

Children are Sacred

Fact Sheet for Parents & Caregivers

Understanding Problematic Sexual Behavior in Youth – A Factsheet for American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes.

Much of Native culture is based on the Circle of Life. Culture teaches us that we are all relatives to all things in creation. Some of the threads in the Circle have become broken. Parents can help mend the Circle by understanding sexual development, healthy relationships, healthy interpersonal behavior and problematic sexual behavior (PSB).

Problematic Sexual Behavior (PSB) is youth-initiated behavior that involves sexual body parts in a manner that is developmentally inappropriate and potentially harmful.¹

Prevent Problematic Sexual Behavior

- Talk with your child about his/her body, body parts, and personal space and privacy in a manner that fits your child's development. Start early and have the conversations often.
- Introduce the concept of OK and NOT OK touching, how to be respectful, and what to do if an adult or another child does not know OK touching.
- Teach children to respect the privacy needs of siblings.
- Limit exposure of nudity in the home and on electronic devices such as cell phones, computers, tablets and computer games.
- Supervise relationships between children of different ages and developmental stages.
- Teach children boundaries and utilize rites of passage and ceremonies as appropriate.
- Model healthy relationships and behaviors.
- Monitor Internet usage and social media posts.

- Openly communicate about relationships, intimacy, consent, prevention of abuse, pornography, and other related topics in a manner that appropriate to age and development.
- Decisions that parents make depend on the individual child and family circumstances. For example, consider at what age it is still appropriate for siblings to co-bathe with another sibling. Also, consider sleeping

arrangements that offer the most privacy and respect for personal boundaries.

- Address the lack of privacy between adults and children due to crowded housing. For example, consider using room dividers, cots or floor mats to enhance privacy and reduce opportunities for exposure to sexual behaviors in the home.
- Understand factors that indicate a sexual behavior is of concern and seek assistance. These factors include:
 - » sexual behavior among children who differ in age/ability/size,
 - » anytime force, coercion is used,
 - » intrusive sexual behavior,
 - » when fear, sadness, anxiety, or strong anger related to the sexual behavior is present in the child, or
 - » when a behavior continues even after you or another adult has addressed the behavior.

Report Problematic Sexual Behavior

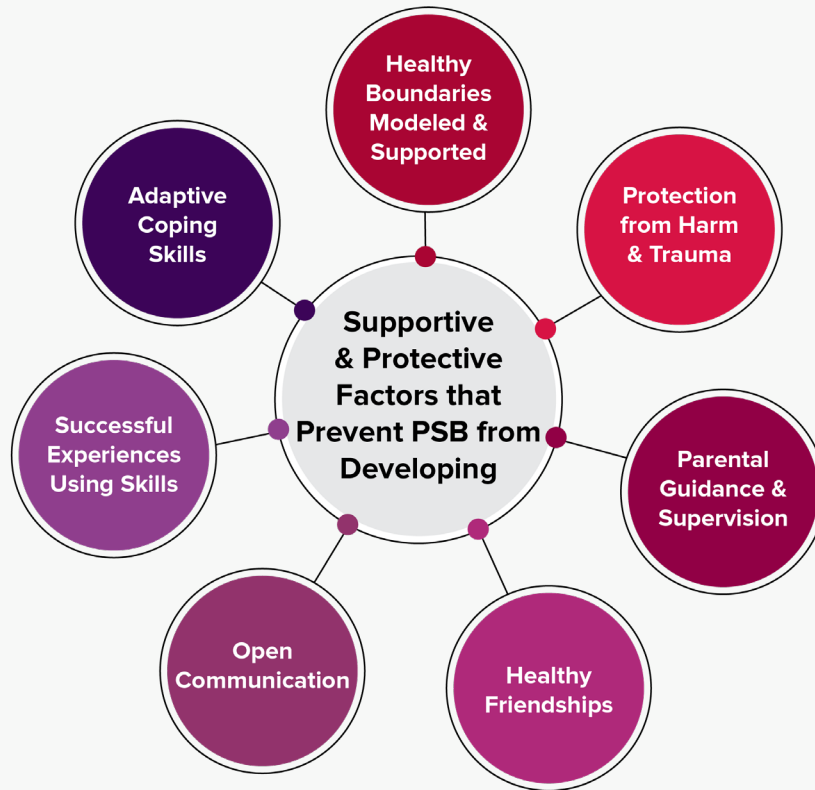
If you are concerned that your child has PSB or is the child victim of PSB, contact a licensed mental health professional immediately. A licensed professional can help you determine next steps for your child and the best treatment options available if needed. This may include child protective services, law enforcement, or other agency, based on local protocols in place.

Risk Factors

Risk factors for youth with PSB are universal and not based solely on any demographic, psychological or social factors. The National Center for Sexual Behavior of Youth identified the following individual, family, and community-level factors that may be helpful for understanding youth with PSB.

