



School District No. 83 (North Okanagan- Shuswap)

Protocol for Responding to Sexualized Behavior in Schools

Introduction

This outline is built to assist school staff in identifying and responding to children's sexualized behavior in a practical, educational and preventative manner under the umbrella of "Wellness Promotion". The method of identification and professional response should help the student better understand their behavior, the impact of their behavior and understand what is healthy.

"A school's response should provide safety, facilitate communication and involvement with parents and appropriate professionals, demonstrate empathy and support responsible student behavior. It is crucial that the focus be on the alleged behaviors of concern and not on labeling the child"

(Langley Schools, Process for responding to: Alleged Problematic Sexual Behaviors for Students under 12, School District #35)

It is important that school staff respond calmly and positively to inappropriate student behaviors in our schools. Our responses as professionals should not label or marginalize students. When inappropriate behaviors are exhibited by students, staff should see this as an opportunity to teach the student appropriate and healthy behaviors. "It is the response of the adult to the child's behavior that gives the behavior meaning for the child" (Responding to Children's Problem Sexual Behavior in Schools, Ministry of Education, British Columbia). In response, this outline presents a model that can assist staff in distinguishing between "normal", "concerning" and "problematic" sexual behavior and in identifying appropriate levels of response these behaviors.

At times some students within our schools who have disabilities may exhibit sexualized behaviors that may be "problematic" within the neuro-typical continuum but may be developmentally appropriate for them as an individual. It is important to attempt to support all behavior for all students as publically appropriate, safe and healthy regardless of the age of the student- our ultimate goal for all students is to be independent. In addition, given the sensitivity of the nature of sexuality it is important to involve parents with the process of educating each student regarding sexuality.

Identified Levels of Sexual Behavior

Normative (Level 1), Concerning (Level 2) and Problematic (Level 3) Behaviors

Adults need to know when a child's sexual expression is normative and developmentally appropriate, and when it has crossed this boundary from concerning to problematic behavior. It is important to consider the environment or context when determining the level of children's sexual behavior such as: the frequency, aggression, manipulation/safety of others, and intent of the behavior. The ability to support the healthy sexual growth and development of children is an important task for parents, teachers, and other professionals who work with them.

Level 1- Normative Behaviors for pre-pubescent students

- Interest in own genitals
- Occasional interest in/or comparing the private body parts of others, playing doctor
- An occasional "flashing" of one's own genitals
- Imitating parental roles (female/male role play)
- Genital/reproductive discussions with same age peers & with parents; wanting to know what sex is
- Kissing, flirting, innocent seduction behavior
- Some use of "dirty" words and jokes, "potty language"
- Other: _____

Level 2- Concerning Behaviors for pre-pubescent students

- Persistent fascination with sexual matters or themes
- Occasional attempts to expose others' genitals
- Repeated attempts to view others' private parts
- Repeated sexually explicit discussions with peers
- Single occurrence of touching genitals of same age peers
- Sexual graffiti
- Repeated exposure of one's own genitals

Level 3- Problematic Behaviors for pre-pubescent students

- Aggressive, forcible or threatening sexual behavior to others
- Repeated genital touching of others
- Ongoing pornographic interest, inappropriate computer use
- Sexually explicit and degrading conversations with peers, exercising of power
- Excessive masturbation at the expense of other daily activities or anal/vaginal insertion while masturbating
- Simulating oral, anal, vaginal intercourse
- Attempting oral, anal, vaginal intercourse
- Compulsive interest in sexual matters

Response to Levels of Sexualized Behaviors

Our District uses a systematic RTI approach for responding to student sexualized behavior, utilizing the following Intervention Checklists.

Level 1- Normative Behaviors

Ultimately our schools aspire to be preventative and support our families in early student learning/teaching of personal boundaries, being safe and healthy sexuality. Positive modeling and teaching of appropriate behaviors in class, and educating when inappropriate behaviors are exhibited are optimal. When inappropriate behaviors are shown teacher, administration or counsellor describe and teach appropriate behavior and share expectations. Parents are informed when these behaviors occur during school time.

