sexual abuse prevention and healthy development strategies into their practice.
This training manual is meant to serve as a guide. You may want to present this training “as is” initially to try out the activities and content. Feel free to make modifications as needed to best reach your particular audience and to incorporate your own training style. Italics with quotes are used to indicate scripted text that serves as a model for presenting the information. The manual includes:

**Overview of Training:**
This section includes an overview of the entire training including learning objectives, materials and equipment needed, training schedule, training environment, and trainer qualifications.

**Activity descriptions:**
This training is divided into 5 activities. In this training manual, the description of each activity includes:
- Purpose of the activity
- Learning objectives
- Preparing to lead the activity
- Materials and Equipment
- Lead the activity
- Summarize and Transition to the Next Activity

**Resources & Citations:**
This is a list of additional resources that might be helpful for the trainer as they prepare to deliver the training and/or for participants.

**Handouts:**
This section includes all the materials that are distributed at the training.
Overview of Training

Learning Objectives:

At the end of this training, participants will be able to:

1. Understand the benefits of strengthening communication about sexual behaviors with young children and adults.
2. Identify children’s sexual behaviors on a developmental continuum, including identification of problematic behaviors.
3. Demonstrate a model for responding to sexual behaviors to promote healthy child development and prevent child sexual abuse.

Materials and Equipment:

- Power Point Slides, LCD Projector, and laptop
- Handouts:
  - Scenarios
  - Advocates for Youth: Growth and Development ages 0-3, 3-5
  - Evaluating Sexual Behaviors: The A-B-C-D of context
  - A 3 step model for Responding to Children’s Sexual Behaviors
  - Resources
  - Training Feedback Form
- Flip Chart Stand and Pad
- Flip Chart Markers
- Tape

Training Schedule: (for 2 hour training)

1. Welcome and Introductions (including agenda and ground rules) .... 15 min
2. Exploring Messages about Sexual Behavior and Benefits of Communication ........................................ 20-25 min
3. Understanding Sexual Behavior in a Developmental Context .... 20-25 min
4. Responding to Children’s Sexual Behaviors (including scenarios and large group) ................. 55 min
5. Closing and Evaluation ........................................ 5 min
Training Environment
The training environment should allow for both large group and small group work. You will want to have participants work in small groups of 3-4 to discuss the scenarios in the second half of the training.

Trainer Qualifications
This training manual is designed for use by experienced trainers. Prior knowledge and experience in the fields of child development, early education, and child sexual abuse prevention is required. A co-trainer model is ideal for this training. For example, one trainer may have expertise in child sexual abuse prevention and work in a rape crisis center or prevention program. The other trainer may be an early childhood education specialist, with expertise in child development as well as effective training strategies for the child care workforce. Together, the co-trainers bring a range of expertise, knowledge of resources, and an appreciation for the experiences of those who work in early education and care settings. If you (or a co-trainer) do not have expertise in the area of sexual development, sexual behaviors, and/or child sexual abuse prevention, consult the list of resources at the end of this manual for background reading suggestions and online resources.

The Topic of Sexual Behaviors and Child Sexual Abuse Prevention
If you are new to training on these topics, it can be helpful to anticipate some of the common reactions participants may have to the activities. These common reactions include:

1. Difficulty believing or accepting one of more of the statistics presented in Activity 2
   A. To address this, detailed background information about the statistics is provided in Activity 2. Is it not necessary to routinely include all of this information when presenting the statistics, but can be helpful to have at your fingertips if there are questions.

2. A desire to be respected for one’s personal/family/cultural beliefs about sexuality and sexual behavior
   A. The following approach to respecting diverse beliefs and values is included in Activity 2, but also provided here because of its importance to the success of the training. It is important to acknowledge the range of family, cultural, and religious beliefs and values about sexual behavior. In order for participants to remain open to learning and considering new perspectives, their values must be respected.
B. In the training, we talk about children’s sexual behaviors that are typical at different stages of development in young children. Typical behaviors are defined as those that are developmentally expected. They are behaviors we frequently see in young children. Just because a behavior is “typical” or “developmentally expected” does not mean it is acceptable or appropriate in every context or in every family. Families, schools, or early education programs can make decisions about what behaviors are appropriate within each of those contexts. This training focuses on the process of responding to children’s sexual behaviors, which can include setting clear limits, in ways that are developmentally appropriate, teach important social and emotional skills, and avoid shaming children. We do not need to all agree on which behaviors are acceptable in order to use the skills presented in this training. These skills can be used by those with a range of beliefs and values.

