

## Topic 6

# Harmful sexual behaviours

concerning  
appropriate

inappropriate  
harmful



The National Child Safety Training aims to enhance safety for children and strengthen child-safe culture across the education and care sector by introducing shared language, responsibilities, and understanding. The training was developed in partnership between Australian Centre for Child Protection (ACCP) and the Queensland Government on behalf of Australian governments.

The first level of training, Foundations of Child Safety, includes two eLearning courses:

- **Course 1:** Understanding Child Safety
- **Course 2:** Understanding and Identifying Child Abuse and Neglect

To complement the mandatory eLearning courses, a suite of non-mandatory Community of Practice resources has been developed to extend learning and support the application of knowledge in education and care settings. Whilst the Community of Practice are a voluntary component of the National Child Safety Training, they provide structured opportunities for discussion, reflection, and shared learning over time, helping staff build confidence and consistency in practice.

These resources contain prompts and suggested activities aligned with each course topic. They are designed to be flexible and may be selected, adapted, shortened, or revisited to suit different service types, team sizes, and meeting formats. The intention is to support practical conversations, not to prescribe a fixed program. There is no expectation that all topics and activities will be used and it is at your discretion how you use these resources.

Child safety is everyone's responsibility in places where children learn and grow. Harm can affect a child's wellbeing, learning, and development throughout childhood, and its impacts can continue into adulthood. When child safe practices are not in place, children are more at risk of harm.

By completing the mandatory eLearning training alongside some non-mandatory Community of Practice activities, you can strengthen your understanding of your role in protecting children, responding to concerns, and supporting a child safe environment in your service.



## Harmful sexual behaviours

Topic 6 focuses on understanding children's sexual behaviours across a continuum, from developmentally appropriate, to concerning, through to harmful. It supports educators and other staff to respond calmly, confidently, and in ways that protect the safety and wellbeing of all children.

Sexual development is a normal part of childhood, and most sexual behaviours displayed by children are typical for their age and stage of development. These behaviours are usually brief, mutual, and respond well to gentle guidance.

At times, sexual behaviours may fall outside what is typical or become harmful. Understanding age, development, context, impact, and patterns over time helps educators decide when a behaviour needs support, guidance, or escalation.

This topic reinforces that:

- Most sexual behaviours in children are developmentally typical.
- Context, age, and developmental stage are critical when interpreting behaviour.
- Patterns, persistence, power differences, lack of consent, or distress or harm increase concern.
- Harmful sexual behaviours are a signal that a child needs support, not labels or punishment.
- Calm, clear, and professional responses help keep all children safe.




### Reminder

You **do not** need to run all three activities.

Select, adapt, shorten, or spread activities across sessions to suit your group and available time.

Activities can also be adapted for one-on-one supervision, mentoring conversations, or team meetings. You may choose to use a single scenario, questions, or reflective prompts to guide discussion.

These activities are designed to be flexible and responsive to your service context.

<b>Activity 1: Where does this behaviour sit?</b>	
<b>Objective</b>	<p>This activity supports participants to practise using the layered continuum (developmentally appropriate to serious/extreme) in a practical, low-pressure way.</p> <p>It helps participants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand that sexual behaviour sits on a continuum, not in fixed categories.</li> <li>• Notice how context, age, and response to guidance matter.</li> <li>• Build shared language without judgement or labels</li> </ul>
<b>Time</b>	40 – 60 minutes
<b>Format</b>	
<b>Materials needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A blank continuum table on the wall or table with headings.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Developmentally Appropriate</li> <li>○ Developmentally Inappropriate</li> <li>○ Concerning</li> <li>○ Very Concerning</li> <li>○ Serious/Extreme</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Very concerning and Serious/ Extreme headings can also be grouped together as Harmful for this exercise.</li> <li>• Participant reference sheet - Layered Continuum for Understanding Harmful Sexual Behaviour.</li> <li>• Behaviour cards.</li> <li>• Blue tac or tape.</li> </ul>



## Activity plan

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### Facilitator preamble

*"We're going to practise using the layered continuum for understanding harmful sexual behaviour rather than deciding if something is 'okay' or 'bad.' The aim is to think together about where behaviours might sit, and why. It's normal to feel unsure."*

### Remind participants:

- These examples are fictional.
- Assessments may change over time as more information becomes available.
- Consultation is always part of good practice.

