

Children

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1. Why do children initiate sexualised play and behaviour _

Kia ora, I'm Alisha Keith. I work for Stan Children's Services and my role is in Manaake. Kia ora koutou, Coraline Janssen, Toko Inua. I'm the Prevention Education Lead with the Stop Services. Kia ora, Banti Gallagher, Toko Inua, and I'm the Team Leader for Stop Children's Services. I lead the team who work with the children. So, we've got quite a few questions to ask, and I'll start off with, why do children initiate sexualised play and behaviour, and what's underneath that box? So, we kind of decided I would answer this question, didn't we? So, if you think about children, the language of children is play, and here we're talking today about children under 10.

And we probably see children in our office from age 6. 6 to 12, actually. But the language of children is play. And so, children might come to learn about not okay touch, as we often call it, through children doing that behaviour at school, through being exposed to something accidentally, or going on the internet and looking, like a child typing in the word sex, for instance, and then not knowing. And so, when that child comes up, they get exposed to something. They might have accidentally seen their parents doing something. Those are some of the reasons that we find behind the behaviour that children present with when they come to our service.

It's often, we often remind people to really think about the behaviour through the lens of a child, rather than putting an adult focus on it. Though, some of the children that I think are vulnerable to this behaviour, for other reasons, are children who live with a lot of trauma, and maybe their boundaries are just not great for a variety of reasons. Also, children who are neurodiverse or have a disability sometimes just don't understand those boundaries. And if you take, for instance, a child coming into puberty that doesn't have very good social skills, well, then it's kind of a set up for them maybe not to get it right.

And so, those are my thoughts on some of the reasons. And I think you know what's really helpful for parents and caregivers that come across our path in our area of work quite often. Is to just remind ourselves that actually the world's a very curious place. And you know, over the last many years, we've had a lot more parents and caregivers and professionals ring up. About, you know, three, and four, and five-year-olds at preschool. And so, just to talk to them. And so, the environment, the environment, whatever, is really important, I think, when you think about it. And so, I think, if you're in the eligibility of the world, if you're at a career and you're at a job, there's often a lot of pressure on you.

And yes, I think you know what's really helpful for parents and caregivers that come across our path and our area of work quite often.

year olds at preschool and kindy who perhaps have initiated or have engaged in sexualized play and behavior the language is really interesting the language is really interesting you know is it sexualized play or is it more inquisitive and you know kids meet developmental milestones with skipping and talking and walking but they there's also a bit of a guide around what might be developmentally age expected also yeah that's right around what children might um and so there's a whole range of and and the other point i think for parents and caregivers to be reminded of is uh is the point that betty made to to kind of view sexualized play and behavior between children really through that childhood because we're so quick to kind of view particular behaviors through an adult lens and that's and that's not helpful in terms of how we respond how we have those conversations how we provide support often there's a lot of overreaction yes um by adults with children who might be displaying more of balance with that is that people sweep it under the mat because you know they're not quite sure how to respond so can i just say one more thing before we move to the next question one of the things i thought of in coming here today was i really wanted to put a cross a message of reassurance for parents so if your child is involved in some level of behavior that's not okay a number of parents or caregivers ask me what does this mean for when they grow up and when they become an adolescent or an adult and my reassurance is that if we get started in preventing it it really doesn't mean a lot we don't we don't want to say that this child is going to become something because of this behavior that's happened in a wee moment in time probably in a context and things like what we've talked about here so just reassurance to not not go there in your head to far you know to what it means later on just be just because a little person might initiate in bottom games it doesn't mean that they're going to continue to do that yeah that's wrong you know i kind of think back to the 70s and 80s where the school of thought was you know if a child is going to grow up in a different way know if a little person of a child or a tamariki had been sexually harmed or sexually abused in any way then they're likely to go on to sexually harm others and that's certainly not the case especially in today's world of digital exposure and you know what our young people are navigating so part of this talk is to to help people help parents and caregivers and adults to slow down and not be quick to making assumptions and look at the context and to look at the context of what this behavior what this what what's behind the behavior what might this behavior you know be saying and if I can use an example there you know it maybe there's a six year old girl who might be exploring her own private parts her own genitalia and as part of that she might want to 03 insert something.

So the behaviour, you know, we often talk about the traffic lights in terms of green on red to kind of get a sense of what is age expected here and when to be concerned. The behaviour, we don't want to be encouraging any of our kids to be putting anything in any orifices. That's why we talk about not putting things into noses and ears and eyes and that also is our bottoms, our anus and our vagina. So the behaviour, we don't want that to be encouraged. However, if parents and caregivers can slow down to understand perhaps what the context might be, and there could be a range of reasons why a little person might be wanting, and this is the part that we really just need to be mindful of, because what if that wee person had had a conversation with a big sister or had perhaps, you know, observed mum changing a tampon in the toilet.

If we can slow down a little bit, we don't want that to be encouraged. However, if parents and caregivers can slow long enough to get the context of the behaviour then you can respond in a way that's going to be most effective for that little person too.

2. When would a parent_caregiver be concerned about a child's sexual play or behaviour _

When would a parent be concerned about a child's sexual play or sexual behaviour? Yeah, well there's a lot of guidelines to kind of give a bit of a sense of when behaviours might cross the line to becoming more than just developmentally age expected. We often talk about kids will be kids, they'll play doctors and nurses, they'll play families, they'll play you show me yours and I'll show you mine. I think one of the key messages is to that every opportunity is an opportunity to have a conversation and it needs to start early with our toddlers. So in terms of when to be worried, when that age expected behaviour might move into more of a concern or the orange kind of level, sometimes we're looking at differences between age of the child.