3. Strong feelings and disagreements among participants about whether certain sexual behaviors of young children are “abnormal,” “perverted,” or “healthy”

A. This concern most frequently comes up during Activities 3 and/or 4, when there is extensive discussion of sexual behaviors. The model for assessing the behavior (Activity 3) and the model for responding (Activity 4) provide a framework for understanding behavior. It can be helpful to acknowledge that differing interpretations about particular sexual behaviors are common.

B. It helps to refer participants back to the assessment model (Activity 3) to identify what specific characteristics of the behavior and its context are concerning/not concerning. Sometimes when participants look more closely at the behavior and the context in which it occurs, they consider new or alternate interpretations or come to better understand the interpretations of others. Learning to consider a range of possible interpretations is a useful strategy for understanding sexual behaviors. Activity 3 and 4 provide support for using these models, including how to respond if there are concerns about sexual abuse.
ACTIVITY 1: Welcome and Introductions

Time: 15 minutes

Purpose
A shared sense of a learning community contributes to the success of training.

Learning Objectives
Through this activity, participants will:

• Learn about the other early childhood professionals in the room
• Establish a shared understanding about the purpose and format of the training.

Preparing to Lead This Activity

• Set up the LCD projector and laptop.
• Change Slide 1 to include the name of the trainer(s).

Materials and Equipment

• Flip chart pad and markers
• Laptop computer and projector
• Slides 1-4
• Screen or wall for projection
• Name tags for participants
• Handout packets

Lead the Activity

1. Show slide 1 (Title Slide). Welcome the participants and introduce the trainer(s). Distribute name tags.

2. Show slides 2-4 (Take-Home Messages). Review the training agenda for this training, highlighting the content and format of the training.

   A. Make sure to clearly state the three take-home messages: “There are three key ‘take-home’ messages from today’s training. We will be addressing these messages in our activities and discussions. The three things to remember today are the following:”

      i. “Open and direct communication about sexual behaviors is a key strategy for preventing child sexual abuse and supporting healthy development.”
ii. “Communicate and respond to children’s sexual behavior based on knowledge about sexual development and an assessment of the context of the behavior.”

iii. “Model communication, empathy and accountability when responding to children’s sexual behaviors. These are protective factors for healthy development.”

B. Explain the agenda for the training:

i. “To address these 3 take home messages, in this training we will:

ii. First, explore the origins and the impacts of adults’ reactions to children’s sexual behaviors. I’ll also share some statistics about child sexual abuse.

iii. Then we will identify children’s sexual behaviors on a developmental continuum, including identification of problematic behaviors.

iv. And then for the last half of the training, we will practice a model for responding to sexual behaviors that promotes healthy development and safety.”

C. It is helpful to share the following as well:

i. “This training deals specifically with how we as early childhood professionals make sense of and respond to children’s sexual behaviors in order to promote healthy development. Although not the focus of this training, it is also important for early childhood programs to adopt policies that support what we are talking about today, and also communicate with families about these issues.”

3. Ground rules: Ground rules facilitate a shared understanding about how to create and preserve a safe environment conducive to learning. If time is limited, you may want to just post a list of ground rules and briefly discuss them with the group. If you have the time, invite participants to volunteer ground rules that promote a positive training environment. Ask: “What is one of your favorite ground rules?” or “What is something that helps you feel comfortable in training?” You can also add to the list created by participants. Ground rules may include:

A. Maintain confidentiality and privacy.

B. Respect and learn from others within the group.

C. Turn off or silence cell phones.

D. Share speaking time.

E. Ask questions and help support a learning environment.

F. Expect to hear a diversity of experiences and beliefs about sexual behaviors.

4. Difficult topic: It is important to acknowledge that talking about sexuality and sexual abuse can bring up many different kinds of feelings.

A. “Whenever we talk about child sexual abuse, it is important to acknowledge what a difficult topic it is. Child sexual abuse has affected many people personally, and as the statistics will show in a minute, it is very likely that there are survivors here in this
room. It is also likely that some of us know, like and love people who have been sexually inappropriate or abusive towards children. Please keep this in mind as we move forward.”

B. “If anyone needs a break, feel free to get up and leave the room. If you would like to talk to one of us after the presentation, we will be available for 10 minutes after the presentation. We will also be handing out resource information that includes confidential helplines and counseling services.”

C. “The good news is that we are here because child sexual abuse can be prevented. We will be sharing information and strategies so that each one of us can participate in protecting children in our families and communities from sexual abuse. We all have a role to play in prevention.”

5. Introductions: If there are fewer than fifteen participants, ask the participants to introduce themselves by sharing their name, job, and place of work. For larger groups, ask for a show of hands in response to questions about the participants such as: How many of you work with children birth to three? How many work with children 3-5? How many of you have regular contact with parents/families? Additional questions may include: How many of you work in family child care settings? Child care or early education centers? Public schools? This introductory activity provides everyone with a sense of who is in the room. In addition, it allows you as the trainer to better modify the content for the particular group of participants. Sometimes it is possible to get this information in advance from the person who arranged for you to present this training. It can be helpful to have this information before the day of the presentation if it is available, so you can modify the training for the specific audience. Even if you have this information in advance, it can help to still ask these questions of the group to confirm the information you were given and to allow the group to become familiar with other participants.

