



## Managing Sexualised Behaviour Guidance for Supporting Children and Young People with Significant and Complex Needs in Schools

### Introduction

This guidance is intended to support schools in responding to sexualised behaviour in a calm, consistent and proportionate way. It should be used alongside existing guidance on Behaviour Support Plans and risk assessments, Individual Education Programmes (IEPs) and child protection procedures to help staff understand behaviour, teach appropriate skills and safeguard wellbeing. The guidance is intended to support professional judgement. It promotes a shared, rights-based approach that is aligned with Aberdeenshire and national policy. Head teachers and senior leaders should ensure that agreed approaches are understood by all staff and are applied consistently, with support from parents/carers and partner services where appropriate.

Sexualised behaviour refers to behaviours by a child or young person that involve their body, actions, language or interactions and are commonly understood to be sexual in nature. For example, self-stimulation, removal of clothing, exposing themselves to others or touching others inappropriately. These behaviours can arise for a variety of reasons, including hormonal and physical changes associated with puberty, curiosity, sensory regulation needs, communication difficulties or a lack of understanding of social boundaries. They may not necessarily have a sexual intent.

Supporting children and young people with significant and complex needs requires a sensitive and informed approach when managing sexualised behaviours. Consideration should be given to immediate management of sexualised behaviours as well as planning to ensure the wellbeing, dignity and safety of all pupils and staff are preserved.

### Immediate Management

When sexualised behaviour occurs, staff should respond calmly and without judgment, using clear and consistent approaches agreed within the school. Staff should prioritise the pupil's dignity at all times, ensuring that any actions taken are discreet, respectful and focused on reducing distress. The use of simple, reassuring language and visual cues can help the pupil understand expectations. For example, if a pupil removes their clothes, staff could offer a blanket or cover them, then gently support them to move to a quiet, low-stimulus area where they can regulate and be supported to redress. A visual "clothes on" symbol and a simple phrase such as, "*Clothes stay on.*", can be used to guide the pupil, followed by redirection using agreed strategies at school level.

**Initial Response** - Stay calm, use simple language and visual cues.

**Redirect** - Offer alternative sensory input (e.g. weighted blanket, fidget toy etc.)

**Record** – log incident details and context.



**Safeguarding** – If harm or exploitation is suspected, follow [Aberdeenshire Child Protection in Education Guidance](#) immediately.

### Assessment

Assessment and intervention should align with [Aberdeenshire’s staged assessment and intervention guidance](#) and [staged assessment and intervention process](#), with evidence gathered over time to inform planning, review and next steps.

Assessment should go beyond noting the behaviour and focus on understanding why it is happening and what factors may be contributing to it. This may include the consideration of:

- sensory regulation needs
- communication difficulties
- anxiety, distress or uncertainty
- environmental factors or transitions
- puberty or hormonal changes

When gathering information, staff should consider:

**Timing:** Does the behaviour occur at a specific time of day or during transitions?

**Context:** Is it linked to certain activities, environments, or staff members?

**Sensory or emotional factors:** Could it be a response to sensory overload, anxiety, or a need for regulation?

An ABC approach (Antecedent–Behaviour–Consequence) may be used to support the recording and analysis of incidents. This helps staff understand what happened before the behaviour (antecedent), what the behaviour looked like, and what followed (consequence), providing insight into triggers and patterns over time.

Partnership with parents and carers is an important part of this process, supporting a more holistic understanding of behaviour, including whether similar patterns or triggers are observed at home. This shared understanding can help inform consistent approaches and more effective support across settings.

Staff should ensure that conversations with parents and carers are handled sensitively. Conversations should use clear, non-judgmental language, acknowledging that such behaviours can arise from a range of different reasons, and reassure parents that the purpose of information sharing is to work together on consistent, supportive strategies across home and school.

