



Harmful Sexual Behaviour amongst Young People

What is Harmful Sexual Behaviour?

Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB) is a term used to describe sexual actions that are outside what is safe for the young person's stage of development. HSB includes actions that put either the young person themselves, or another person at harm. This can include a spectrum of behaviour such as; frequently and intentionally accessing age-inappropriate sexual material online, using inappropriate language, undertaking mutual sexual activity they are not ready for with peers, sending and receiving illegal images or engaging in abusive or sexually violent sexual behaviour online or offline.

How big is this problem?

We do not know a true to life picture of the extent of HSB amongst young people, as much occurs without authorities becoming aware.

Research indicates that under 18's are responsible for at least one third of recorded sexual offences against children and young people in the UK. (Hackett, NSPCC 2016 and The Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2015).

Will these young people keep causing harm?

Young people who have displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviours are not "mini adult sex offenders" (Hackett, 2014) or "paedophiles in waiting" (Allardyce & Yates, 2018). It is important to remember that young people who have displayed HSB are "persons in development" (Lenkiewicz and Gallagher, 2016).

Most adolescents mature out of the behaviour as they move into adulthood (McCann & Lussier, 2008). The majority of young people will not go on to commit further sexual offences. Various studies have suggested sexual recidivism rates of between 2% and 14% (Prentky et al, 2000). Between October 2014 and September 2015, the reoffending rates for young people formally sanctioned for a sexual offence in England and Wales was 14.9%. This compares to an averaged juvenile reoffending rate of 37.8%. (MOJ, 2017) However, rearrests for non-sexual offences are more common amongst this cohort of young people, being 6 times more likely to be arrested again for non-sexual crimes (Caldwell, 2002).

What do young people need to prevent HSB?

All young people need to have support and guidance from trusted adults, to answer their questions and help them navigate their sexual development in a safe and positive way.

All young people need positive and consistent messages from the adults responsible for their welfare (professionally or otherwise) about sex and relationships, and keeping safe and respectful on-and-offline.

A proportion of young people need an anonymous space to get help about things that worry them about their sexual behaviour.

Some young people need specialist input, which involves their carers, to develop their understanding of the behaviour and how to make changes for a better and safer life.

Very few young people need to work with social care or criminal justice professionals, to keep themselves and others safe.

How can I help?

We are developing resources to help young people who are concerned about their online harmful sexual behaviour. If you are a young person, parent or professional and have a view on what more young people who are concerned about their sexual behaviour need, we would appreciate your input.

YP's Survey (aged 16-25) – Growing up in an online world

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/D52N5Z5>

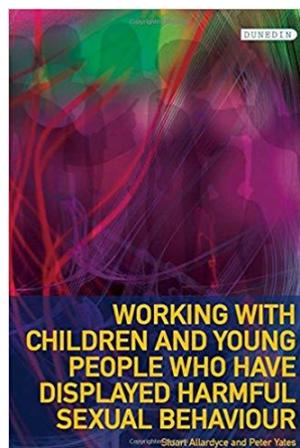
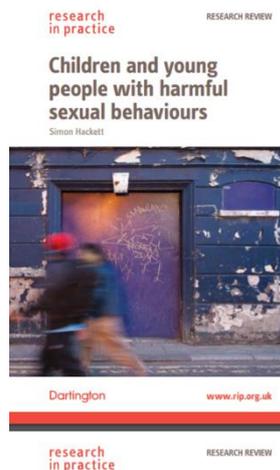
Parent's survey – Parenting in an online world

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/Y8GHTHL>

Professional's survey - Sexual development in an online world

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/YDPZPQL>

Suggested reading*:



* 'Ctrl' and Click on images for hyperlinks