



Tips for Reducing Problematic Sexual Behaviors

(adapted from *Helping Children with Sexual Behavior Problems* by Toni Cavanagh Johnson, PhD)

1. Provide a healthy home environment by establishing clear boundaries (physical, emotional, sexual, moral and electronic) and consistently reinforcing them.
2. Identify the problem:
 - a. Make a list of all sexual behaviors.
 - b. Identify which ones are problematic (can't be redirected, causing personal or other distress, age inappropriate, etc.).
 - c. Prioritize the problematic behaviors – put them in order from most disruptive to least.
3. Work with the child to pick one behavior to modify.
4. Label the behavior – have the child help and choose something simple and straightforward – ie: “rubbing yourself.”
5. Take notes – watch for a few days to see when, where, how often and with whom the behavior happens. Share your observations with the child.
6. Back up the train – try to identify triggers by interviewing the child about their thoughts and emotions just prior to starting the behavior. Is there a person or thing that upsets them? Talking with the child about what you observe can help move it from an automatic behavior to one that can be modified.
7. Understand the triggers – by now, a pattern will emerge that might help “explain” the behavior. Working on addressing the root of the problem often helps with resolution.
8. Develop a plan – With input from the child, decide what you can say/do to help remind them to stop the behavior.
9. Redirect – Agree on three substitute behaviors the child will like such as:
 - a. Getting active –moving in any way (avoid aggressive or contact sports)
 - b. Mind games – crossword, Sudoku, puzzles, video games
 - c. Mindfulness – deep breathing, leaving the situation, counting to ten, helping others
 - d. Connect – especially with caregivers – do something positive
10. Restrict – The child might need boundary restrictions or extra supervision until they can control their behavior.
11. Share – make sure everyone involved in the child's life is on the same page and knows the plan.
12. Monitor- use charts/rewards maintained by child so they can see the results of their work. If the behavior isn't stopping, use negative reinforcement (taking away a privilege such as screen time).