### Step 1: Small group sorting (15–20 minutes)

- In groups of 3-5, give participants a set of behaviour cards.
- Ask groups to place each card along the continuum from developmentally appropriate through to serious/extreme.
- Allow participants to use the participant reference sheet, if required.
- Encourage discussion using prompts:
  - Age and developmental stage.
  - Context (where, when, who else was present).
  - Whether behaviour stopped with guidance.
  - Impact on the child and other children.

### Step 2: Context shift round (10 minutes)

- Choose 2–3 cards and change one factor (age, repetition, setting).
- Ask groups: *"Does this change where it sits?"*

**Step 3: Whole-group reflection (15–20 minutes)**

- Discuss:
  - Which cards were hardest to place?
  - Where did opinions differ?
  - What helped you avoid jumping to conclusions?

**Facilitator tips**

- Normalise discomfort and uncertainty.
- Reinforce that early, calm responses are protective.
- Redirect away from labels or assumptions about intent.
- Remind participants that to use self-care strategies as needed.
- If a serious concern is raised, acknowledge and redirect to service procedures and reporting obligations after the session.





## Online adaptation (MS Teams or Zoom)

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This activity can be delivered online using breakout rooms and a shared continuum template (slide, shared document, or whiteboard). The purpose remains the same: to help participants practise using the layered continuum thoughtfully, without judgement or pressure to be certain.

### Platform Preparation (before the session)

- Prepare one clear slide displaying the layered continuum:
  - Developmentally Appropriate
  - Developmentally Inappropriate
  - Concerning
  - Very Concerning
  - Serious/Extreme
- Very concerning and Serious/ Extreme headings can also be grouped together as Harmful for this exercise.
- Keep definitions brief and visible throughout the activity.
- Prepare behaviour scenarios on separate slides or group them clearly across a small number of slides.
- Create a shared slide, whiteboard, or document where groups can place behaviours along the continuum (e.g., by typing the scenario number under a heading).
- Set up breakout rooms in advance (3–5 participants per group).
- Prepare one slide with context prompts (e.g., age, repetition, setting, supervision, impact on others) to display during breakout discussions.

### Step 1: Create psychological safety

- Begin with the facilitator preamble and a wellbeing reminder.
- Reinforce that the activity is about professional judgement, reflection, and shared language. It is not about labelling children or making final determinations.
- Explain the continuum clearly by screen sharing the slide.
- Remind participants that behaviours may reasonably sit in more than one place depending on context. Differences in judgement are expected.

## Step 2: Small-group sorting

- Place participants into breakout rooms of 3-5 people.
- Share the behaviour scenarios via screen share, chat, or shared document.
- Ask groups to discuss where each behaviour might sit on the continuum and why. They may:
  - Type the scenario number under a continuum heading in the shared document.
  - Agree verbally within the group.
  - Or note differing views if they do not agree.
- Display prompts before sending groups out:
  - *How old is the child, and what is their developmental stage?*
  - *What is the context (setting, privacy, supervision)?*
  - *Does the behaviour stop with guidance?*
  - *What is the impact on other children?*
- Emphasise that agreement is not required. The discussion is the learning.

## Step 3: Context shift round

- Bring participants back to the main room.
- Select two or three behaviours and adjust one factor (e.g., younger age, repeated pattern, less supervision, private setting).
- Ask participants to respond via chat, quick poll, or brief verbal responses:
  - *Does this change where the behaviour might sit on the continuum?*
  - *Why is this?*
- Highlight how context shifts professional judgement.
- Whole-group reflection and consolidation.
- Invite groups to share:
  - One behaviour they found hardest to place.
  - One factor that most influenced their thinking.
  - One strategy that helped them avoid jumping to conclusions.
- Capture key words or themes on the shared continuum slide.
- Normalise differences by reinforcing: *“Different placements are expected. Professional judgement grows through discussion and consultation.”*

## Step 4: Closing reflection

- Invite participants to complete in chat or privately: *“One reminder I want to keep in mind when using the continuum is...”*
- Close by reinforcing that uncertainty is normal. Consultation and supervision strengthen decision-making. The layered continuum supports calm, thoughtful responses rather than quick or reactive decisions.



## Facilitator reference guide: Examples of sexual behaviours

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This reference sheet contains the link (below in the box) to age related examples of behaviours to guide and prompt our thinking. The tables provide examples of sexual behaviours across a range of developmental stages, described by age, schooling, and sexual development. These examples are intended as a guide only. They can be used by facilitators and participants to support their identification of behaviours across a continuum, from developmentally appropriate to serious/extreme.