Yes. Yes. Sometimes we're looking at differences between age of the child. Yes. So if you've got a 10 year old who's initiating bottom games of some sort with a 5 year old, that would be a little bit more of a concern than a same age pair. We're kind of looking at how mutual is the behaviour. In an adolescent and an adult world, we talk about consent and consent is used a lot also, it's been talked about a lot more also for our preschoolers and our kindy age kids. But how mutual was this game? How mutual was this behaviour or not? How distressed perhaps one of the children might be over the other?

Again, slowing down to get a wee bit of a context. And then we're also looking at differences in perhaps functioning. You know, if there's a child who's functioning much lower cognitively alongside a same age peer who might be functioning at a different level, you're kind of looking at differences. That's right. What have I missed, Betty? Any threats or coercion in the behaviour. So if you don't do this touch, I'm going to do something, whatever it may be. Not be your friend. No, I'm going to not be your friend if you don't play this game with me. You're not going to come to my birthday party.

You're not going to come to my birthday party. You're not going to have any friends or something like that. So we often talk with parents, caregivers and the children around okay, not okay secrets. Because that's an important, very important conversation. And to not underestimate that children can be quite tricky. But again, this is the real message for parents and caregivers to slow down. You know, the example that I used with a wee six year old girl around perhaps inserting something into her vagina, the behaviour is probably in the orange. Because we don't want kids to be doing that. It's a concern.

But when we slow down and get the context to understand she was playing to process something quite innocent to make sense of, then there's less of a concern. So it's tricky because we can't kind of manualise this without understanding the context and slowing down and being curious about what's happening. When we do an inquiry, when I take an inquiry, I'm asking all kinds of questions around, the context and what type of touch it was. So the other thing we haven't said is that for us there's a difference between silly school games that go on like, well, boys, I suppose, or girls who play a little game where it's, you know, touching each other's privates.

And there's a difference between a game that's gotten silly and a bit out of hand of that versus putting hands down in clothing. Or asking someone to remove their pants or their skirt. So if it's under clothes and actually hands on privates, then we're a little more concerned. So it really is about the context and how really the level of how intrusive it is. And I was thinking how explicit, you know, so again, depending on age, if you've got a four year old who's showing really explicit sexualised behaviour, speaking about it, showing gestures, acting out, using the dolls to act out, then there would be some level of curiosity to explore a little bit more as to, you know, how concerned should you be.

You know, I think the statistics and sadly who are still experiencing. And so we don't want to rule, you know, that there's some tough stuff or some trauma or some sexual harm that has happened. But our encouragement is often for that to not be the first place that parents and caregivers go. Yeah. But to be able to slow down, because so many times in our area of work when teachers, when social workers, when grandparents have had conversations, can you tell me what happened? You know, what was the game that you were playing? Sometimes it can be quite innocent. We're engaging in that.

Another example that comes to mind of two little girls who, at kindy, so they're little, might be, one had their pants down, and the other had their pants down, and the other had their pants down, and the other had their pants down, and the other had their pants down, and the other was looking into the other wee friend's bodrum. So for an adult to stumble across that behaviour and seeing a little girl with their pants down bending over and the other little girl looking very, very closely, you know, these things sometimes take adults by surprise in terms of how they respond.

But in this situation, it was innocent. Mm-hm. And that, you know, I think that's what we're trying to do. I think that's what we're trying to do. And that one of the wee girls had had worms, and she was checking out her friend's bodrum to make sure that she didn't have worms. And again, looking through the eyes of a child, when you think of worms, you know, kids think of potentially garden worms, you know, and that's not the case. So I think as adults, we have to remind ourselves, slow down, through the eyes of a child, conversation.

3. Supporting a child that has specific _learning needs with sexualised behaviour

I heard both of you mention, over the last couple of questions, about disabilities. So I just wanted to ask, how would someone support a child with sexualised behaviour that has a disability? What would that look like? We get very creative. So we have quite, over the last nearly eight years that I've been in the children's service, at any given time, I don't know how many we'd have, but we see a lot more children on the spectrum. Children who have an intellectual disability, low social functioning, and when we work with those children, we're just developing a way of interacting with them and getting the messages across that we need to at their level.

So we do a lot of that. We do a lot of creative things with visuals, stories, social stories, play. Kids come in, the natural thing that they do when they come to us is play. We've got playrooms set up. So we use a lot of play and games, it might happen through games. And then the parent or caregiver in the children's service is almost always there. Not every time, but almost always part of the session. So we really equip them for how to carry on those ideas at home as well. But sometimes it's even a visual of like three points and there might be a red circle with a line through it in terms of no bottoms touching or something.

And we work with the schools, we support the school as well, particularly if behaviors happened at the school. Do you have any thoughts? I was just thinking it kind of highlights that, you know, all children, you know, we have to be creative. We have to be creative. We have to be creative. And I think that's something that, you know, our role as parents is to begin to take the kids to face the

challenges of children, regardless of developmental challenges and things that, you know, we need to adjust our messaging and our responses accordingly. It's like some kids will ask lots of questions, you know.

