

## Understanding Problematic Sexual Behavior in American Indian and Alaska Native Youth

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 traditional views of sex and sexual behavior**, healthy relationships, healthy interpersonal behavior and problematic sexual behavior (PSB). PSB is youth-initiated behavior that involves sexual body parts in a manner that is developmentally inappropriate and potentially harmful.<sup>1</sup>



View the more on the traditional views of sex and sexual behavior in toolkit, [CLICK HERE.](#)

Addressing trauma, abuse, and neglect in tribal communities is necessary for understanding PSB. Trauma-informed principles can help us support all youth.

**Youth need safety, supervision, protection, guidance, monitoring, and teachings. All youth must know they are connected, sacred, and honored.**

### You Can 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, sexual images, and other related topics in a manner that is appropriate to age and development.



# FACTSHEET: Parent & Caregiver

## Making Decisions

Decisions that parents make depend on the individual child and family circumstances.

- What age it is still appropriate for siblings to co-bathe with another sibling?
- What sleeping arrangements offer the most privacy and respect for personal boundaries?

- Address the lack of privacy between adults and children due to crowded housing. 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.

## Characteristics of Typical vs. Problematic Behaviors

<b>TYPICAL</b>		<b>PROBLEMATIC</b>
Occurs between children of same age and size	<b>VS</b>	Children are different ages/abilities
Light-hearted Emotions	<b>VS</b>	Strong negative emotional reaction
Infrequent	<b>VS</b>	Frequent
Voluntary	<b>VS</b>	Threats, force, aggression
Easily redirects	<b>VS</b>	Does not respond to parental guidance or correction

### Typical Examples:

- Two 5-year-old children spontaneously show each other private parts when outside playing in sprinkler
- A 10-year-old touching his/her private parts while alone in the bedroom

### Problematic Examples:

- A 12-year-old touching a seven year old's private parts
- A child threatening to send pictures of another child's private parts
- A child repeatedly looking under bathroom stalls after parents/school officials have previously corrected his/her behaviors

