CHILD SEXUALITY

Important notes:

1. This research (see references below) describes sexual behavior without making judgments about whether it is socially appropriate. The goal is to make clear the characteristics of the behaviors involved in order to determine a response that does not harm the youth it is intended to protect.

2. Researchers agree that there is a fundamental lack of knowledge about children's sexual behavior and what is scientifically defined as normal. Due to the taboo surrounding youth sexuality and to legal and political constraints, little research has been conducted.

3. Studies giving frequencies of various childhood sexual behaviors are highly variable since behavior varies among groups and individuals due to differences in culture, moral beliefs, values, development, and strength of sexual feelings.

Early childhood: Ages 0 - 5

• Sexual curiosity, arousal, and behavior are spontaneously expressed unless the child is taught to inhibit them.
• Children in the first two years of life engage in simple pleasurable handling of their genitals.
• A few begin masturbating before age 2, but many begin at age 2 or 3 as they have developed sufficient muscle coordination.
• If left unsupervised, play among 2- or 3-year olds can be sexual, although interest in sex play is not dominant.
• In an Israeli kevutza, one researcher found play among two year olds sometimes included kissing each other, and touching each others' genitals.
• At age 4, curiosity about their own genitals and those of peers increases. They may fondle their own genitalia and show them to others.
• 4- or 5-year olds like to talk about objects and activities that they sense adults consider dirty or taboo, including those that refer to body parts and sexual functions. They may use them to shock or challenge adults or to tease peers.
• Doctor/nurse/patient games and similar forms of play become common. They may involve examining, touching, and manipulating others' genitals. Sex play is spontaneous, light-hearted, and exploratory rather than goal oriented.
• Even play as intimate as kissing of others' genitals is reported by nursery school staff.
• Occasionally, 5-year olds may attempt intercourse if they have learned about it from parents or other children.

References:

• Child Sexual Development
  Loretta Haroian
  monograph prepared for student use at the Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality, ca. 1985.
• **Childhood Sexuality**
  Floyd M. Martinson

• **The Sexual Life of Children**
  Floyd M. Martinson
  Bergin & Garvey, 1994.

• **Childhood Sexuality**
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