From age three, they're asking all sorts of questions and those questions continue. But not all children ask questions. Some are very quiet. But all children need to have those safe adults in their lives to talk about boundaries and them being flexible. boundaries, to talk about safe hands, to talk about how precious and special they are, a lot of that over the last few years in terms of talking about personal space, and it's kind of an extension.

You know, we're good at talking about not pulling hair and not kicking and not biting and not hitting, but I think our encouragement also is for adults to also talk about how precious our bodies are, and because of that, we don't play bottom games, we don't look at people's bottoms, so the messaging is quite simple, I think it's a big topic, it's a big topic that for many adults don't know quite where to start, how much to say, and look, the reality is, for every family, for every whānau, depending on their values, depending on how they do life together, depending on what goes on in their home, you know, they will have a good sense of what their child is going through.

And it's part of the mahi that we do, isn't it Betty, like we'll speak to parents and caregivers and professionals, sometimes 15, 20 phone calls a week, just to kind of give guidance about how to approach these conversations.

4. At what age do you start conversations about safe touch, safe boundaries_

How young is young enough to start these conversations about safe touch and boundaries?

Start early you know like I guess these conversations we've moved on from having the big chat you know that one big chat and the conversations start I think with our babies you know just really sharing not doing to the babies and the kids but kind of having opportunities when it's bath time when you're changing nappies to just be talking about you know you're a big girl now you're a big boy now or you know you're at kinder or you're at school and so you can be washing your own private parts of your own body I think I think parents and caregivers will have all different views as to you know when these conversations should start I remember working with you know working with a family where the wee two-year-old would sit on Nana's lap and they would read a story about where babies are made you know and it started then and then I've worked with other families where that book would not come out until the child was age 12.

yes you know we've we've worked with families where um you know sometimes uh the mum will kiss their kids on the lips good night or you know goodbye in the morning to go to school and I've worked with other mums where they would never kiss their kids on the lips because for them that it didn't feel right or it felt a bit too intimate and so um there's no right or wrong I think um but our encouragement is that this doesn't need to be a taboo topic correct and and that earlier is better so I've worked with a parent not long ago who had a seven-year-old and still felt like that was too young to start talking about privates being private and how babies are made and that sort of thing but I think um what I would remind about is how prevalent and available the internet is and even games that children play where somebody might a stranger might come into a game and show something or do something that's not really okay and so younger and younger children are looking online seeing things that are you know not okay and younger and younger children at school have language that would be shocking that is just shocking to adults so seven is I think could be a bit late nowadays I agree with you Lynn the earlier the better and that early on conversation starts about our our team and our boundaries and our body being sacred and and who can touch you like you know we talk about the people who can touch your privates are your your mom or your dad the doctor with them present probably but that's that's about the limit no one at school an auntie or an uncle unless unless there's some arrangement for their caregiving but even then you know really nobody should be touching their privates unless there's something something a little wrong I think I think adults need to be prepared yeah to for the big questions that come you know just in the last couple of weeks I've heard of several families one where a seven-year-old came home and asked mum what a blowjob was and another family where a nine-year-old came home and said the kids at school were talking about 69ers what is that so you know we're long gone of having these big conversations when kids are at purity and you know like if we had ten different families sitting in the room or ten different lots of parents I'm sure each of us would have a slightly different way of approaching and asking sorry approaching and responding to those questions so our encouragement is for adults to think about that you know the what if your children are coming home to ask these questions?

First of all, it's great that they're coming home and feeling safe enough to ask. Because if they go to Google, they're going to get a whole lot more than what they bargained for. That's the other point, actually, is to just really encourage parents to set a safe space for any question. No questions off limits. You have to be prepared and think about how you'll answer them. But if we make it really okay for kids to ask questions, then they can, and you can have more control over what they get as an answer. Because historically, often kids have been told off for asking questions or saying anything.

So that's duty. We're not talking about that. Often there's quite a shame-based way that adults can respond to kids, sometimes humiliate them, sometimes laugh. So, again, as parents, I think, and caregivers, and actually all children in our lives, to really treat it as

quite a treasure when children feel safe enough to come and ask about the big stuff that they are hearing about and being exposed to. And to give yourself a minute. Take a breath and just say, and to be curious. I'm kind of curious about your question. And, wow, I'm kind of curious where you might have thought about that. Really great question, let me get back to you, you know, with a response.

I think, you know, being gentle on ourselves as parents and caregivers, we're not always going to get it right, but responding gently and respectfully, not reacting, is helpful. Yes, absolutely. Because it's a teaching opportunity, I guess. All behaviours, situations where parents or caregivers might walk into the kids exploring each other in the bath, or playing, playing with the kids. Playing the game in the hut, or out on the trampoline with their pants down, or gestures, or jokes, or whatever it might be. There's the treasure in terms of being able to have a conversation.

5. What behaviour is developmentally age expected_

What behaviour should I expect to be age appropriate, age expected? It's interesting the language, the language is really important because for years we talked about normal, what's normal? And we've kind of realised actually normal's quite a big category. And then we moved into appropriate, what's age appropriate? But sometimes the behaviour might be appropriate for that context, if you're with your mates at school, telling dirty jokes at school, it might be age appropriate, or age expected but not appropriate. And so just in the last little while we've been probably talking more about what is normal.