Facilitators may choose to use these tables in different ways. They can be used as a reference during activities, or as a standalone discussion tool to support deeper reflection and shared understanding. For some groups, working through the table together may be a helpful activity, particularly where there is uncertainty or discomfort about distinguishing between developmentally appropriate, concerning, and serious/extreme sexual behaviours.

[Layered Continuum - Age range tables](#)



## Scenario cards: Where does it sit?


Print and cut the cards out and give them to participants. Ask the group to place each card under the appropriate heading on the layered continuum.

The scenarios are designed to be mixed and discussed as a group or in small groups. There are no “correct” answers. The purpose of the activity is to prompt discussion, reflection, and shared understanding, rather than to reach agreement or certainty.

Facilitators may also choose to develop their own scenario cards. These can be informed by real practice or case studies but must remain de-identified.

A 3-year-old briefly touches their genitals during rest time and stops when redirected.	Two 4-year-olds giggle and look at each other’s private parts in the bathroom area.
A 5-year-old repeatedly tries to pull down other children’s pants during outdoor play.	A 7-year-old talks about body parts using correct names after a family health conversation.
A 6-year-old continues to use sexual language and gestures beyond their developmental stage during play despite repeated guidance from educators.	A 10-year-old asks questions about bodies and private body parts during a group discussion with an educator.
A 4-year-old uses explicit sexual language that is not typical for their age.	A 5-year-old pressures another child to keep a ‘touching’ game secret.
A 3-year-old imitates kissing scenes seen on TV but stops when guided.	A 5-year-old becomes distressed when an educator intervenes to stop sexual play.

<p>A 4-year-old regularly removes their clothing and becomes angry when asked to put them back on.</p>	<p>An 8-year-old child repeatedly engages younger children secretive in play involving showing and touching of private parts.</p>
<p>A 2-year-old pulls down his pants and rubs his genitals during nap time.</p>	<p>A 3-year-old girl pulls up her dress in front of her educator, laughs, and runs away.</p>

<b>Activity 2: Pause, respond, reflect. Roleplay with guided reflection.</b>	
<b>Objective</b>	<p>This activity supports participants to practise responding to sexual behaviours in the moment and then reflect on their response using a structured worksheet.</p> <p>It helps participants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practise calm, child-safe responses to sexual behaviours.</li> <li>• Build confidence using clear, appropriate language.</li> <li>• Understand their role and responsibilities in the moment.</li> <li>• Reflect on how responses protect all children and prevent escalation.</li> </ul>
<b>Time</b>	50 - 70 minutes
<b>Format</b>	
<b>Materials needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scenario cards</li> <li>• Role play and reflection worksheet</li> <li>• Timer</li> </ul>



## Activity plan

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### Facilitator preamble

*"This activity combines a short role play with guided reflection. The aim is not to act perfectly, but to practise staying calm, responding safely, and thinking about what happens next in our role."*

### Remind participants:

- All scenarios are fictional and de-identified.
- No one is required to act; observing is a valid role.
- Keep scenes brief, non-graphic, and focused on everyday practice.
- We are practising response, not investigating or labelling behaviour.
- Participants may step out or take a break at any time.

### Step 1: Set up and individual preparation (10 minutes)

- Divide participants into small groups of 3.
- Give each participant a 'Role play and reflection' worksheet.
- Each group selects one scenario card.
- Ask participants to quietly read the scenario and complete Section 1 of the worksheet.
- If time permits, encourage participants to complete another scenario.

### Step 2: Role play - responding in the moment (10-15 minutes)

- Ask groups to decide who will:
  - Play the educator responding.
  - Play the child (if comfortable – not essential).
  - Observe and take notes.
- Groups act out the scenario up to the point where the behaviour needs to be addressed.
- The educator role then practises responding using calm, clear steps:
  - Regulate oneself.
  - Stop the behaviour.
  - State what is observed.
  - Explain why the behaviour is not safe/ not appropriate.

- Redirect the child and any other children
- Check in with the child to ensure their wellbeing (and any other children involved)
- Think about what supports or actions may be needed to ensure safety (i.e. increased supervision, reporting obligations)
- Observers focus on language, tone, and actions, not acting ability.