### Risk Assessment

A risk assessment ensures that responses are proportionate, consistent, and safeguard the wellbeing of all involved

When considering risk, staff should take account of:

**Intent:** Is the behaviour exploratory, sensory-driven, or potentially harmful?

**Safety:** Does it pose a risk to the pupil or others?

**Peer Involvement:** Are other pupils/staff affected or at risk?



The [Aberdeenshire Behaviour Support Plan and Risk Assessment](#) should be used to structure this process. This supports consistency across staff and provides a shared understanding of agreed strategies. Input from parents/carers, staff and, where appropriate, education support services and multi-agency partners should be included to build a holistic picture.

## Interventions

Interventions should be planned through school curricular planning and an [Individualised Education Programme \(IEP\)](#). Targets should be clear and achievable, reflecting the pupil's needs and context.

### Early Intervention

Early intervention is particularly important for pupils with significant and complex learning needs, as some may experience barriers that make understanding social norms more challenging. Addressing sexualised behaviours early can reduce the likelihood of these becoming established patterns that may persist into adulthood and cause harm or difficulty.

In the early years, teaching the distinction between public and private spaces through clear visuals and consistent routines can help pupils to understand where particular behaviours are appropriate. As pupils develop, this learning can be progressively extended to include areas such as personal space, consent, and online safety, ensuring understanding is built incrementally and reinforced consistently over time.

As pupils approach puberty, it is important that pre-teaching and preparation are in place to support understanding of physical and emotional changes to their bodies. For pupils with significant and complex needs, this learning may need to begin earlier, be highly structured, and be revisited regularly using visual, concrete and repetitive approaches. Clear teaching around body changes, privacy and self-care can help reduce anxiety and prevent behaviours that arise from confusion or sensory discomfort.

Schools play a key role in supporting pupils with significant and complex learning needs to access Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) education. Staff should use a range of differentiated approaches to support understanding and communication in order to meet individual pupil needs.



### Strategies to Support Education Staff

The strategies outlined below offer examples of supportive approaches that schools can consider when responding to sexualised behaviour. This is not an exhaustive list, and not all strategies will be appropriate for all pupils. Staff should take account of developmental stage, communication profile and underlying regulation needs when selecting strategies, informed by ongoing assessment and risk assessment. Responses should be implemented consistently by all staff and aligned with agreed Behaviour Support Plans and Individual Education Programmes (IEPs).

Suggested Strategies	
<b>Environmental and Routine-Based Supports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce unstructured time where uncertainty may increase distress or dysregulation.</li> <li>• Timetable short periods of planned unstructured downtime, to help the pupil practise regulating in a low-demand context</li> <li>• Use clear visual timetables showing when and where private activities occur (e.g. toileting, changing)</li> <li>• Working with parents and carers to ensure that pupils receive consistent messages about public and private spaces across home and school, including identifying a designated private space at home where personal, private behaviours can take place</li> <li>• Maintain predictable routines to reduce anxiety linked to transitions</li> </ul>
<b>Regulation and Sensory-Based Strategies -</b> (Sexualised behaviours may be linked to regulation needs rather than sexual intent).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide planned sensory regulation opportunities throughout the day (movement, deep pressure, calming activities)</li> <li>• Offer acceptable replacement strategies that meet the same sensory/regulation need (e.g. hand fidgets, weighted items, movement breaks, sensory boxes, weighted blankets, and sensory breaks)</li> <li>• Identify sensory triggers (e.g. noise, clothing textures etc) and adapt the environment accordingly e.g. consider clothing choices (seams, textures, fastenings) if behaviours, such as stripping, are linked to sensory discomfort</li> <li>• Teach and reinforce alternative strategies, using repetition and modelling</li> <li>• Ensure all staff are familiar with agreed regulation/sensory strategies and apply them consistently</li> <li>• Offer calming strategies proactively, not just reactively, to prevent escalation.</li> </ul>