It kind of ties in with your question earlier around do all kids have the right behaviour? It's the same thing. They're all going to be very, very, very mature. They're very, very mature in terms of how they're going to grow. We know that some kids are going to be very, very mature, grow at the same age and stage, or we might have a 12-year-old who's gone through puberty as big as a young man but functioning as a five or six-year-old. But there are guidelines. There are guidelines. There's actually a resource on our website, a wee booklet, that goes through what parents and caregivers might expect to be age expected through the ages zero to two, three to five.

I don't know if that's the right word for age, but any age. And then you can go through it. What sort of questions should I ask?

five five to seven there's also um brook traffic lights is another resource you know if parents googled what is age appropriate behavior there's a lot of information out there that give you a guide um so thinking of our toddlers for example you know it's not uncommon for our three and four year olds to be really fascinated about the world around them fascinated about poos and leaves fascinated about how people go to the toilet fascinated about their orifices and it's about that age that we'll often hear things being put into orifices which sometimes can be quite scary for a parent yes that's right you know oh this is should i be worried about that um and yeah it's not something that we want to there's the teaching moment as opposed to for things to be put on you know because it might be hurtful or it might you know force them down so i don't know that either um well what would be in the you think about just your age and developmentally expected questions or curiosities that they might have like do my privates look the same as your privates and i just was in a conversation the other day actually with with someone who works with us talking about their children and you know exploring well why do you have that and i don't um and having a little conversation about that so that's all really age expected and even um some types of touch like if if they're playing mums and dads and they're playing out um mum and dad being in bed together you know we don't want them in the in the classroom tucked away under a blanket together things tend to happen when that happens but it's it's age expected play and i remember um a little boy that we saw had just been to a wedding and was you know playing things like that out um so i'd say that that's age expected and con the context is there some kids love to be butt naked yes yes we hear of um you know mums sometimes beside themselves and parents and caregivers beside themselves of you know you know my wee boys pulling his penis and how long it stretches there's a whole lot of normal that we don't have to freak out that's right there's i'd say also that there have been a couple of times even in this last year where we've got a situation where there's been oral genital contact between two boys but one of them saw something just wanted to try it out with a friend it was a mutual thing none of them were really upset but you know it's working with the parents so they're going to know how to respond to that but in the absence of any other behavioral issues trauma parents who are really on to it and can have these conversations that's not going to be necessarily a referral to us it again it really does depend on the whole context and who the children are swimming swimming in change rooms is an um definitely a place that we the spectrum of behavior from really age expected checking each other out to maybe wanting to do a little bit of touch that isn't okay and just remembering that children are going to potentially initiate and explore yes so themselves as well that's right yeah you know we often talk about self-soothing with children in terms of touching their own private parts it's something that sometimes babies and toddlers do as opposed to masturbation you know which often has a bit more of an adolescent or an adult um connotation to it and in and some parents and caregivers you know react quite quite in huge ways when that happens that often are quite shaming and telling off of the children you know how young is young enough to have those conversations but when your children are young enough to have those conversations with them yeah they're often a bit shy when they're really coming up and saying something like well, you know, often this is a question that preschool teachers and kindies ask, you know, we've got kids that are sitting on the mat and they're touching themselves, you know, should we be worried?

Well, generally actually at that age, no, I think this is where distraction and redirection sometimes is helpful. And privates are private, so it's okay to maybe touch your privates, but not on the mat at preschool, in front of everyone else. That's right, and as they get older, you know, perhaps the conversation then extends, doesn't it, too? But it's always done in a caring, respectful way. I mean, kids have crushes on each other. Kids want to, you know, play all sorts of games. They want to tell dirty jokes, naughty jokes. They want to explore names for genitalia. They're hearing a whole lot of stuff.

They're seeing a whole lot of stuff. And I've often asked, you know, well, I've often wondered myself, these... This criteria of what we put sexualised behaviour in, you know, does that evolve with time, given the context of our digital world and technology? And we're certainly experiencing that children from a much younger age know a lot more, are exploring a lot more, and alongside that, to just be reminded that not all children, do engage in this stuff. That's right. Sometimes, some kids won't ever engage in sexualised play and behaviour, or they won't ever touch themselves or play with themselves in front of, you know, family at home.

Some ask questions, some don't. A real range. I think it gets, it becomes a little bit more clear-cut as children grow into adolescence. We're 15 years, 15 years older, so it's pretty obvious. I think that a lot of us, as kids, often are just not as comfortable, we're all at our own home, we're not at home. What I find amazing about this is there are many ways for us to engage in this. There is... but all of that foundational conversation around being safe and being respectful starts young. Yeah, yeah. Starts early. So that they can have good positive relationships. They'll have lots of good positive relationships, I hope.

I think that's what I'd like to see. Yeah. I think that's what I'd like to see. I think that's what I'd like to see.

6. Is sexualised behaviour due to sexual harm - being careful about our assumptions

Yeah, we were talking about parents' reactions before to things. I was just wondering if it is a common factor with what you see with your work for parents to assume that their children have been possibly sexually assaulted or something happened to their children to them be displaying behaviours, sexual behaviours. Does that make sense? Yeah, I think that parents and caregivers can quickly go there out of fear. Or teaching staff sometimes at schools also can make that connection. And this is probably one of the really important things to keep working on moving forward as family, as whānau, as community, to not make those assumptions, to...