### Step 3: Pause and complete reflection (10 minutes)

- After the role play, pause the activity.
- Ask participants to individually complete Sections 2 and 3 of the worksheet:
  - *What response did I see or use?*
  - *How might this response feel for each child involved?*
  - *What helped keep the response child-safe?*
- This step anchors learning before discussion.

### Step 4: Small group reflection (10-15 minutes)

- In the same groups, participants share reflections from their worksheets:
  - *What felt clear or helpful?*
  - *What felt challenging or uncertain?*
  - *What language or actions worked well?*
- Encourage groups to stay focused on practice and role, not judgement.

### Step 5: Pause and complete reflection (10 minutes)

- After the small group reflection, pause the activity.
- Ask participants to individually complete Sections 4 and 5 of the worksheets.
- This step anchors learning before the whole group discussion.

### Step 5: Whole-group consolidation (10-15 minutes)

- Bring the group back together and draw out shared learning:
  - *What supported calm, safe responses?*
  - *What helped avoid escalation?*
  - *What reminders would be helpful in a real situation?*
- Close with the prompt:
  - *"One thing that helps me respond safely is..."*

**Facilitator tips**

- Normalise discomfort and uncertainty.
- Reinforce that early, calm responses are protective.
- Redirect away from labels or assumptions about intent.
- If a serious concern is raised, acknowledge and redirect to service procedures after the session.





## Online adaptation (MS Teams or Zoom)

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This activity can be delivered online using breakout rooms, shared documents, and guided reflection prompts. The purpose remains the same: to practise calm, child-safe responses to sexual behaviours and reflect on those responses in a supported, low-pressure way.

### Platform Preparation (before the session)

- Prepare each scenario on a separate slide.
- Prepare a digital Role Play and Reflection Worksheet with clearly labelled sections (1-5). Ensure participants can easily access it via link or download.
- Set up breakout rooms in advance (2–3 participants per group). Smaller groups support safer discussion.

### Step 1: Create psychological safety

- Begin with the facilitator preamble and wellbeing reminder.
- Reinforce that the activity is about practising responses, not acting skills.
- Remind participants that observing, listening, or reflecting silently are all valid ways to participate.
- Encourage cameras on or off based on comfort.
- Remind participants they may step away briefly if needed.
- Advise participants that examples and discussion must remain de-identified and practice focused.

### Step 2: Set up and individual preparation

- Share one scenario at a time via:
  - A shared slide, or
  - Posting the scenario text in the chat, or
  - Uploading scenarios to a shared document.
- Ask participants to open the Pause, respond, and reflect worksheet (digital or printed).
- Place participants into breakout rooms of 2–3 people.
- Ask participants to quietly read the scenario and individually complete Section 1 of the worksheet, focusing on:
  - What they notice.

- Who is involved.
- What stands out.
- What their role is.
- Remind participants they do not need to share what they write unless they choose to.

### Step 3: Practising the response

- In breakout rooms, invite groups to decide who will:
  - Verbally describe the educator's response.
  - Act as a listener/observer.
  - Keep time.
- Rather than acting out a full role play, ask one participant to talk through how they would respond in the moment, using calm, clear steps such as:
  - Regulating themselves.
  - Stopping the behaviour.
  - Naming what is observed.
  - Explaining why the behaviour is not safe/not appropriate and explaining boundaries.
  - Redirect the child and any other children
  - Check in with the child to ensure their wellbeing (and any other children involved)
  - Think about what supports or actions may be needed to ensure safety (i.e. increased supervision, reporting obligations)
- Observers listen for tone, clarity, and child-safe language.
- Keep each response brief (1-2 minutes).

### Step 4: Pause and individual reflection

- Ask participants to complete individual work within breakout rooms.
- Ask them to complete Sections 2 and 3 of the worksheets, reflecting on:
  - How the response might feel for each child involved.
  - What helped keep the response calm and protective.
  - What supported safety without shame or escalation.
- Emphasise that this step is about learning, not evaluation.

### Step 5: Small-group reflection

- In the same breakout rooms, invite participants to share (if comfortable):
  - One thing that felt clear or helpful.
  - One thing that felt challenging or uncertain.

- A phrase or action that worked well.
- Encourage groups to stay focused on practice and role, not judgement or certainty.

### Step 6: Pause and individual reflection

- Ask participants to complete individual work within breakout rooms.
- Ask them to complete Sections 4 and 5 of the worksheets.