6. If time allows during the introductions, invite participants to also share why they are attending the training or what they hope to learn from the training. Make a list of these hopes or learning goals on a flip chart. You can then refer to this list during the training or at the end, to ensure that participants’ goals were addressed. If a participant shares a goal that will not be able to be addressed in this training, you can acknowledge that now, and possibly suggest how the participant might identify another resource to meet that goal.

Summarize and Transition to the Next Activity

1. Summarize by noting the range of participants in the room, the important role they play in the lives of young children and families, and any particular questions or interests in the training that participants voiced during the introductions.

2. Transition by noting:

   A. “Next we will think about some of the messages we each received about sex and sexual behavior when we were children. Later we will use this information to think about the messages we want to communicate to children in our work as early childhood professionals.”
Activity 2: Exploring Messages about Sexual Behavior

Time: 20-25 minutes

Purpose
Each of us grew up receiving messages from our families, communities, and/or society about sex and sexuality. These messages may influence how we approach children’s sexual behaviors in our professional work. The purpose of this activity is to explore some of these messages about sexuality and their influence.

Learning Objectives
Through this activity, participants will:

• Reflect on family and societal messages about sexuality
• Explore how these messages might influence professional practices with children and families
• Appreciate the many ways that children learn/receive intended as well as unintended messages about sex and sexuality
• Identify the benefits of strengthening open and direct communication about sexual behaviors with young children and their families

Preparing to Lead This Activity

• Prepare four flip chart pages. On the first page, write “Sex/sexuality is bad or shameful or embarrassing.” On the second page write “Sex/sexuality is healthy and good.” On the third write “Silence. No message about sex/sexuality.” On the fourth, write “Other.”

• Reflect on messages you received about sexuality as you grew up, and be prepared to share one as an example when you introduce this activity.

Materials and Equipment

• Prepared flip chart pages “four messages about sex “ described above.
• Slide 5 (Cartoon Slide)
• Slides 6-10 (Definition, Statistics, Who Sexually Abuses, Common Deficits, Understanding Child Sexual Abuse)
Lead the Activity

1. Show Slide 5 (Cartoon). Explain:

A. “Let’s start by thinking about the first take-home message: Open and direct communication about sexual behaviors is a key strategy for preventing child sexual abuse and supporting healthy development. We are going to talk about how adults communicate messages to children about sexuality. This cartoon highlights one of the many challenges of communicating with children about sexuality. What do you think happened in this miscommunication?” Answers will typically highlight adult anxiety about talking with children about sex.

B. “Children receive all kinds of messages about sexuality and sex. Sometimes these are messages adults intend to send. Sometimes they are messages we don’t even realize we are sending. This training provides multiple opportunities to reflect on and plan for communication about sexual behaviors.”

2. Introduce activity:

A. “First let’s reflect on some of the messages we learned about sex. Take a minute to think about one message you received as a child about sex/sexuality. Now look around the room. In each corner of the room, there is a poster. Each poster has one message about sex. Find the poster that most closely matches what you learned as a young child about sexuality. Now we’ll all get up and go stand by the poster that best fits with the message you have thought of. Once you are gathered around a poster, take turns sharing with one another why each of you choose to stand by that poster. We’ll take the next five minutes to do this activity.”

3. After five minutes or so (watch the group and your schedule to determine the length of time for the group discussions), ask everyone to return to their seats. Ask for volunteers from each group to briefly share some of the key points from the group discussions.

4. Highlight key messages that arose from the group discussions, and note any variations, similarities, or differences among the various messages. Acknowledge any differences in the size of the groups that clustered around particular messages. Share with participants that the division of participants among the various messages differs greatly from training to training, and likely reflects the diversity of knowledge, values, and beliefs about sexuality in our world.

5. “We’ve just explored messages we received when we were young. Now let’s move into thinking about the messages we as adults convey to children. For example, if I saw two three year olds “playing doctor” in a corner of the classroom, my response to the children would convey a message to them. If I got angry and snapped at them to “knock it off,” the children might learn that what they were doing was bad. They might learn that they should hide this kind of behavior from adults. On the other hand, if I just walked away and ignored the behavior, the children might learn that either the behavior is acceptable, or that I am uncomfortable talking about the behavior. And finally, imagine that instead I asked the children a question about their
behavior and communicated a safety message about bodies. What might the children learn in this instance?” (Answers might include: I am someone they can talk with about sexual questions and concerns. We don’t touch each others’ private body parts, or other safety and prevention message. There are words for private body parts and we can use these words to communicate about bodies.)