Yeah. To hold gently because at times children have been harmed or they have been exposed to sexual harm by someone in the family, by someone in the extended family, by someone that they know. In the neighbourhood. An older child in the neighbourhood. Yeah. Or just exposure to some online stuff that's been incredibly distressing. So we hold that gently and encourage parents to not jump to those assumptions too soon, too quickly, until they've had a chance to slow down a bit. Into your question, though, it's not, if I think about the calls we get on a weekly basis, it's generally not the first question that people are asking.

Sometimes that will come up with extended whānau where there might be a history or sometimes in families where parents have separated we'll get a bit of a query. And that's really tricky, especially if the child is really quite young and not verbal. So really we answer in the way you've just suggested, that there's a whole raft of reasons other than that, that their behaviour might be wrong. Parents and caregivers, you know, we work very hard at keeping our kids safe. So often it's quite a distressing time when they hear that their child is initiated in some sexualised plan behaviour. Yeah. It's distressing for them, the little person has initiated, and also incredibly distressing for them.

Really important to hold at the centre what's best for the children in this situation. And often parents who lose the plot will get angry and have a huge response for all sorts of reasons. It can trigger all sorts of things, sometimes their own harm, sometimes stories that they've heard of sexual harm happening to others. There's all sorts of reasons that parents naturally might have a huge reaction to, sometimes out of fear. So we often support parents, don't we, to just be reminded of what their angry and distressed adults will often close children down. To create a safe space to have these conversations.

Yeah. That's one of the things we do.

7. When and how do I start talking about safe boundaries with my child_

Kia ora, I'm Alicia. I'm a social worker from Stand to Myer and I work in the mana ake team. Kia ora i te whānau, ko Aroha Atene. My current role is as a facilitator for Stopped Services. Kia ora koutou, Colin Janssen te whānau. I'm the Prevention Education Lead with the Stopped Services. When and how do I start talking about private parts and safe boundaries with my child? So I feel like I did hear some of this korero a little bit earlier, but it's really quite important to continue reinforcing starting early. As my fellow colleagues mentioned, there's no longer a big chat. I think that notion probably should have gone with the dinosaurs.

So just remembering that our children have lots of access to multi-different media on lots of different types of devices. We've got to think about what is coming in and how that may be transmitting for them. So when it comes down to private parts, I think we talk about their gorgeous little bodies as infants. We're like, oh, look at your delicious little fingers. Look at your wee toes. And we identify those things in a really loving and affectionate way. And then for some reason or another, we get to genitalia. You just skip over it. You don't have any genitals at all. Or it comes with an uncomfortable notion.

So for our children to be really confident in themselves, I think as hard as it is, we really need to challenge ourselves to be really honest about our anatomy because our bodies do really wonderful things and so do our genitals. So to talk about that at a young age in a non-shaming way, maintaining everybody's mana, is really helpful. But I do understand that for adults, that's hard. It's really challenging. And I think that naturally, language evolves. I think when I started my parenting journey, it was a front bump, I think, if I recall. It was a bottom and a front bump. It's like boppy and your back boppies.

Yeah, I was like, okay. But it wasn't until one of my wee babes fell in the bar and she said, oh, I hurt my front bump. And I'm like, oh, okay, so what part of your body is that? And so it was really not very helpful that I had to find it that way. But that was the language that I had. Turned out that she had actually slipped on something and hurt her internal part of her body, which was her vagina. So it wasn't her vulva, it was her vagina. And that was actually really important for her to be able to tell me because how else can I help? So just in regards to common sense and being able to assist our children well physically, and without shame, I think that conversation needs to start really early.

But our encouragement, or the rationale for our encouragement is that actually they're over, historically children have tried to disclose harm to adults, and the adults have not been able to understand their communication. So when you're calling your vulva or your vagina a pocketbook or a cookie or a flower, and you're asking somebody to help you because you don't want things to keep happening in that space, and the adults can't understand you, they can't assist. So as Lynn said earlier, the statistics of harm in our country are really high. So though we know that children, as humans, we're sexual beings, and we do play to process and we explore and we're curious, and things are mutual sometimes, when our children are being harmed, they need help and they need it swiftly.

So for us to be committed in that space, we need to be brave adults, and use tricky words like penis and scrotum and anus and the things. So just like forehead, elbow and kneecap. Yeah, we don't call these grabbers, eh? I was going to use my grabbers to get that, like actually these are my hands and I'm going to use my hands, and there's no shame about that, yeah? I work with families, you know, like families use all sorts of words. You know, I work with one family that will talk about willies and boobies, and another family that will, you know, talk about you're for JJ and you're for Joah, and another family that will talk about dick and dicks and tits, and another family that will talk about testicles and breasts and penises.

And dicks and tits always kind of makes me laugh. Even as an adult, you can see why kids want to have that chat at school, because actually, I'm growing, and it's funny. There's often a lot of energy, isn't there? Definitely. The room erupts at our workshops. And there's some families that actually still don't have any language, you know, and sometimes we'll hear adults talking about, you know, kind of like what happened down there. And so language is really, really important in this space. It's important for parents and caregivers to feel confident and equipped with the language. Sometimes parents and caregivers might need to practice.

Because, you know, if we as parents and caregivers don't have the language, then that's not going to be helpful for the kids that are in our lives. And as Aroha said, the rationale is that why does it have to be any different from, you know, our nose, our cheek and our mouth? There's lots of resources as well, so in regards to literature. So before coming to Scott, I worked in classrooms for about 15 years. And, yeah, literature is a great tool. So even if, I find, if the text isn't for you or you're not happy to read aloud, like, there are lots of online resources too. So if you're uncomfortable talking about bodies, maybe, you know, maybe Google can help in that sense.