### Step 7: Whole-group consolidation

- Bring everyone back together.
- Facilitate whole-group reflection using prompts such as:
  - *What supported calm, safe responses?*
  - *What helped avoid escalation?*
  - *What language felt most protective?*
  - *What reminders would be useful in a real situation?*
- Capture key phrases or insights in the chat or on a shared slide or word cloud.
- Close with the reflection prompt: *"One thing that helps me respond safely is..."*



## Scenario cards: Pause, respond, and reflect

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These de-identified roleplay cards are designed to support practice conversations and calm, child-safe responses. Print and cut the cards before the session. Provide one scenario set to each group and remind participants the focus is on the adult response, not acting out harm.

Facilitators are encouraged to adapt the scenarios or develop new ones that reflect their service routines, roles (including non-educator staff), and local context.

### Scenario 1

**Setting:** preschool room

A 5-year-old child creates a game during indoor play and tells other children the rules.

One rule involves touching private body parts over clothing. When another child says they don't want to play, the child responds, "Then you're not my friend anymore."

### Scenario 2

**Setting:** preschool room

Two 4-year-olds are found playing in a storage room during pack-up time. One child is lying down while the other is rubbing their genitals over clothing.

**Scenario 3**

**Setting:** outside school hours care

During afternoon care, a 7-year-old that is new to the service follows staff members into private spaces, such as the toilet and staff room.

**Scenario 4**

**Setting:** long day care

A 4-year-old waits near the bathroom and watches other children use the toilet.

They comment on other children's bodies and try to follow them into cubicles.

When educators redirect the behaviour, it stops briefly but starts again later in the day.

**Scenario 5**

**Setting:** outside school hours care

A 10-year-old often talks to the other children about sexual things they have seen online. Some children laugh, while others appear uncomfortable and move away.

**Scenario 6**

**Setting:** outside school hours care

A 7-year-old repeatedly involves younger children in games involving touching. When educators intervene, the child stops the behaviour around staff but resumes the behaviour when supervision reduces.

**Scenario 7**

**Setting:** long day care centre

Staff notice a 3-year-old frequently tries to sit on adults' laps, including educators, volunteers and admin staff. The child also tries touch female staff on their chests while talking to them.

When redirected by staff in the past the child becomes upset.

**Scenario 8**

**Setting:** family day care

A 5-year-old tells a 3-year-old that touching games are a way to show love.

They say, "If you like me, you'll play it with me." When the younger child says no, the older child becomes upset and says they will stop being friends.



## Worksheet: Pause, respond, and reflect

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### Responding to sexual behaviours in education and care settings

This worksheet supports you to think through what you notice, how you respond, and what happens next in your role within education and care settings. You do not need to reach conclusions or be certain. Focus on observation, response, and process.

#### Scenario title

#### Setting (e.g., preschool, outside school hours care, family day care):

#### Section 1: What do I notice? (Before the role play)

Complete this section on your own.

- 1. What behaviour did I notice?** (Describe what you see or hear. Avoid labels or assumptions.)

**2. Who is involved?** (e.g., one child, two children, adults present)

**3. What stood out to me first?** (e.g., repetition, distress, boundaries, context)

**4. What is my role here?** (e.g., educator, assistant, outside school hours staff, family day care educator, supervisor)

**Section 2: Responding in the moment (After the role play)**

Reflect on the response that was used or observed.

- 5. How was the behaviour stopped or addressed?** (e.g., words used, tone, body language)

- 6. Was the response calm, clear, and respectful?** What helped? What made it harder?

- 7. How were the children supported?** (Think about safety, comfort, supervision, and separation if needed.)

**Section 3: Impact and reflection**

**8. How might this response feel for the child who displayed the behaviour?**

**9. How might it feel for any other children involved or nearby?**

**10. What helped keep this response child-safe?** (e.g., language, boundaries, supervision, not shaming)

**Section 4: What happens next? (My role)**




**11. What would I do next in my role?** (Tick or write all that apply)

- Document objectively
- Consult with a supervisor or leader
- Increase supervision
- Follow service safeguarding procedures
- Seek guidance or support
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. What support might I need to do this well?** (e.g., leadership support, clear policies, time, guidance)

