SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING

WORKING TOGETHER TO KEEP OUR YOUNG PEOPLE SAFE

June 2026 | Primary | What parents need to know about: Harmful sexual behaviour | Attendance

Understanding Harmful Sexual Behaviour in Children

Many parents hear the term harmful sexual behaviour and immediately feel worried or unsure what it means. In schools, this term is used to describe sexual behaviours shown by children that may be unsafe, inappropriate, upsetting or harmful to themselves or others.

It is important to remember that children are still learning about bodies, privacy, relationships and boundaries. This is why calm, age-appropriate conversations at home are so important.

What is harmful sexual behaviour?

Harmful sexual behaviour can include:

- touching another child in a way that makes them uncomfortable
- trying to look at private body parts
- using sexual words or language they do not fully understand
- showing sexual images to other children
- pressuring other children into games or behaviours they do not want to join in with
- copying behaviours they may have seen online, in videos, games or from older children.

Some behaviours may seem 'childish' or 'just joking' but children still need help to understand safe boundaries, consent and respect.

How can children learn these behaviours?

Children may copy things they have:

- seen online, including through social media
- heard from older children
- watched in videos, films or games
- overheard in conversations
- been sent via group chats on gaming platforms.

Young children are naturally curious, but they often do not fully understand what they are seeing or repeating.

Why talking about this matters

Children who understand body safety and boundaries are more likely to recognise when something feels wrong, speak up if they feel uncomfortable and understand when they need help from a trusted adult. These conversations also help children learn to respect other people's personal space and boundaries, as well as understand the importance of consent in an age-appropriate way. Talking about these topics is not about frightening children or taking away their innocence. It is about helping them stay safe, build healthy relationships, and learn how to treat others with kindness and respect.

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Helping children attend school

For some children, getting into school can sometimes feel difficult. This may happen after illness, changes at home, friendship worries, anxiety, poor sleep or simply losing confidence in the school routine.

As a school, we understand that every family is different. We are here to work together with parents and carers to support children in feeling happy, safe and ready to learn.

Why attendance matters

Coming to school regularly helps children to:

- build friendships
- feel part of the class
- develop confidence
- enjoy routines and structure
- keep up with learning

Young children learn best when they attend school regularly and feel connected to their teachers and classmates. Missing school can sometimes make worries feel bigger. Children may start to feel nervous about returning if they are away for long periods.

Signs your child may be struggling

Children do not always have the words to explain how they are feeling. Sometimes worries about school can show up in other ways, such as:

- tummy aches or headaches before school
- becoming upset at bedtime or in the morning
- refusing to get dressed
- changes in sleep
- becoming clingy or emotional
- saying they do not want to go without explaining why.

These behaviours are often signs that a child needs reassurance and support.

Helpful questions to ask

Keeping communication open can help children feel listened to and supported. You could ask:

"What are you looking forward to today?"

"Is there anything worrying you about school?"

"What helps you feel happy and safe at school?"

"Who could you talk to in school if you needed help?"

Working together

If your child is finding school difficult, please speak to us as early as possible. The sooner we understand what is happening, the sooner we can work together to support your child.

Children do best when home and school work together with patience, understanding and encouragement.

If you are worried about your child's attendance, please remember - you are not alone, and support is available.