6. “Open communication increases safety and promotes learning. Much of what we see in children’s sexual behaviors is very typical and developmental in nature. Sometimes we have concerns or questions about sexual behaviors or sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is a significant societal problem. Let’s look at the current data on child sexual abuse briefly.”

7. Child sexual abuse statistics: Present slides 6-8: Plan to take just five minutes for this section. If you feel your group is going to want a more extended discussion on these slides, you will need to adjust the time accordingly. Additional information that explains the statistics is provided here so it is readily accessible if needed.

A. Slide 6: “Definition”: Read the definition or ask for a volunteer to read it aloud. You may want to ask whether any part of this definition surprises anyone. You may want to ask for examples of touching and non-touching behaviors, to help clarify the range of abusive behaviors. Non-touching behaviors could include behaviors such as photographing a child naked, sexually explicit talk, internet sex crimes, or showing a pornographic video to a child.

B. Slide 7: “Statistics”

You may simply share the statistics, noting the prevalence of child sexual abuse. You may also add some additional background information if the group is interested or if you get questions. The following additional content is OPTIONAL, and elaborates on the meaning behind these statistics.

i. Statistic #1: “It is likely that you have seen a range of statistics on this point. There are many challenges to collecting data on the incidence (number of separate occurrences) and prevalence (number of individuals affected) of childhood sexual abuse.” These challenges include: 1) Studies use different definitions of child sexual abuse. For example, some studies like the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study avoid using the word ‘abuse’ at all and instead ask questions about specific experiences. This technique allows researchers to identify abuse among individuals who might not label their experiences as abusive.” 2) “Studies use different populations (for example, college students or convicted perpetrators) that are not representative of the general population. Because most cases of sexual abuse are never reported to child protective services or law enforcement, statistics gathered from these sources greatly underestimate the problem. Not only that, we cannot assume that what we learn from those cases that are reported can be generalized to those cases that aren’t reported.” 3) “Much of what we know about child sexual abuse comes from retrospective studies in which adults are asked to
recall childhood events. Some people who were abused as children might not remember the abuse or the specific details.”

ii. Statistic #2: “According to a national phone survey of adolescents (ages 12-17) conducted in 1995, 86% of sexual assaults experienced by these youth were not reported to any authorities (police, CPS, schools, or other). Retrospective studies done with adults have found similarly low reporting rates for childhood sexual victimization.”

iii. Statistic #3: “It is a common misconception that children lie about being sexually abused. Researchers have found that false reports are statistically uncommon, and estimates range from less than 1% to 10% of cases, depending partly on whether or not reports based on simple misunderstandings are included. In fact, it is far more common for children to minimize or deny the extent of abuse they have experienced than to overstate what has occurred. Children will often test the waters by disclosing lesser offenses first to see how the adult reacts. There are also many reasons why children recant, or take back what they have said, after a disclosure. A child may want to protect the family, be upset by parents’ reactions, or want to put an end to the immediate crisis that can arise after disclosure. Clinicians with expertise in working with child victims consider this to be a common part of the disclosure process rather than an indication that abuse did not occur.”

C. Slide 8: “Who Sexually Abuses”

i. “Because these statistics are based on reports to law enforcement, and we know that the vast majority of sexual assaults against children are never reported, these numbers might not be representative of all incidents of child sexual abuse.”

ii. “Many people are surprised to see that 40% of those abused were abused by an older child or a peer. This statistic reinforces how important it is to communicate with children about sexual behaviors, and to think about safety of children in their interactions with other children as well as with adults.”

D. Slide 9: “Common Deficits”

i. “The hypothesis is that these are the most common deficits among youth who display abusive behaviors. While this explanation for abusive behavior is a hypothesis, it is based on Gail Ryan’s expertise in research and clinical work with young offenders. Ryan is a national expert on child sexual abuse and prevention at the Kempe Center in Colorado.”

ii. Communication: “A deficit in communication means that a person lacks skills for communicating about feelings and needs. Some perpetrators are very skilled communicators in terms of their ability to be charming, outgoing, or pleasant. The deficit pertains to communications about feelings.”

iii. Empathy: “A person lacks empathy if he/she misses or disregards cues or signs that indicate the feelings and needs of those around him/her. Again, this does
not mean that abusers appear insensitive. They can be selective in what they pay attention to when working to build trust with those around them.”

iv. Accountability: “A lack of accountability involves a distorted attribution of responsibility and failure to take responsibility for one’s own behavior.”