**Section 5: One thing I want to remember**

**13. One thing that helps me respond safely to sexual behaviours is:**

<b>Activity 3: Words matter – language that protects</b>	
<b>Objective</b>	<p>This activity helps participants practise using objective, non-labelling language when discussing sexual behaviours. It helps participants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Separate the child from the behaviour.</li> <li>• Reduce stigma and shame.</li> <li>• Strengthen professional communication.</li> <li>• Align language with child-safe practice.</li> </ul>
<b>Time</b>	35 – 50 minutes
<b>Format</b>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><i>Individual Work</i></p>  </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><i>Small Group Activity</i></p>  </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><i>Whole Group Activity</i></p>  </div> </div>
<b>Materials needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common phrase worksheet</li> <li>• Paper / Participant notebooks</li> <li>• Pens</li> </ul>



## Activity plan

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### Facilitator preamble

*“The words we use shape how children are treated and supported. This activity helps us practise language that is accurate, respectful, and protective.”*

### Step 1: Individual work (10 minutes)

- Provide each participant with a copy of the ‘Common phrases’ worksheet.
- Invite participants to quietly reflect on each phrase and note what thoughts or feelings it brings up for them in practice.

### Step 2: Small group rewrite (15-20 minutes)

- Separate participants into pairs or small groups.
- Ask participants to rewrite the phrases using:
  - Behaviour-focused language.
  - Past tense.
  - No labels or assumptions.

### Step 3: Whole group sharing (10-15 minutes)

- Invite groups to share their rewritten phrases with the wider group.
- Facilitate a brief discussion focusing on:
  - How changes in language shift the tone and impact of a response.
  - How child-safe language supports both the child and the wider team.

### Step 4:

- To close, invite participants to reflect on how this activity might influence the way they speak about children, behaviour, or concerns in their practice.



## Online adaptation (MS Teams or Zoom)

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This activity can be delivered online using shared documents, chat responses, and breakout rooms. The purpose remains the same: to help participants practise using child-safe, professional language that separates the child from the behaviour and reduces stigma

### Platform Preparation (before the session)

- Upload the Common Phrases worksheet in an accessible format (PDF, shared document, or slide deck).
- Prepare a collaborative document or slide where rewritten phrases can be captured live.

Set up breakout rooms in advance (3–4 participants per group). Smaller groups support safer discussion.

### Step 1: Create psychological safety

- Begin with the facilitator preamble and a brief wellbeing reminder.
- Reinforce that the activity is about learning and reflection, not correcting people or judging past practice.
- Remind participants that language develops over time.
- Remind participants they may step away if needed.
- Encourage camera on or off based on comfort.

### Step 2: Individual reflection

- Share the Common Phrases worksheet by:
  - Posting it in the chat.
  - Sharing it via a link.
  - Displaying it on a shared screen.
- Ask participants to read through the phrases quietly and reflect on each one.
- Participants can:
  - Jot down notes privately.
  - Reflect without writing.
  - Draw images.

- Use their own notebook.
- Prompt participants with: *“What thoughts or feelings come up when you hear or use this phrase in practice?”*

### Step 3: Breakout room rewrite

- Place participants into breakout rooms in pairs or small groups (3-4 people).
- Before opening rooms, display and paste instructions in the chat. Ask groups to rewrite each phrase using:
  - Behaviour-focused language.
  - Past tense.
  - No labels or assumptions about the child.
  - Clear, neutral wording suitable for documentation or conversations with families.
- Assign each group 3-5 phrases.
- Ask groups to decide roles:
  - One person reads the original phrase.
  - One person suggests a rewrite.
  - Others refine or adjust wording.
  - One person records the final version.
- Encourage groups to record their written response in:
  - A shared document.
  - The chat (in their breakout room).
  - Their own notes, ready to share verbally.



#### Facilitator tip

Move between breakout rooms to listen, support, and gently prompt if groups get stuck.

### Step 4: Pause and individual reflection

- Before returning to whole group discussion, ask participants to reflect quietly in breakout rooms:
  - *What changed when we rewrote the phrase?*
  - *What felt easier than expected?*
  - *What still feels challenging?*
- Remind participants this is about strengthening practice, not perfection.