- Inform parents/guardians;
- Provide educational materials to parent and school (e.g., stages of development, creating a healthy sexual environment);
- Educate child (e.g., social stories on public/private, personal space, terminology of body parts);
- Communication/Follow-up (e.g., monitor for future situations, inform parent via agenda book or telephone contact);
- Document interventions/meeting notes.

Level 2- Concerning Behaviors

If Level 1 interventions have not been successful and/or student exhibits more concerning behaviors a sensitive conversation with the School Based Team around support for this student and safety of others may be appropriate. A *Support Plan* (or possibly a *Behavior Plan*) must be developed which includes outside agency support/consultation to assist the student and the family in developing more appropriate, safe and healthy behaviors.

- Inform parents/guardians;
- Provide educational materials to parent and school (e.g., stages of development, creating a healthy sexual environment);
- Educate child (e.g., social stories on public/private, personal space, terminology of body parts);
- Create *Support Plan* or *Behavior Plan* with monitoring checklists (as needed);
- Outside agency support (e.g. non-profit counsellor, private counselor). Collaborate with school counsellor or principal;
- Communication/follow-up (e.g., monitor for future situations, inform parent via agenda book or telephone contact).
- Document interventions/meeting notes.

Level 3- Problematic Behaviors

Typically, these behaviors have not presented without a past sexualized incident(s).

This level of intervention may require some or all of the following:

- Program modification, either in content or in length of day;
- Specific IEP that implicitly programs for student's health and safety;
- Outside resources/ agencies will be required to support the student and their family;
- Alternate Programming may need to be explored.
- RCMP or Ministry of Child and Family Development may also be required to participate in a team risk assessment meeting for the child.
- Document interventions/meeting notes.

This level of support requires Interagency Collaboration, including the parent/guardian participation.

NOTE: Documentation regarding sexualized behaviors (at any of the three levels) does not go into the student's main file. Documentation is to be uploaded into the VTRA/Confidential Notes folder.

Supporting the Student Who Was Mistreated

Support for the child who was mistreated begins with the staff member's initial intervention.

- Speak privately,
- Acknowledge what happened and ask how the student is feeling.
- Stay matter of fact, and let them know you are sorry it happened.
- Depending on circumstances, it may be appropriate to reassure the student that it was not their fault and telling an adult was the right thing to do.
- Let the student know what will happen next: parents will be notified and that there are consequences for the student who initiated the behavior.
- Let the student know you will check back in a day or two to see how they are doing and to determine a need for further intervention or support.

Signs indicating the need for further intervention or support may include:

- On-going and increased anxiety at home and at school;
- The student is unusually quiet, overly compliant and non-assertive;
- The student acts out sexually and has a problem maintaining appropriate boundaries;
- The student has few friends or social skill deficits.

The school counselor may be the most appropriate person to provide individual support. The goal is to help the student resolve feelings of fear and anxiety by equipping the student with skills and strategies for self-protection and self-control. (e.g. making safe choices, being assertive, reporting skills, social skills and understanding boundaries.

If other students were impacted, class discussions and activities on boundaries may be an option. However, empathy and compassion for others struggling to overcome behavioral problems should be the foundation for the discussion.

Supporting the Parents:

- Immediately notify the parents/guardian;
- Meet to discuss what happened and the actions taken (confidentiality is essential);
- Reassure the parents that the school has a plan to keep their child safe;
- Listen to concerns and answer questions;
- Offer school-based counselling support or community referral

Adapted from the Following Resources:

1. "Responding to Children's Problem Sexual Behavior in Schools",
<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/sco/resourcedocs/probsexbehave.pdf>
2. "Alleged Problematic Sexual Behaviors for Students under 12", School District No. 35 (Langley)
3. "Children With Sexualized Behavior Problems", School District No.22 (Vernon)
4. http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/towards_better_understanding_children039s_sexual_behavior
5. Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education
6. Health and Career Education K-7, IRP profile, Ministry of Education, British Columbia
 - http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/pdfs/health_career_education/support_materials/hce89_irp_profile.pdf