<b>Communication and understanding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use simple, consistent language</li> <li>• Avoid abstract explanations that may be difficult for pupils to understand.</li> <li>• Reinforce learning through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· symbols and visuals</li> <li>· objects of reference</li> <li>· social stories</li> <li>· songs and repeated phrases</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Repeat key messages across different routines and contexts to support generalisation</li> </ul>
<b>Teaching Public / Private Concepts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embed public/private teaching into daily routines (e.g. bathroom use, PE changing)</li> <li>• Use colour coding, photographs or room-specific symbols to support understanding</li> <li>• Reinforce learning at predictable moments rather than only when behaviours occur</li> <li>• Align teaching approaches between school and home wherever appropriate</li> </ul>
<b>Staff Consistency and Planning - Consistency can help to reduce confusion and escalation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree strategies through IEPs, Behaviour Support Plans and Risk Assessments</li> <li>• Ensure all staff (including relief staff) understand agreed language and responses</li> <li>• Avoid individual staff improvising responses outside agreed approaches</li> <li>• Review strategies regularly and update plans as the pupil's needs develop</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for staff to debrief and seek support after incidents, helping maintain wellbeing and consistency of practice.</li> <li>• Use trauma - informed approaches where needed, recognising that some behaviours may reflect past distress</li> </ul>
<b>Multi-Agency and Family Involvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve parents/carers to ensure consistent messages across settings.</li> <li>• Ensure information sharing respects the pupil's dignity and right to privacy</li> <li>• Where sexualised behaviour is persistent, complex or raises safeguarding concerns, support should be coordinated through the Child's Planning process, with contributions from parents/carers, relevant education support services and partner agencies</li> </ul>
<b>PSE &amp; RSHP Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapt lessons to meet communication, sensory, and cognitive needs. For example, use signing, symbols and objects of reference for pupils with limited verbal language.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate resources such as <a href="#">RSHP Complex ASN</a> and <a href="#">Autism Toolbox – Sexual Health</a> to ensure content is accessible and developmentally appropriate. (Further suggested resources can be found on the next page)</li> </ul>
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### Resources to Support Education Staff

Learning and Teaching Resources	
<a href="#">Aberdeenshire ECS Curriculum Health and Wellbeing Hub</a>	This hub provides resources, guidance, and professional learning materials to support the delivery of Health and Wellbeing. It includes practical tools for planning, teaching, and assessing wellbeing, relationships, and RSHP education.
<a href="#">Aberdeenshire ECS Curriculum Health and Wellbeing Hub</a>	This Glow site holds resources and information to support learning and teaching across the Primary and Secondary HWB curriculum
<a href="#">Autism Toolbox – Sexual Health</a>	This provides practical advice and resources to support autistic learners with understanding sexual health and personal care.
<a href="#">Health and Wellbeing Experiences and Outcomes</a>	This document outlines the Health and Wellbeing experiences and outcomes within Curriculum for Excellence, including those related to Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP).
<a href="#">Online Pornography and Illegal Content – an easy read guide</a>	This document provides practical advice for supporting individuals who may encounter online pornography or illegal content. It outlines risks, safeguarding responsibilities, and strategies for promoting safe online behaviour.
<a href="#">Pants resources for schools and teachers</a>	This resource provides lesson plans and activities to help schools teach the PANTS rules, which support children in understanding body safety, privacy, and consent. It offers age-appropriate guidance and practical tools.
<a href="#">Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood resource for Young People with Autism Spectrum Disorder</a>	This document provides practical guidance on delivering Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) education to autistic learners. It offers strategies for adapting content and teaching approaches to meet diverse communication and sensory needs, ensuring lessons are accessible, inclusive, and aligned with Curriculum for Excellence and children’s rights.



Learning and Teaching Resources	
<a href="#">RHSP – Complex ASN</a>	Tailored resources and guidance for delivering Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood education to learners with complex additional support needs. It includes adapted lesson materials, visual supports, and practical strategies.
<a href="#">Skills For Life</a>	A set of animations produced originally for BBC Learning as a resource for use in schools for pupils with Additional Support Needs, in support of PSHE. The animations deal with personal health, hygiene and social issues.
<a href="#">SWIRL – Sexual Wellbeing Image Resource Library Scotland</a>	SWIRL is a tool for professionals to support the development of accessible sexual health and wellbeing information. The images are free to use for educational purposes.