Because once again, you have the control over what you're offering to your child. If we're talking about what they're being exposed to and what's okay and what's not, I think that once again, those conversations need to start really young. Because as we know, I've seen many toddlers hold devices and watch things streaming in at them. And if you're not able to supervise all of the time, how do you know that genitalia aren't flashing out in front of your kids? Because it does happen. It's happened to me on numerous occasions. And I'm like, oh, I wasn't expecting that. So, you know, for my poor, you know, for our poor wee kids, and I do think about my own babes, we check in quite regularly.

So, you know, is there anything that's popped up online that's making you feel uncomfortable or that you want to talk about? And we create a plan. And we always have from quite an early age around if you see something that makes you feel uncomfortable, turn your device off, turn the screen over and you seek support from an adult. And then I say uncomfortable too, but actually sometimes it's confusing. And then for some children might see something and it might actually make you feel quite nice. And you're like, what is this? Like, who helps me with this? And I think it's quite important, yeah, once again, start those conversations early because the media is coming at our children.

We know that the industry of pornography is wanting our children's time. It's how they make their billions of dollars. So just not to be naive in that space. Yeah.

8. Conversations about pornography and resources that support these

What conversations can whānau have when their children have been exposed to porn? I think, first of all, parents and caregivers, they've got to be prepared. And again, that starts early with just equipping tamariki with knowing that there's likely at some stage for stuff to pop up, perhaps on the iPad or the laptop, that perhaps is not for kids. You know, that's perhaps yucky, that's perhaps scary, that's actually a bit confusing, that's a bit rude. You know, again, thinking about language, it doesn't have to be all fancy. Do five-year-olds need to know about pornography? Well, probably the language and best to have conversations with them is about, you know, rude pictures.

And... perhaps people that, you know, there's sometimes pictures that are online that people might show them of perhaps people not wearing clothes or, you know, things that are a wee bit confusing. Because, you know, there's loads of statistics out around kids being exposed to pornography from a very young age. And I, you know, I'm not sure if you remember the stats, Araha, but it's something like, you know, 70% of young people... Yeah. 70% of young people by the time that they're age 12 have potentially had had some exposure to some explicit material, whether that's R18 games, whether that's sexual content, whether that's specifically pornographic images.

So we need to prepare and equip our kids and to let them know that they're not in trouble. You know, often these images find them, you know, whilst children might stumble across or type in, you know, big boobs or sex. There's a lot of images that are coming across their eyes and their path because it's just popping up. We hear many stories that sometimes this is really distressing. That kids will stop hugging adults because of what they've seen. They just feel really yucked because they think that that's what the adults in their lives might be doing. But they've seen a lot more quite yucky, aggressive, not consensual, a range of sexual behaviour images that are just not what our young minds are equipped to take in.

I think what we also hear a lot is that adults think that children can differentiate between what is real and what is not. And what is fantasy. And that's not actually the case for a lot of young minds. So, I would even say that for some adults, if they view too frequently, that they get really poor perception about what is okay and what's not okay. And, you know, is this fantasy or is this reality? And sometimes, depending on, yep, the hours streamed, I would say, playing games and engaging with context, it's a lot to ask for young minds to be able to say, actually, that's not okay. That's not what I should be doing as a child.

That's not what other adults should be doing. So, yeah, I think we just, as Lyn said, be prepared and be realistic. Because it doesn't always make children feel yucky. You know, if you see people kissing on the internet, well, then actually that might make you feel quite nice. And then, if those types of things evolve into something else, you get curious and you play with your friends. And then, you know, if any other adults do view this, they can get quite reactive, as we know. And that creates a lot of shame. And then, for our children, I think it just can either make them really confused about what is okay and what's not okay.

And then, if it is something that they do, if it is something that they do enjoy doing, if we're not going to be open about the dialogues that we're having with them and embrace it as a learning opportunity, that stuff will go underground. And that's when it becomes quite secretive. And that's obviously when we get more concerned and it kind of moves into that orange phase of, you know, no longer age-typical because there are elements of secrecy, sometimes coercion. Yeah, I think it's just really important for us to know that, that information that our children will see online sometimes is not okay and they cannot differentiate that unless we actually help them.

And adults really need to step up here. You know, many families have worked with where, you know, adults can look at whatever they want in the privacy of their own home. You know, but as soon as you've got a little person who's looking over your shoulder, you know, especially watching fairly explicit, violent, sexual, you know, material, that actually becomes abusive and harmful. And as Aroha said before, you know, even sometimes our parents and caregivers need to be reminded that children don't know the difference between reality and fantasy. I remember working with a family once and their boundaries in terms of the movies that they watched, well, actually there weren't any boundaries.

And so they had three-year-olds and a six-year-old and, you know, younger children who were being exposed to this and causing quite a lot of distress for the children, but the parents were unaware of the impact that that was having. So I think that's a good time to talk about these particular resources. Yeah, so out in our workshops we share, when we do talk about pornography, we do share these resources. So these are actually, they do come out of America. We don't have a lot of New Zealand literature around this actually, just globally, because we're only just catching up. We're seeing the impacts of the pornography on our tamaiti and we're like, oh, we'd better start having these conversations.