“Of course, not everyone with deficits in communication, empathy, and accountability is abusive. Instead, what Gail Ryan’s research suggests is that those who do abuse have deficits in these areas. If you think about it, we probably all believe in teaching skills for communication, empathy, and accountability to young children already. In the field of early education and care, we know that these skills are critical for healthy development. What Ryan adds to this understanding is the idea that they may also work as protective factors against sexual violence.”


“We have talked quite a bit now about the messages children receive about sexuality, and also about the prevalence of sexual abuse. So let’s connect preventing sexual abuse with communicating with children about sexual behaviors. How might communication about sexual behavior increase safety and reduce the risk of abuse?” Take several responses from participants. Possible responses may include:

I. Serve as a protective factor against the development of sexually abusive behavior.

II. Encourage a child to feel comfortable enough to disclose a concern about sexual abuse.

III. Break the silence about sexual abuse that makes it hard for children to get help when needed.

IV. Send a warning to potential perpetrators that inappropriate or abusive sexual behavior will not be tolerated.

V. Empower children to speak up about their own personal boundaries.

Summarize and Transition to the Next Activity

1. Transition by noting: “We have established the importance of communication with children about sexual behaviors. Communication supports healthy development and can reduce the risk of abuse.”

2. “In order to decide how best to communicate with children about their sexual behaviors or sexual questions, we first need to feel confident in our knowledge about sexual development in children and then we can discuss how to respond to those behaviors. Next, we are going to move to our second take home message: Communicate and respond to children’s sexual behavior based on knowledge about sexual development and an assessment of the context of the behavior.”
**Activity 3: Understanding Sexual Behavior in a Developmental Context**

**Purpose**

Research shows that sexual behaviors are common among young children both at home and in early education settings. Early childhood professionals frequently observe sexual behaviors, and often have questions about when and how to respond. This activity covers sexual behaviors in young children and the importance of understanding the context in which the behaviors occur.

**Learning Objectives**

Through this activity, participants will:

- Learn about developmentally expected as well as problematic sexual behaviors during the early childhood period (birth to five)
- Discuss the importance of considering the context of the behavior in assessing how to respond

**Preparing to Lead This Activity**

- Copy handouts from Advocates for Youth on sexual development
- Copy handout “Evaluating sexual behaviors: The A-B-C-D of Context”

**Materials and Equipment**

- Slides 11-17 (Take home message, Educate, 2 slides on Developmentally Expected Behaviors, Assessing the Situation, Responding, Transition)
- Handout “Evaluating Sexual Behaviors: The A-B-C-D of Context”

**Lead the Activity**

1. Slide 11: (Transition slide)
2. Slide 12: Take home message.
   - “When we observe or hear about children’s sexual behaviors, we may wonder if the behavior is ‘normal.’ Remember the second take-home message: Communicate and respond to children’s sexual behavior based on knowledge about sexual development and an assessment of the context of the behavior.”
   - “It makes sense that our response and the actions we take will depend on how we interpret the behavior we see in our classrooms or programs. This is true for all
3. Slide 13: “Educate ourselves.” It is important to acknowledge the range of family, cultural, and religious beliefs and values about sexual behavior. In order for participants to remain open to learning and considering new perspectives, their values must be respected. As you begin this activity, be sure to note the following:

A. “Now we are going to talk about children’s sexual behaviors. We saw how many different beliefs and values exist about sexuality in our opening activity. We are going to talk about behaviors that are typical for different stages of development in young children. Typical behaviors are those that are developmentally expected. They are behaviors we frequently see in young children.”

B. “Just because a behavior is “typical” or “developmentally expected” does not mean it is acceptable or appropriate in every context or in every family. Families, schools, or early education programs can make decisions about what behaviors are appropriate within each of those contexts. What this discussion does is provide a child development framework for understanding children’s sexual behaviors.”

4. Developmentally expected behaviors 0-2:

A. “As you know, there are many dimensions of child development, such as physical, cognitive, and language development. Sexual development is another dimension of human development. First let’s think about sexual behaviors in very young children, between the ages of birth and two. What sexual behaviors have you seen or heard about at this age?”

B. Invite participants to volunteer ideas or examples of behaviors they have seen or expect from infants and toddlers. You may want to use a flip chart to record the examples participants give.

C. If participants suggest behaviors that may not fall within the typical or developmentally expected range, place a question mark or star next to the behavior. Ask if others have seen this behavior, or consider it typical at this age. Explain that behaviors such as this, that do not seem to fall within the typical range, require additional attention. Explain that you will come back to these behaviors after you have talked about the developmentally expected range of behaviors.