Professional Learning	
<a href="#">Behaviour Support Plan</a> - ALDO	This online training module provides staff with essential knowledge and practical strategies for supporting pupils displaying challenging behaviour.
<a href="#">CIRCLE</a>	Research-informed education resources focused on adapting learning environments and approaches to support inclusion for all children and young people.
<a href="#">Employee Assistance Programme</a>	Confidential wellbeing support for Aberdeenshire staff.
<a href="#">Individual Education Programme</a> - ALDO	This training helps participants understand how Individual Education Programmes can support pupils in overcoming barriers to learning. It covers the purpose of an IEP and practical advice on setting achievable targets.
<a href="#">Understanding and Supporting Autistic Learners: Universal Autism</a> - ALDO	This online course is designed to develop staff knowledge and understanding of autism and how to provide support for autistic learners. It consists of five modules, each including information and activities to help staff anticipate needs, reduce distress, and promote inclusion.
<a href="#">Understanding Sensory Behaviours</a> - ALDO	This course helps staff develop a deeper understanding of sensory needs and how to support them effectively in educational settings. It consists of four modules. The training promotes practical strategies to enhance inclusion and wellbeing.



<b>Professional Learning</b>	
<a href="#"><u>Rosslyn School – Case Study</u></a>	This sway shows how Rosslyn School adapted RSHP Complex ASN resources to create a resource to support schools and home to teach complex needs pupils about masturbation and where/when it is okay to do this.
<a href="#"><u>Trauma Informed Practice - ALDO</u></a>	This course provides information on the role you have in understanding and responding to people affected by trauma.
<a href="#"><u>Understanding Sexualised Behaviour in Children - NSPCC</u></a>	This NSPCC course helps professionals understand what harmful sexual behaviour is, why it occurs, and how to identify and respond to it safely and confidently.

<b>Documents and Policy Drivers</b>	
<a href="#"><u>Aberdeenshire Child Protection in Education</u></a>	This document provides clear guidance for safeguarding children and young people within Aberdeenshire educational settings. It outlines roles, responsibilities, and procedures for identifying, responding to, and reporting child protection concerns. The guidance supports staff in creating safe learning environments and ensuring that the wellbeing and rights of all pupils are protected in line with national legislation and local policy.
<a href="#"><u>Aberdeenshire Complex Needs Provision for Pupils with Significant and complex Needs Guidance</u></a>	This guidance outlines Aberdeenshire Council’s approach to supporting pupils with significant and complex additional support needs. It provides a framework for planning, delivering, and reviewing provision to ensure that pupils receive appropriate, personalised support.
<a href="#"><u>Equality Act 2010: guidance - GOV.UK</u></a>	Provides a single legal framework to protect individuals from discrimination, harassment, and victimisation based on protected characteristics (e.g., age, disability, race, sex).
<a href="#"><u>GIRFEC - Aberdeenshire</u></a>	This website provides information on how Aberdeenshire implements the <i>Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)</i> approach. It explains local processes for supporting children and young people’s wellbeing, including the use of wellbeing indicators, planning tools, and multi-agency collaboration.
<a href="#"><u>GIRFEC – Scottish Government</u></a>	This explains the national policy, which is Scotland’s approach to improving outcomes and wellbeing for all children and young people. It sets out key principles,



Documents and Policy Drivers	
	roles, and responsibilities for practitioners to ensure every child gets the right support at the right time.
<a href="#"><u>Guidance on the Delivery of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) Education in Scottish Schools</u></a>	This national guidance sets out expectations for planning and delivering RSHP education across all stages of learning in Scotland. It provides principles, key messages, and practical advice to ensure RSHP education is inclusive, age-appropriate, and aligned with Curriculum for Excellence.
<a href="#"><u>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)</u></a>	This resource explains the UNCRC, an international treaty that sets out the fundamental rights of all children and young people, including the right to protection, education, and participation.