Handout 7

Signs of Sexual Disturbance

Toni Cavanagh Johnson, a psychologist specializing in childhood sexual development, lists signs of concern in children up to the age of about 12:

- Children should not be preoccupied with sexual play, and should engage in many other forms of play
- Children should not engage in sexual play with much younger or much older children
- Children should not have precocious knowledge of sex beyond their age
- Children's sexual behaviors and interests should be similar to those of other same-age children
- Children should not be "driven" to engage in sexual activities, and be able to stop when told to by an adult
- Children's sexual play should not lead to complaints from or have a negative effect on other children, and should not cause physical or emotional discomfort to themselves or others
- Children should not sexualize relationships, or see others as objects for sexual interactions
- Children aged 4 and older should understand the rights and boundaries of other children in sexual play
- Children should not experience fear, shame, or guilt in their sexual play
- Children should not engage in adult-type sexual activities with other children
- Children should not direct sexual behaviors toward older adolescents or adults
- Children should not engage in sexual activities with animals
- Children should not use sex to hurt others
- Children should not use bribery, threats, or force to engage other children in sexual play