Intervening with Sexual Behaviour Problems

Four Step Model of Intervention

Attitude: Separate the child from the behaviour. Know they are behaving inappropriately because they have been hurt and have not gotten the modelling, guidance and limits they need – not because they are bad. They may not understand that what they are doing is wrong or may have difficulty controlling themselves.

Strive to teach, not punish or shame. Use words that describe behaviour such as "not O.K." or "against the rules" instead of words that judge the person such as "bad" or "misbehaving" or "nasty". Stay calm, use simple, direct and few words, set limits firmly, and help child feel your support.

Technique for confronting children's sexual behaviour problems

1. **Stop** the behaviour – tell the child to stop, remove the child's hand, separate the children, have them pull up pants, etc.
2. **Define** the behaviour – describe specifically and clearly what the child is doing that is not okay. The more specific and clear, the better opportunity the child has to change or relearn his/her behaviour. If we react with general anger, the child may interpret our anger as "I'm bad" instead of "What I'm doing is wrong". Instead of "Stop that!" or "Don't do that!" or "That's bad!" try "You are poking Billy's private parts and that's not okay." Or "You are being sexual with the dog and we already talked about how it is not okay."
3. **State** the house rule or expectation about this behaviour – Don't lecture; state matter-of-factly with as few words as possible. "In this house…", or "The rule is…" or "We expect everyone in our family to…"
4. **Re-direct** the child (let him/her know what you expect him/her to do) and/or enforce the consequence – For younger children you can redirect the child to more appropriate behaviour. End the encounter on a positive note and praise the child when he/she acts in the way you suggest. If the child is older and this behaviour is repetitive, you may wish to set up a consequence and enforce it matter-of-factly and consistently.