

# SAFEGUARDING ADOLESCENTS

## STRATEGY GUIDE

### Theme: Harmful Sexual Behaviour

#### Introduction

Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) is developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour which is displayed by children, and which may be harmful or abusive (Hackett, 2014).

Children will display sexualised behaviours as part of their development. It is not always easy to recognise if the behaviours displayed are harmful. Like all behaviours, HSB is on a continuum, based on the level of concern as illustrated below:



*A continuum of children and young people's sexual behaviours*  
(Hackett, 2010)

The [Brook Traffic Light Tool](#) can assist in identifying, understanding and responding to sexual behaviours in children. Use of the Tool is good practice for all agencies and offers a unified safeguarding approach for Isle of Wight (IOW) and Hampshire professionals. IOW and Hampshire Safeguarding Children Partnerships offer [training](#) which, upon completion, gives professionals access to the Tool.

## What is the impact on safeguarding adolescents?

For any child displaying sexual behaviours, time needs to be taken to build an understanding of what needs the behaviour is communicating. All behaviours require a response and may offer opportunities for early intervention that could reduce the risk of the behaviour escalating. When sexual behaviours are identified as problematic or harmful, this includes a need to understand why this is being exhibited, as they may be an identification of safeguarding concerns, for example, exposure to inappropriate sexual activities, experience of abuse or child sexual exploitation.

Hackett's research suggests that anywhere from one-fifth to two-thirds of sexual abuse is committed by other children and young people (Hackett 2014). HSB is a very relevant safeguarding concern especially given the significant harm it can cause.



### Key facts

- At least one third of all sexual offences against children in the UK involve other children as perpetrators (Hackett *et al.*, 2016).
- Characteristics of children who display harmful behaviours are very different from adults.
- Recidivism rates are very low i.e., the vast majority will not repeat behaviours (Caldwell, 2016).
- Where a child is identified as a victim and/or preparator of HSB, consideration should be given to the need to complete an [Inter-Agency Referral Form](#).

Specialist assessment such as [AIM3 Assessment of Adolescents and HSB](#), may be required. Dependent on circumstances, this is most likely to be led by Children's Services and/or the Youth Offending Team, who will need the support of partnership agencies.

There is no prescriptive programme for HSB. As with many areas of intervention with children, core conditions of change relate to the need to build on effective relationships, consideration of strengths, taking account of the impact of trauma and the child's wider context.

## Additional Resources and Information

### Training

[Isle of Wight Safeguarding Children Partnership](#) - Information on training available for IOW professionals.  
[Hampshire Safeguarding Children Partnership](#) - Information on training available for Hampshire professionals.

### Multi-agency Consultation Forum

These forums are facilitated by the Youth Offending Team (YOT) and Forensic CAMHS. They are a safe space to explore and discuss harmful sexual behaviour. Please note this is not a service professionals can refer in to. Even if professionals do not have a case to discuss they are welcome to join a forum to listen, hear and contribute to the other cases being discussed.

For full information, including the latest dates and to book a slot, email:

Hampshire: [Hsb.consult@hants.gov.uk](mailto:Hsb.consult@hants.gov.uk)

Isle of Wight: [steve.whorwood@iow.gov.uk](mailto:steve.whorwood@iow.gov.uk)

### Further Reading

[NSPCC](#) - Information about protecting children from harm sexual behaviour.

[Barnardo's](#) - The importance of talking about harmful sexual behaviour.

[Home Office](#) - Information about healthy relationships.

[NICE](#) - Harmful sexual behaviour among children and young people.

[Simon Hackett- Research in Practice](#) – Research review on children and young people with harmful sexual behaviours.

### References

Hackett, S. (2014). Children and young people with harmful sexual behaviours: Research Review.

Hackett, S., Holmes, D. and Branigan, P. (2016). Operational framework for children and young people displaying harmful sexual behaviours, London, NSPCC.

Caldwell, M.F. (2016). Quantifying the decline in juvenile sexual recidivism rates, Psychology, Public Policy and Law 22(4), pp. 414-26 doi: 10.1037/law 0000094.