

Medicine

Sexual behavior found normal in children

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CHICAGO — Sexual behavior in young children is normal and does not necessarily mean that they've been molested, a new study confirms.

The study of more than 1,000 children who had not been molested showed that the younger the children, especially ages 2 to 5, the more likely the chance for sexual behavior.

The most frequent behaviors were self-stimulation, exhibitionism and standing too close to or rubbing against someone, researchers said in April's *Pediatrics*, released yesterday.

Besides corroborating observations dating at least to Freud, the findings are consistent with two recent studies, the authors said.

After age 5, sexual behavior tended to drop off considerably, resurfacing at age 11 for girls and age 12 for boys, the researchers said.

Although victimized children often act more sexual, the researchers said that "simply because a 5-year-old boy touches his genitals occasionally does not mean he has been sexually abused. Rather, it is a behavior that is seen in almost two-thirds of boys that age."

Other common behaviors in young boys and girls include trying to touch women's breasts and trying to look at people when they are nude.

On the other hand, when a behavior is excessive or very unusual and raises concern, a pediatrician should be consulted, the authors said.