



# ONE MINUTE GUIDE: Harmful Sexual Behaviour

## What is it?

Harmful Sexual Behaviours (HSB) are defined as; Sexual behaviours expressed by children and young people under the age of 18 years old that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards self or others, or be abusive towards another child, young person or adult.

## How serious is it?

It's important to remember that sexualised behaviours occur on a continuum from normal to inappropriate, problematic, abusive and violent and that to ensure consistency in responding to an incident, a standardised approach should be used to identify where the behaviour sits on this continuum. For that reason the City of York Council currently use Hackett's Sexual Continuum to help identify whether the behaviour reflects healthy and safe normal development, where it has the potential to be outside of healthy and safe development by being inappropriate or problematic and where behaviours are clearly outside of safe and healthy behaviour and are abusive or violent.

Using the Continuum also gives clarity on how to respond and aids the determination of defensible decisions about safeguarding children and young people. Importantly this also helps professionals to assess and respond appropriately to sexual behaviour in children and young people and understand healthy sexual development and distinguish it from harmful behaviour.

## Why do I need to take action?

It's important that incidents of HSB are not ignored and that they are responded to in a timely and consistent manner. Early intervention in cases of harmful sexual behaviour can enable young people to adopt a healthy development pathways and proceed to make healthy relationships.

## What if I have concerns about a young person's HSB?

If concerns around HSB are identified by a professional or a disclosure of potential HSB is made to a professional then in the first instance Hackett's Sexual Continuum should be used to identify whether the behaviour lies on the Continuum. Usually normal and inappropriate behaviour can be responded to through direct interaction with the child or young person and the giving of information, advice and explanation of boundaries with guidance including issues of privacy and consent. There may be instances in which if there is an absence of direct/indirect victims, problematic behaviours also result in a single agency response through targeted intervention, advice or guidance. However, if the agency or individual who become aware of the issue is unsure as to how to respond or of where the behaviour sits on the Continuum and are not prepared or unable to provide the child or young person with this information then contact with the [Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub \(MASH\)](#) on 01904 551900 should be made for advice and who can then signpost to other professionals and/or agencies including the voluntary sector to provide information and resources to use with the young person.

If behaviour is considered to be Problematic, Abusive or Violent and there is concern that a child, young person or an adult might have been harmed by the behaviour of the child or young person then the behaviour should be reported to the Police if it has not already been done so. Allegations of peer abuse should be taken as seriously as allegations of abuse perpetrated by an adult.

Behaviour falling into this range should also result in a referral to the [MASH](#) for each child/ young person. If the child is already open to Children's Social Care (CSC), the allocated worker and line manager will be notified.

## What Happens next?

A lot depends on whether there is going to be a police investigation or prosecution. If there is, then the young person will be supported through the process and the Youth Justice Service will ensure that any identified HSB will be assessed and appropriate intervention delivered at the earliest opportunity. However where it is concluded it is either not in the public interest to do so or there is insufficient evidence to charge then there remains the need to address the identified HSB through targeted HSB intervention.

The Youth Justice Service (YJS) provide a Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB) Service seeking to deliver intervention work with young people around identified HSB concerns that had not resulted in ongoing police investigation or prosecution. The YJS has the opportunity to engage with children and young people displaying these behaviours with the aim of preventing offending and reducing re-offending. Using identification, assessment and intervention tools such as Hackett's Sexual Continuum and AIM3 the primary objective of YJS intervention remains at all times the protection of victims, potential victims and the avoidance of any repetition of inappropriate or harmful behaviour. Government findings indicate that those young people offered early intervention benefit from the child centred approach of youth justice practitioners and their chances of rehabilitation improve. Such intervention can enable young people to adopt a healthy development pathway and proceed to make healthy future relationships.

The YJS currently only take referrals for the HSB service directly from Children's Social Care. The following information will be required on the referral before it is accepted by the YJS:

- Written consent from the young person and parents/carers for the referral to the YJS HSB Service will be required.
- Referral forms are available upon contacting the YJS on **01904 554565**.
- Completed referrals should be emailed to [yot.admin@york.gov.uk](mailto:yot.admin@york.gov.uk).

## Useful resources and further reading

### Child exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP)

CEOP is a National crime agency for the prevention and reporting of online abuse and exploitation. The Safety centre has links for children of all ages, parents and professionals to provide age appropriate information.

[www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre](http://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre)

### National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)

The NSPCC provides A Harmful Sexual Behaviour framework, which is a systemic tool to develop a local area response to HSB. They also provide a range of information on the website including research, advice for schools and professionals and how to respond to incidents of HSB.

[www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

### Parents Protect

The Lucy Faithful foundation runs Parent Protect, an organisation aimed at helping parents identify and respond to sexual abuse.

[www.parentsprotect.co.uk](http://www.parentsprotect.co.uk)

### Brook

Brook provide online information, advice and research aimed at supporting young people to stay safe. Their vision is to provide clinical services, digital support, tailored counselling and inspiring relationships and sex education ensuring young people are able to take charge of their sexual health and wellbeing.

[www.brook.org.uk](http://www.brook.org.uk)

## Where do I go for further information?

Please visit the [CYSCP website](#) for up to date information and latest news.

Please also sign up to the [CYSCP Newsletter](#) and follow us on Twitter [@YorkSCP](#)