- Child vulnerabilities may hinder a youth's ability to cope with stressful events or control impulses and respect the boundaries of others. These include attention deficit disorder, learning and language delays, reactions to trauma events or other factors.
- Lack of information or limited accurate information about bodies and sexuality, unhealthy boundaries or privacy in the home, exposure to adults sexual

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activity or nudity, pornography, or other factors that contribute to a sexualized environment.

- Exposure to harsh or coercive interactions, such as family or community violence, physical abuse, bullying or other factors.
- Factors that hinder a parent or caregiver’s ability to monitor, guide, support, and teach their children, such as depression, substance use, exposure to abuse and other factors.

Sexual abuse experiences, particularly when young and curious, may lead to PSB through trauma responses as well as confusion about healthy interactions. While sexual abuse is an important risk factor, not all youth with PSB have been sexually abused.

Protective Factors

Tribal protocol, practices and ceremonies can facilitate resilience and protective factors in youth. Protective factors that facilitate healthy behaviors and good decisions at the individual, family and community levels include the following:

- Adults supervision and guidance provided throughout development.

- Healthy boundaries and coping skills that are modeled and supported.
- Protection from trauma or harm.
- Friendships with peers who make healthy decisions.
- Having experiences of competencies or success.
- Open communication about relationships and sexual matters with healthy adults.³

Research on Problematic Sexual Behavior

- Children of all races, ethnicities, education levels, and socioeconomic status may demonstrate PSB.¹
- More than one-third of sexual offenses against children are committed by other youth.³
- Risk for PSB is greatest among youth 12 to 14 years of age.³
- Almost half of child victims of PSB are under 6 years of age.³
- Problematic sexual behavior occurs most often between children/youth who know one another. More than 34% of PSB cases involve family members.⁴
- The recent average sexual recidivism rate for adolescents with illegal sexual behavior was less than 3%.⁶

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What To Expect From Assessment or Treatment

- Treatment is typically provided by social workers, psychologists or psychiatrists.
- Length of treatment depends on the seriousness of the sexual behavior, whether the youth has other problem behavior, and the youth and family's active participation and progress in treatment (www.ncsby.org/content/understanding-treatment).
- Know that caregiver involvement in treatment is crucial. Caregiver involvement has been found to significantly improve treatment outcomes. Therapy should include caregivers so that they have the information needed to best assist their children. Caregivers should receive education related to appropriate supervision, supporting their children in decision-making, and other areas.⁶
- Respect and support are key. When you are in services, you should feel supported, respected and heard. This will help you share and invest in treatment. Therapists should provide messages of hope and the potential for progress. You may not be completely

comfortable during your first session; it can take some time. Confidentiality is important and should be upheld. The information you and others share in treatment is private.⁶

“When people don’t understand what they can do about it (PSB), they just turn the other way. They have to accept, like okay this is the issue, but then what do I do about it? If they don’t have an answer, they just ignore it and it becomes overwhelming, shocking, in the community, and for our children. We have to be open and honest about it.”

– Janet Routzen, Associate Judge Rosebud Sioux Tribe

Resources For Parents

Indian Country Child Trauma Center It Starts With Me Postcard
www.icctc.org/It%20Starts%20With%20Me1.pdf

National Center on the Sexual Behavior of Youth
www.ncsby.org/content/parents

Newsletter and Guides from the NCSBY Parent Partnership Board
www.ncsby.org/sites/default/files/PSB%20Newsletter%20V1N1.pdf

NEARI Press and Training Center Parent 2 Parent
www.nearipress.org/parent-2-parent-project/

National Center on the Sexual Behavior of Youth
www.ncsby.org/content/parents

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Child Welfare Information Gateway on state and tribal laws and policies
www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/state/?hasBeenRedirected=1

Parent and Caregiver Fact Sheet References

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2. National Children's Alliance (2017). PSB Fact Sheet Overview. Risk and Protective Factors. Available online from: <http://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/2017-PSB-Fact-Sheet-Overview-3.pdf>
3. Finkelhor, D., Ormrod, R., & Chaffin, M. (2009). Juveniles Who Commit Sex Offenses Against Minors. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Juvenile Justice Bulletin, December 2009. Available online from: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/227763.pdf>
4. Snyder, H. (2000). Sexual Assault of Young Children as Report to Law Enforcement: Victim, Incident, and Offender Characteristics. NCJ 182990. Available online from: <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/saycrle.pdf>
5. Caldwell, M. F. (2016). Quantifying the Decline in Juvenile Sexual Recidivism Rates. Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, 22(4), 414.
6. Parent Partnership Board of the National Center on the Sexual Behavior of Youth. (2019). Now What? What to Expect out of Treatment. Guild for Parents/ Caregivers Concerned about Children's Sexual Behavior, Vol. 1, Number 1. [add link]