D. Show slide 14: “Developmentally expected behaviors”. Compare this list to the one on the flip chart.

i. “It can be helpful to remember that the motivation behind children’s sexual behaviors is different than that of adults. For example, when children touch their own genitals, or masturbate, they do so because they have learned that the touching feels good and not because they associate it with sex. Some children will masturbate as a way of calming down or relaxing, just as other children will twirl their hair or suck their thumb to accomplish the same self-soothing effect.”
5. Developmentally expected behavior 3-5:
   A. “Let’s move into the preschool years. What sexual behaviors have you seen or heard about in 3-5 year olds?”
   B. Repeat the flip chart exercise above making sure to note any unexpected behaviors that participants might raise.
   C. Show slide 15: “Developmentally expected behaviors.” Compare this list to the flip chart.

6. Assessing the situation.
   A. Show slide 16.
   B. Transition into talking about the context of the behavior:
      i. “We’ve just created lists of the typical behaviors we have seen or can expect to see in very young children. Now let’s talk about the context of those behaviors.”
      ii. “Sometimes we wonder whether we should be concerned about a particular sexual behavior we have observed. We frequently cannot categorize specific sexual behaviors as healthy or as problematic without considering the context or situation in which they occur.”
      iii. “Can anyone think of an example of a sexual behavior that might be ok (or not worrisome) in one situation but that would be problematic or worrisome if it occurred in a different situation?”
      iv. Take one or two examples, or share one of your own, such as:
         I. “Consider ‘playing doctor,’ where two children might have their clothes off and look at or touch one another’s private parts. If a 3 year old wanted to ‘play doctor’ with another three year old you might consider this typical developmental behavior.”
         II. “However, if a six year old wanted to ‘play doctor’ with a two year old, you might feel worried or troubled by this behavior. These examples highlight the importance of the context in which the behavior is occurring. When we try to make sense of children’s sexual behavior, it is important to pay attention to the context in which the behavior occurred.”
   C. The A-B-C-D of Assessing the context:
      i. Invite participants to refer to the handout ‘Evaluating sexual behaviors: The A-B-C-D of context.’
      ii. “Some of the important factors to consider are”
      iii. “Affective context: The affect, or emotional response, of the children is an important contextual factor. Are the children laughing and giggling lightheartedly, or is there evidence of fear or anger?”
iv. “Behavioral context: In assessing the behavioral context, we want to know whether this is the first time this behavior has occurred, or is this repetitive behavior that continues despite our interventions. We might also want to know if the behavior is changing, happening more frequently, or part of a larger pattern of behaviors.

v. “Control: This looks at the relationship between the children involved, and asks us to consider the following:

I. “Power: is there a power difference between the children involved? Power differences often involve age differences, but there are other important factors to consider. For example, is one child bigger than another, more developmentally advanced, or are the children engaged in pretend play roles such as police officer and prisoner?”

II. “Manipulation or use of force: are the children giggling or whispering, or is one child being manipulated or forced to engage in the activity?”

vi. “Developmental context: This is what we just were talking about. Does the behavior match the child’s age and developmental level?

7. If any potentially problematic behaviors were shared earlier in this activity (and you may have put question marks or stars next to them on the flip chart lists), return to one or more of these now. Ask participants to consider the contextual factors here, and share how those factors influence the possible interpretation of those behaviors. Explain that additional information might be necessary to understand the behavior and the context more fully. The point of this activity is to think about assessing the behavior, but not to discuss how to respond to the behavior. Assessing is the first step. Responding to the behavior is covered in the next activity.

Summary and Transition to the Next Activity

1. Show slide 17: “Responding”

A. “We’ve just laid the groundwork for understanding sexual development in very young children. We’ve also talked about how important it is to think about the context of the behavior as we move into assessing how best to respond to the behavior.”
**Activity 4: Responding to Children’s Sexual Behaviors**

**Purpose**
This activity is designed to provide a model for responding to sexual behaviors of young children. Small groups discuss scenarios involving sexual behaviors and practice applying the model. Then a large group discussion provides an opportunity to share ideas, challenges, and appropriate responses to the scenarios.

**Learning Objectives**
Through this activity, participants will:

- Practice using a model for responding to sexual behaviors that is designed to promote healthy development by fostering open communication, empathy, and accountability.

**Preparing to Lead This Activity**
- Copy scenario handouts
- Copy handout entitled: “A 3 Step Model for Responding to Children’s Sexual Behaviors”

**Materials and Equipment**
- Slides 18-21 (Reminder, Tips, Responding, Scenarios)
- Handout on Sexual Development: Advocates for Youth: Growth and Development Ages 0-3, 3-5
- Handout “A 3 Step Model for Responding to Children’s Sexual Behaviors”
- Scenarios handout

**Lead the Activity**

1. **Slide 18: “Take Home Message #3.”**
   - A. “Our third take-home message gets to the heart of our role in promoting safety and helping children learn important social and emotional skills.
   - B. “We can respond to children’s sexual behaviors in ways that promote communication, empathy, and accountability. These are protective factors for healthy development. Remember earlier we talked about the risks associated with a lack of skills in these areas. When we teach these skills, we help all children build resiliency and promote healthy social and emotional development.”