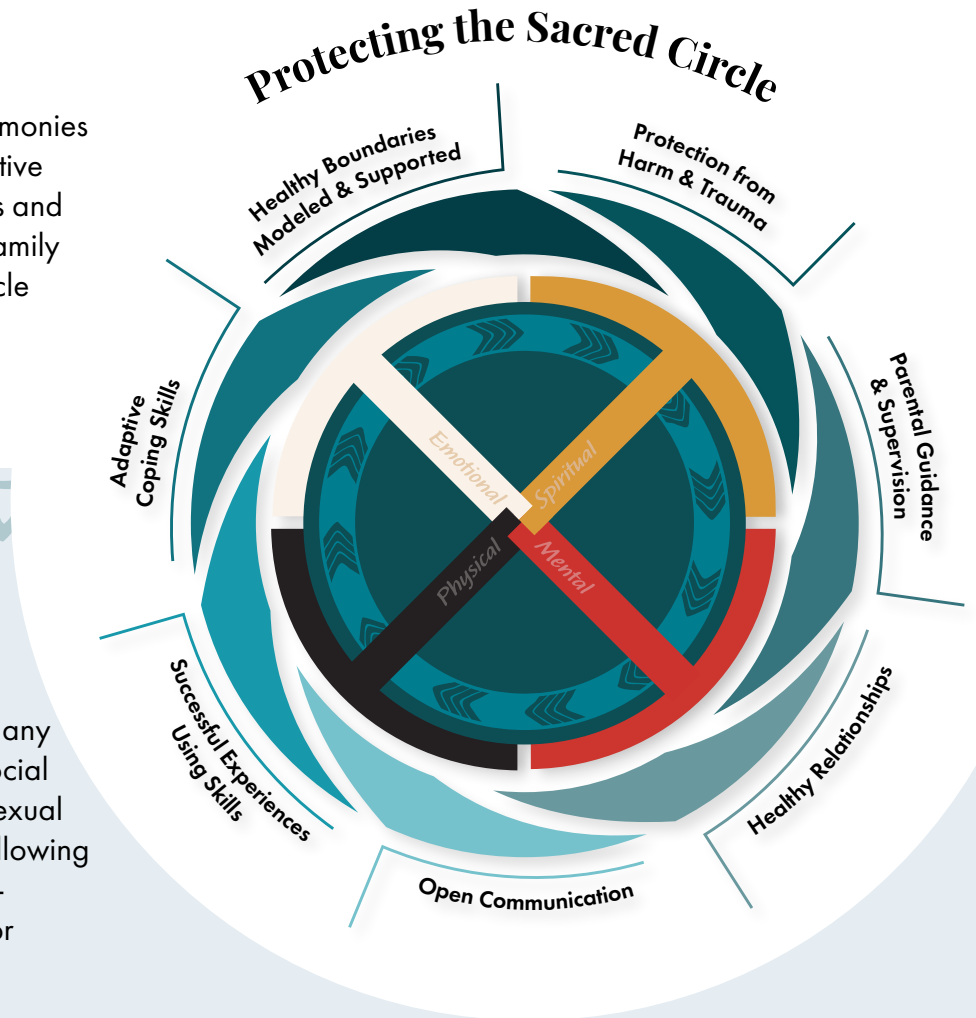
## Protective Factors

Tribal protocol, practices and ceremonies can facilitate resilience and protective factors in youth. Healthy behaviors and good decisions at the individual, family and community levels keep the circle sacred.

## 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 activity or nudity, sexual images, 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.



## 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 the next steps for your child and the best treatment options available if needed. This may include child protective services, law enforcement, or other agencies based on local protocols in place.

## 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**.



For more information on understanding the treatment process, [CLICK HERE](#).

- Know that caregiver involvement in treatment is crucial. Caregiver involvement improves treatment outcomes. Education about supervision, supporting their children in decision-making, and other areas helps youth with PSB.<sup>6</sup>
- Respect and support are essential. You should feel supported, respected and heard. 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.<sup>6</sup> If information is shared that a child's safety is of concern, this may need to be reported in compliance with child abuse reporting laws.

## Research

PSB does not increase based on sexual orientation, race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status.<sup>1</sup>

**1/3**, of sexual offenses against youth are committed by other youth.<sup>3,4</sup>

12 to 14 years of age, is when PSB happens the most.<sup>3</sup>

**1/2**, of child victims of PSB are under 6 years of age.<sup>4</sup>

**25%** of PSB cases involve family members.<sup>3</sup>

Most PSB occurs between children/youth who know one another.<sup>3</sup>

**<3%**, is the average sexual recidivism rate for youth with PSB and illegal sexual behavior.<sup>5</sup>

## Caregiver involvement in treatment is crucial.

### Additional Considerations

Review these guidelines for additional considerations about PSB and parental involvement for youth with PSB.











[CLICK HERE](#)





## Resources

### TOOLKITS, GUIDES AND BOOKLETS





-  National Sexual Violence Resource Center Toolkit
-  Newsletter and Guides from the NCSBY Parent Partnership Board
-  NICWA Resources on Response and Tribal Codes
-  Talking About the Elephant in the Room
-  Now What? What to Expect Out of Treatment
-  A Caregiver's Survival Guide
-  Taking Action Booklet (Adolescents)
-  Taking Action Booklet (Children)

### SUPPORT

-  Amaze Sex Education
-  Foster Parent Support

The information contained in this toolkit and multimedia content represents the views and opinions of the creators and not the views of OUHSC or states, tribes, and agencies. Mandatory reporting requirements and response to PSB varies between jurisdictions. For more information about mandatory reportings of child abuse and neglect, visit: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/manda.pdf>

### CENTERS, ORGANIZATIONS AND PROJECTS

-  National Center on the Sexual Behavior of Youth  
[www.ncsby.org](http://www.ncsby.org)
-  National Child Traumatic Stress Network  
[www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)
-  Stop It Now  
[www.stopitnow.org](http://www.stopitnow.org)
-  Healthy Children  
[www.healthchildren.org](http://www.healthchildren.org)

### References

1. Silovsky, J. F., & Bonner, B. L. (2003). Children with Sexual Behavior Problems: Common Misconceptions vs. Current Findings. National Center on Sexual Behavior of Youth.
2. National Children's Alliance (2017). PSB Fact Sheet Overview. Risk and Protective Factors.
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.
4. Snyder, H. (2000). Sexual Assault of Young Children as Report to Law Enforcement: Victim, Incident, and Offender Characteristics. NCJ 182990.
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.