But we probably should start doing it about two decades ago. But regardless, these resources are really helpful, really basic messaging about what is a good picture and a bad picture, and a simple plan and a vision for older children, which actually talks about the impacts

that it has on their brains. Lots of go-to questions for parents. Just if you're a little bit stuck, which most of us are, they're really helpful tools. So yeah, that's definitely something we recommend. Parents can find their own language as well. You know, some families might have a bit of a reaction to good and bad. But kids get good and bad.

They understand that language. Whether it's safe pictures, not safe pictures, there's no one-size-fits-all. It's about making it work for them.

9. Safe Boundaries and conversations about online content

And in saying that around boundaries in regards to technology, I know a lot of families that will have time restraints, you know, you only have 30 minutes on the tech, or actually we're only going to have 20 minutes of screen time, or whatever that looks like, it's also quite sensible to say these are the sites we're going to use, and be quite critical about that, I know a lot of parents try to stay within that YouTube kids kind of realm, they feel a lot safer in that space, for me personally, I would still say that that needs some supervision, Pearl Pepper Pig has been known to drink bleach, so, you know, like, I don't know who's creating this content, but it's harmful, it's harmful for our children, so people should never be trying to drink bleach.

So just being mindful too that even though it is on a platform that you think is for kids, and you could make assumptions that it's safe, that's not always the case. So maybe spending a little bit of time sitting alongside your tamariki, viewing what they're viewing, having conversations about, you know, actually, this is okay for us to watch, we might watch Bluey, because she shares really beautiful messages, but we're not actually going to watch this anymore, because I don't know if it's always safe. Yeah, quite, you have to be quite a critical consumer, I suppose, and what you're going to allow, as Lynn said, we've seen lots of different things over the years.

I would definitely say that I would keep reinforcing to whānau that restrictions on games are placed there for a reason. Had many young tamaiti openly having conversations about playing games like Grand Theft Auto at the age of five, six, seven, that is a R18 game, it's restricted for people over 18 years old, and for very good reason. So just, even if our tamariki, if you really want to engage with these games, because maybe other people are playing them, and that's what's cool, and you really want to fit in, the parenting bit is really challenging, and it's really hard, but we do need to maintain the boundaries.

Boundaries will keep our tamariki safe, boundaries around their body, boundaries around what they will consume, maybe how frequently they'll consume it, that's kind of our role, even though it's not always easy. So many conversations. You can, parents can control what goes on in your own home, in your own family, but, you know, as soon as children are growing up and going to school, you know, that opens up their world, the birthday parties, the playdates, the sleepovers, and, you know, families, families have different boundaries of what's okay and what's not okay, so lots of conversations. Definitely, when we talk about, like, that transition off to kura, like, a lot of the time, you know, they have this, free-spirited preschoolers that, in some centres, will actually play under a sprinkler, with not a lot of clothes on, and that's okay, that's okay in that setting.

You get to kura, and then, sometimes a sprinkler or a hose might come out on a really hot day, and then, all of a sudden, you've got to keep all your clothes on, like, it's, it can be quite challenging for them to understand, so, two months ago, I was at preschool, and I could do this, I could run around in my undies under this sprinkler, and nobody was overly distressed, but I've come to kura now, and all of a sudden, I've got to keep all my, actually, no, I've got to change my clothes, and I've got to put my togs on before I can get wet, and this process is actually quite tricky, because I don't even know how to tie my own shoelaces, and so, lots of complexities, how are we preparing our children to be successful in regards to that type of play, so, you know, so many conversations, when we go to kura, we're going to, you know, we're going to wear our togs when we go under the sprinkler, and actually, when we're getting dressed in our togs, we're not going to stand around looking at everybody like we do at our own whare, because, if you're anything like our house, the kids are, like, always staring at bodies, they find it fascinating, my children are like, Mum, what's going on over there?

And I'm like, please don't ask this question to another adult, ever, you know, another boundary, like, yes, we can talk about my body, because you're my child, and we can do that in the comfort of our own home, but please don't ever ask that to your, like, teacher, or some other adult in your space, like, simple things like, Mum, why is that hair growing under your chin? And I'm like, okay, getting old, ever ask anybody, ask that outside of the vicinity of this space, because it will make them feel really uncomfortable and embarrassed. And what's beautiful about that example is that it's the adults stepping up and, you know, taking responsibility for the boundaries, that's how kids learn, you know, that's how children learn, isn't it?

By shaming their parents. Kids need safe adults that they can, I was just thinking, you know, kids adapt really well providing that the adults in their world are really clear, you know, they kind of learn quickly that what's okay at Dad's place might be different to what's okay at Mum's place, that might be different, again, to what's okay at Nana's place in terms of where you can tell the jokes, when you can ask the questions, but they'll be looking for the adults in their lives to put those safe boundaries and to put some direction there as well.

10. Resources available for families – books and websites

What resources are available for people to look at? So we have always, in our trainings, we spend a lot of time filtering through resources because we only want to offer what we think is suitable for the context in Aotearoa and then also things that are sharing a really, like I say, positive message. So for us it's more proactive, it's about setting the boundaries and creating safe spaces to kōrero. So on our website we have a few videos, so we'll just drop in the links to the videos that we think are helpful because as we've talked about being critical consumers there's lots of things out there that aren't so helpful.

