

HOW TO **RESPOND** TO PSB: A Caregiver's Cheat Sheet

Responding to Problematic Sexual Behavior (PSB) can feel overwhelming, but with the right approach, caregivers can foster safety and healing. This guide outlines five steps to navigate these situations, from staying calm to reinforcing positive behaviors, while supporting your child's emotional well-being.

1 **Pause: Your Reaction Matters**

When you learn about a concerning behavior, take a deep breath and try to stay calm. Children are highly sensitive to our reactions, and how we respond can either escalate or de-escalate the situation. By responding thoughtfully rather than reacting, you create a safe space where your child can process the behavior without shame or fear of punishment.

2 **Get Curious: About the Need Behind the Behavior**

Children engage in concerning behaviors for reasons beyond the obvious. Take a moment to consider: What is this behavior trying to express or achieve? Is it a way to cope with anxiety, a response to past experiences, or an impulsive decision fueled by curiosity? Understanding the need behind the behavior is key to addressing the root cause.

3 **Ask Yourself: Is There a Knowledge Gap?**

Behaviors occur because children simply haven't been given the tools or education they need to navigate social norms, body boundaries, or emotional regulation. Identify potential gaps in your child's knowledge or skills that might be contributing to the behavior. Take the opportunity to turn these situations into "teachable moments."

4 **Work on Skill: Building Outside of the Moment**

Once you've identified the need behind the behavior, focus on practicing healthier, safer ways to meet that need. Whether it's self-regulation strategies, body and privacy rules, or appropriate ways to show affection, providing opportunities for your child to practice the behaviors you want to see will help them build the necessary skills.

5 **Repeat: Reinforce and Be Patient**

Change takes time, especially for children who are still learning how to manage complex emotions, develop impulse control, and make sense of their past experiences. Be consistent in reinforcing positive behaviors and continue to offer opportunities to practice new skills. Building connection and avoiding shame will create the ideal environment for growth and healing!

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1 Pause: Your Reaction Matters

When you learn of concerning behavior, take a deep breath and stay calm. Children are sensitive to our reactions, which can escalate or de-escalate situations. Respond thoughtfully instead of reacting to create a safe space where your child can process their behavior without shame or fear.

2 Get Curious: About the Need Behind the Behavior

Children's concerning behaviors often have deeper reasons. Ask yourself: What is this behavior expressing or trying to achieve? Is it coping with anxiety, reacting to past experiences, or impulsive curiosity? Understanding the need behind the behavior helps address the root cause effectively.

3 Ask Yourself: Is There a Knowledge Gap?

Concerning behaviors often happen when children lack tools to navigate social norms, body boundaries, or emotional regulation. Identify gaps in their knowledge or skills and use these moments as teaching opportunities to guide them toward healthier behaviors.

4 Work on Skill: Building Outside of the Moment

After identifying the need behind the behavior, teach healthier ways to meet it. Whether it's self-regulation, body boundaries, or appropriate affection, give your child opportunities to practice desired behaviors and build essential skills.

5 Repeat: Reinforce and Be Patient

Change takes time, especially for children learning to manage emotions, control impulses, and process past experiences. Stay consistent in reinforcing positive behaviors and providing practice opportunities. Building connection and avoiding shame fosters growth and healing.

5 Useful Approaches to Foster Safety & Healing

A gold-standard parenting tool designed to equip with caregivers with support and vital education.