Sexual feelings and play are a natural part of children’s development. It is expected that children will ask questions, look at and touch their own bodies and will be curious about the differences between their own bodies and the bodies of other children. These activities help children learn about their developing bodies and also about family and cultural rules and expectations about sexual behavior. Some childhood sexual behaviors, however, show more than typical curiosity. For example, some children may have a hard time not thinking about sex, touch themselves frequently or in public, try repeatedly to get other children to join with them in sex play or try to force other children to do things that are uncomfortable.

There are many reasons why children may show sexual behaviors that are inappropriate or unexpected for their age. Some children with sexual behavior problems have been sexually abused and some may have seen or heard adult sexual behavior that is more than they can cope with. Other children’s sexual behavior problems may be part of more general problems with self-control and impulsive behavior. For children who have had traumatic sexual experiences, repeating the sexual behavior with others, whether by agreement or by force, may be a reaction to the abuse. For others, the concerning behavior may be one of the only ways they have learned to be close and especially connected to someone else.

It can be very upsetting and stressful for caregivers to see children acting in ways that are inappropriate for their age and potentially hurtful to themselves or other children. When caregivers are upset, it can be tempting to respond harshly in order to stop the unwanted behavior immediately. What children need most at these times, when they are not able to control their own impulses, is firm adult limit setting but not punishment or highly emotional responses.

**How You Can Help:**

There are some things you can do to help your child and the rest of your family to limit inappropriate sexual behavior, and to set the stage for further treatment, if needed. The most important thing to remember is that your child needs your help in putting the brakes on activities that they are having a hard time stopping on their own:
**BE CLEAR WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT WHAT KINDS OF TOUCHING ARE OK WITHIN THE FAMILY AND WITH OTHER CHILDREN**

Be sure to set clear limits about privacy in your home, including privacy in the bathroom and while dressing. If the child is violating someone’s privacy or touching in a way that is not OK, say firmly and calmly that it is not OK to touch someone like that and tell the child to stop. Do not yell, threaten or shame the child. Many children will respond to clear and consistent limits and the behavior will stop.

**SUPERVISE YOUR CHILD**

Children with sexual behavior problems really need your help. They shouldn’t be left alone with other children or allowed to play behind closed doors. If you see your child putting hands on or getting too close to someone else, remind them to respect the other person’s privacy or personal space.

**MAKE SAFE SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS**

Do not let your child sleep in a bed with another child or adult, and if at all possible, do not allow your child to sleep in a room alone with another child. If you are concerned about not being able to provide the level of supervision necessary to help your child to control themselves, tell your CFTSI provider and they will help you find options to keep everyone safe.

**IDENTIFY TRIGGERS**

Pay attention to whether there are particular things that trigger your child’s sexual behavior, for example particular people, places or activities. Point out these connections to your child when it is happening. Remember to tell the CFTSI provider what you and your child have noticed so that they can help you and your child find other ways to manage the feelings.

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**REMEMBER:**

**BE AWARE OF HOW YOU ARE FEELING**

If you are upset, angry or distressed, make sure that you can respond to your child in a calm supportive manner before interacting with him or her. If you are having a hard time yourself, it’s better to wait until you’re feeling better before trying to help your child re-connect with the world.

**REMIND CHILD OF THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THEIR BEHAVIOR AND FEELINGS**

Which are brought up by the event, as discussed in meetings with clinician.

**MAINTAIN ROUTINES**

Keep routines that existed before the traumatic events as a way of supporting order and predictability in your child’s world.