We have a list of literature. We really do love this book here which is *My Body, My Taonga* which was published last year, put together in Aotearoa by a number of organisations that promote body safety. So that's really nice to have that context and a piece of literature coming out of Aotearoa actually, it's very cool. But then there are lots and lots of other tools around underpants, underpants are really important when you're a child, especially if you're the kind of, as we said, free spirit that gets to run around with no pants on and then all of a sudden you've got to wear pants all the time.

So we do have lots of books that talk to that messaging because it's really important, we would have thought that pants are so important. And some fabulous websites, so Aroha's mentioned the STOP website, we've got a few links to books and to video clips that we find really helpful. We would love to hear from you if you'd like to share your thoughts on that. We've also developed some of our own resources, so those links will be on the video today. We are part of a wider sector, we've got Well Stop in Wellington and SAFE in Auckland, so we often connect together. SAFE, the SAFE network based out of Auckland has quite a helpful app that parents might find helpful around sexualised behaviour, so certainly look that one up.

It kind of gives you, so in their app, what it does is you will go through a series of questions and it'll help you kind of work out whether it's age typical or it's concerning. So you know how like sometimes you'll be a little bit confused and you're like, if you didn't want to call STOP for whatever reason, you can actually jump online and go yep, that happened, and this happened, and this happened, and then it will give you an indication of whether it's age typical. And look, Well Stop, SAFE, we're three agencies in New Zealand that parents and caregivers are very welcome to call us directly if they have any concerns, any inquiries.

We'll put some other great websites on the link to the video. The NSPCC, the National Society of Protection for Children that comes out of the UK, they've got some great video clips. The *Pantasaurus* is a bit of a well-known one, which is kind of aimed at kindy, you know, toddler age. Children pants. And also the Consent for Kids that's come out of the UK. I think the Bristol Police, if I've got that right, we'll make sure that we've got that correct on the link. That's a really wonderful clip as well, just to kind of talk about how important our body is, our boundaries, our personal space, and giving children some empowerment and guidelines around what's okay and what's not okay.

A lot of the literature, that's a lot of the literature. That's a lot of the literature. That's a lot of the literature. That's a lot of the literature. we are utilising at the moment, we're finding quite helpful in our space, is actually coming out of Australia. So they have put a lot of putia and a lot of time and energy into teaching children around consent. So it's part of their curricula. So yeah, lots of time and energy spent on those resources. And I think that we do have, you know, many similarities in our culture. So they're quite helpful tools. They are on our website. Yeah, I'd say that they're quite a good space too.

Because when we talk about boundaries, obviously we're talking about people being empowered, including tamariki, like all of our babes being empowered to actually say, this is what I'm comfortable with. And how do you have those words that share that if you haven't explored it? And literature just definitely does assist in that conversation. So there's some wonderful video clips online too of people reading some of these amazing books. So, you know, that's accessible.

11. Key messages

Just to really encourage parents and caregivers to be brave, to make space, to have these really important conversations with the little people in their lives. To slow down, to take a breath, to not overreact and to not underreact and sweep things under the carpet, but to kind of lean into that space of having conversations with the children. To remember that sexualised behaviour is likely to come across your path at some point. At some point you're going to have to probably navigate conversations and behaviours in your own circle of having children in your world. Whether that's in the bath, whether that's showers, whether that's questions.

And to slow down and to get the context of the behaviour. Those are some of my key takeaways of that. Yeah. Yeah. I think what I'm thinking about, I wasn't going to say it initially, but from that kōrero around what relationships and connection look like, can we, once again, *kia kaha whānau*, lean into that really beautiful conversation of talking about what sex and sexuality can look like in a really positive way. And helping our kids shape up to be really considerate partners. Because we are sexual beings. We do want to reproduce. That's kind of in our DNA. And what does that look like going forward?

So if we're promoting really positive relationships, respect, permission, consent, non-shaming language. Then maybe if we're promoting this all the time, in hopefully all of our spaces, our children won't get distracted by the things that are hunting their time and warping their perception about what healthy relationships really look like. Key messages for me are quite similar to what's being said. I think the context is a huge thing that stood out for me. And really getting the full story and not just jumping in and out of it. And really getting the full story and not just jumping in and out of it.

And really getting the full story and not just jumping in and out of it. And really getting the full story and not just jumping in and out of it. Not just jumping to conclusions. And also, yeah, seeing it through the child lens. And not just thinking as an adult, this might look one way, but actually could be the total other. I think the points that stand out for me in all of the information that we've talked about today is remembering the context. Remembering to see the child through.

and the behavior through the lens of a child instead of using an adult lens and to echo others to be brave to go there with the conversations and not to skip ahead thinking that something terrible awful and awful is going to happen when your child grows up that this is a really important teaching moment with your child and to just grab that opportunity I'm just thinking about in our response so when things happen regardless of how heightened or stressed or nervous we feel to just check ourselves because we do have lots of we carry lots of bias we want to or not we say we're non-judgmental but actually we are wired up to judge like judgments keep us safe so when we're talking about our future our mokopuna our beautiful tamariki that sit in front of us that have sometimes just got it wrong yeah let's be honoring enough to check ourselves before we engage in that really mindful I guess of our own historical stuff whatever that you might look like yeah and just being present and yeah and just being present and just being present and just being present and and just being present and just being present and just being present and just being there for the time of