A. “Now we are going to consider some specific examples, or scenarios involving children’s sexual behaviors, and develop responses to those behaviors.”

B. “First and foremost, make sure that you stay calm, help the child to feel safe, and avoid shaming the child or children involved. It is important to remain calm in order to demonstrate that sexual behavior can be discussed in a calm and thoughtful manner.”

C. “This can be challenging, given that many of us are uncomfortable witnessing sexual behaviors in children and may not have much practice or confidence in talking about them.”

D. “Depending on the situation, you might have very strong feelings about what you have observed. We will be talking next about ways to express these feelings. However you feel, presenting yourself in a calm way will help the child or children remain calm.”

E. “We want to avoid shaming children. What is the difference between shame and guilt?” Take several ideas from participants. If no one identified the following distinction, share it.

   i.  Guilt = I did something bad and I feel sorry about it.

   ii. Shame = I did something bad and therefore I am bad.

F. “Part of establishing a safe context for communicating about sexual behaviors is making sure not to shame children for their behavior. Instead, we want to model communication and promote accountability for one’s behavior.”

3. Slide 20 “Responding.”

A. “This is going to be the model we will practice for responding to children’s sexual behaviors. This model is designed to specifically promote: communication, empathy, and accountability.”

B. “If you think about this response model, it is what we as early childhood educators often do in response to other kinds of behavior we see frequently.”

C. “For example, if a child throws a block across the classroom, we might say something like ‘I saw you throw a block across the classroom. This labels the behavior’ (point to Step 1).”

D. “Then you might continue ‘That makes me feel worried that one of our friends might get hurt.’ What you’ve just done when you say that is to model open communication about the behavior, label your feelings about the behavior in a way that models empathy (point to Step 2).”

E. “Then you might continue to respond by helping the child to go pick up the block, by setting a limit, and/or engaging the child in problem solving (point to Step 3).”

F. “Let’s try this model with a sexual behavior.”
i. “Let’s imagine you just observed two four year olds touching one another’s genitals in a corner. They were both giggling and whispering.”

ii. “Let’s start with labeling the behavior. We could say, for example, ‘I see you two were touching each others’ private parts.’ This statement communicates to the children that we are open and calm when we talk about sexual behaviors. We communicate that we are someone this child could come to.”

iii. “Next let’s label our feelings and model empathy. We could say, for example, ‘Touching like that in the classroom makes me feel very uncomfortable.’”

iv. “Finally, we come to our opportunity to promote accountability. If we have concerns about the behavior, we might first ask the children some open-ended questions to learn more about this behavior and help us to better understand the context of the behavior. Then we can communicate limits and safety rules for the classroom. In this example, we might then remind the children that the classroom rule is to ‘keep your hands on your own bodies.’”

v. “Depending on the behavior, at this point we also might begin to plan ways to follow up on the behavior, such as increased supervision, talking with a supervisor, or the family. It is always important to be familiar with mandated reporting laws and your program’s policies and guidelines. If you have a concern that a child might have been sexually abused, it is important to follow the policy at your center about handling this kind of situation.”

vi. You may present this example for responding to sexual behavior as scripted above. An alternative method of presenting this example is a role-play. If you have a co-trainer, one trainer can act out the role of the adult/teacher, and the other trainer can act out the role of the child. If you are training without a co-trainer, you may consider asking a participant to volunteer to be the child. You can then model the response protocol scripted here as the adult/teacher speaking with the child. For some participants, the role-play format may provide extra support for learning to use this method for responding to children’s sexual behaviors.


A. “Now we will put into action the information that we’ve been talking about so far in this training. We are going to use some scenarios of children’s sexual behaviors. These scenarios reflect real situations teachers have encountered in their work with young children. You are also welcome to include a scenario from your own experience as a part of this next activity. We will work in small groups to discuss the scenarios, the context for the behavior described, and then to plan how respond. The task for each group is the following:”

   i. “Select a note-taker and reporter for the group.”

   ii. “Read each scenario, then:”

      I. “Discuss the questions in the ‘assess’ column. Jot down your thoughts.”
II. “Using the model presented for responding, write out the words you suggest using in response to the child. Use the three steps listed to guide your response.”

5. Create small groups of 3-4 participants each. Hand out the practice scenarios. Distribute the handout on sexual development, and let participants know they can refer to it as a reminder about typical sexual development. Ask if anyone has any questions about the instructions for the small group exercise. Be sure to indicate how long the groups have to work on the scenarios. Fifteen to twenty minutes is usually enough time. During this time, check in with groups to see if they have any questions as they work on the scenarios. You can also monitor how far along the groups are to gauge the amount of time needed for the small group discussions.