### Step 5: Whole-group consolidation

- Bring participants back to the main room.
- Invite groups to share one or two rewritten phrases, either verbally or via the chat.
- Guide a brief discussion by asking:
  - *How did the rewritten language change the tone of the response?*
  - *How does this language protect the child and support professional practice?*
  - *What feels realistic to use in everyday work?*

### Step 6: Closing reflection

- To close, invite participants to reflect quietly on: *“How might this activity influence the way I speak about children, behaviour, or concerns in my practice?”*
- Participants may respond verbally, via chat, or keep the reflection private.

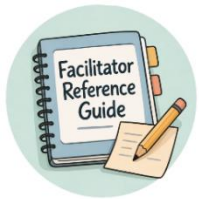




## Scenario cards: Words matter – language that protects

Print these cards and cut them out. Provide the cards to the participants.

"That child is being sexual."	"They knew exactly what they were doing."	"That child is going to grow up to be an offender."
"They're too young to know what they're doing."	"This child is a problem."	"We don't want to label the child, but..."
"They're copying adult behaviour."	"They're just curious, it's probably nothing."	"They're being inappropriate on purpose."
"That behaviour is just naughty."	"That child is manipulative."	"That child shouldn't be around other children."
"That child is dangerous."	"They're trying to get attention."	"This is just a phase."
Let's not overreact."	"I don't want to make a big deal out of this."	"Let's just keep an eye on it for now."
We don't have enough information to act yet."	"It's probably happening at home."	"They are an abuser"



## Facilitator reference guide: Words matter – language that protects

The examples in this section are provided as a guide for facilitators. They are intended to model child-safe, professional responses and demonstrate how language can support safety, regulation, and care. These examples are not the only appropriate responses, nor are they scripts to be followed word-for-word. Effective responses will vary depending on the child, the context, the setting, and the people involved.

Facilitators and participants are encouraged to:

- Develop their own language that feels natural and appropriate to their role.
- Adapt responses to reflect their service context and community.
- Listen to and learn from the perspectives shared within their Community of Practice.

Phrases to avoid	Child-safe, professional rewrite (examples)
“That child is being sexual.”	“The child has engaged in sexual behaviours that are not typical for their age or the setting.”
“They’re too young to know what they’re doing.”	“The child may not understand the meaning or impact of the behaviour and needs guidance and support.”
“That behaviour is just naughty.”	“The child has displayed unsafe behaviour that requires adult support and redirection.”
“They’re copying adult behaviour.”	“The behaviour may be influenced by experiences or exposure beyond the child’s developmental stage.”

“That child is dangerous.”	“The child has displayed behaviours that pose a safety risk to other children and require supervision and planning.”
“They knew exactly what they were doing.”	“The behaviour may appear intentional, but the child may not understand the impact or boundaries involved.”
“This child is a problem.”	“The child has displayed behaviours that need assessment, guidance, and support.”
“They’re just curious, it’s probably nothing.”	“While curiosity can be typical, the pattern and context of this behaviour need to be monitored and discussed.”
“That child is manipulative.”	“The behaviour may reflect learned patterns, unmet needs, or difficulties with boundaries.”
“They’re trying to get attention.”	“The behaviour may be a way the child is communicating a need for support or connection.”
“This is just a phase.”	“The behaviour needs to be responded to and monitored to support the child’s development and safety.”
“That child shouldn’t be around other children.”	“The behaviour requires safety planning which may involve increased supervision and support to ensure the safety of all children.”
“They’re being inappropriate on purpose.”	“The child has engaged in behaviour that is not appropriate for their age or setting and needs guidance.”
“We don’t want to label the child, but...”	“Let’s focus on describing the behaviour we observed and what support is needed.”

<p>"That child is going to grow up to be an offender."</p>	<p>"Children's sexual behaviours and development are different from adults, and the focus should be on support and healthy development."</p>
<p>"Let's not overreact."</p>	<p>"It's important we respond early and thoughtfully to support safety and wellbeing."</p>
<p>"We don't have enough information to act yet."</p>	<p>"We may not have certainty, but we can document, consult, and safety plan to ensure the wellbeing of the child and others."</p>
<p>"I don't want to make a big deal out of this."</p>	<p>"It's important we take the behaviour seriously and follow our procedures."</p>
<p>"It's probably happening at home."</p>	<p>"We can't assume cause; our role is to notice, respond, document, consult and report."</p>
<p>"Let's just keep an eye on it for now."</p>	<p>"Let's document what we've noticed and discuss next steps with leadership."</p>
<p>"They are an abuser"</p>	<p>"The child has shown behaviour that has caused harm to another child"</p>