6. Following the small group discussions, ask the groups to wrap up their conversations so that everyone can participate in a large group discussion. Have people stay seated with their small groups to facilitate the reporting process from the groups.

7. Starting with the first scenario, invite groups to share how they assessed the behavior and why, and then how they responded and why. Encourage participants to share the specific language they would use in responding, based on the model. Continue with as many of the scenarios as time will allow. Remember that some groups may have used their own scenarios, and you may invite groups to share about these as well.

8. Provide an opportunity to discuss some or all of the following:
   A. Varying interpretations of the behavior and the context of the behavior
   B. Different ideas about how to respond to the child based on the model
   C. Benefits or challenges in applying the model for responding
   D. Strategies for asking children questions about the behavior or for following up on behaviors that were of concern and warrant further action

9. Note on mandated reporters: Early childhood educators, child care providers, and teachers are all mandated reporters of child abuse. Mandated reporter laws are important laws that can help protect children. If questions arise about situations that warrant or may warrant making a report of possible child abuse or neglect, refer participants to their program’s policies and procedures about mandated reporting. If a participant is not aware or fully informed about these policies, help the participant identify who s/he can go to at his/her program to find this information.

ופן קבוצתי ואפשרויות נוספות

Summarize and Transition to the Next Activity
Let participants know that it is time to wrap up the training with a few final thoughts and a training evaluation.
ACTIVITY 5: Closing and Evaluation

Time: 5 minutes

Purpose
The closing is designed to summarize the learning objectives from the training, and provide participants an opportunity to give feedback on the evaluation form.

Learning Objectives
Through this activity, participants will be able to:
• Review the take home messages of the training.
• Provide feedback about the training

Preparing to Lead This Activity
• Copy feedback form
• Prepare resource handout

Materials and Equipment
• Slides 22-23 (Take-Home Messages, Acknowledgements)
• Training feedback form
• Resource handout

Lead the Activity
1. Show slide 22 and review the three take-home messages.
2. Thank participants for their contributions and for sharing their experiences in ways that enriched the training.
3. Acknowledge the important role early childhood educators can play in promoting communication, empathy, and accountability. In doing so, they foster healthy development and reduce the likelihood of child sexual abuse.
4. Refer participants to the resources handout and your contact information.
5. Distribute training feedback form, and designate a place for participants to put them before leaving. Let participants know that the feedback helps you know what worked and what could be improved for future training.
Resources for Trainers

Child Sexual Development:
- Understanding Children’s Sexual Behaviors – From Natural and Healthy to Disturbed, Instructor: Toni Cavanagh Johnson, Ph.D, on-line course offered at www.neari.com/trainingcenter
- Advocates for Youth: www.advocatesforyouth.org
- The Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada: www.sexualityandu.ca
- Zero to Three National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families: www.zerotothree.org

Sexual Violence and Child Sexual Abuse:
- Boston Area Rape Crisis Center: www.barcc.org
- Enough Abuse Campaign: www.enoughabuse.org
- National Center for Missing and Exploited Children: www.ncmec.com
- National Sexual Violence Resource Center: www.nsvrc.org

Inappropriate/Illegal Sexual Behaviors:
- National center on sexual behaviors of youth: www.ncsby.org
- Stop it now: www.stopitnow.org
- Massachusetts Adolescent Sex Offender coalition: www.masoc.net
- The Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers: www.atsa.com
Citations


ACE study: [http://www.acestudy.org/](http://www.acestudy.org/)

Note: Definition of child sexual abuse used in ACE study: “…During the first 18 years of life, did an adult (… or someone at least 5 years older…), relative, family friend, or stranger ever (1) touch or fondle your body in a sexual way, (2) have you touch or fondle their body in a sexual way, (3) attempt to have any type of sexual intercourse with you (oral, anal, or vaginal), or (4) actually have any type of sexual intercourse with you (oral, anal, or vaginal)?”

Advocates for Youth: [www.advocatesforyouth.org](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org)


Bureau of Justice Statistics report: *Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement: Victim, Incident, and Offender Characteristics*, July 2000


The Leadership Council, [www.leadershipcouncil.org](http://www.leadershipcouncil.org). “How often do children’s reports of abuse turn out to be false?”


The Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada: www.sexualityandu.ca, Citation for developmentally expected behavior slides.


1. Evaluating Sexual Behaviors: The A-B-C-D of context
2. A 3 step model for Responding to Children's Sexual Behavior
3. Advocates for Youth: Growth and Development ages 0 to 3
4. Advocates for Youth: Growth and Development ages 3 to 5
5. Scenarios
6. Resources
7. Training Feedback Form