

Reflection instrument



Safeguarding
Young People in Care



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Supporting the healthy sexual development of young people in care

Stimulating a healthy sexual development of young people growing up in out-of-home care requires special attention. Five competencies turn out to be crucial:¹

1. Discussing sexuality
2. Supporting young people's needs concerning sexual development
3. Dealing with sex and sexuality in a professional way
4. Dealing with differences in values and cultures regarding sex and sexuality
5. Recognising and responding to harmful sexual behaviour

Talking about sexuality is not an easy thing to do. This reflection instrument is intended as a tool to help you do this. The goal is to enable you to reflect on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that help young people in care develop their sexuality and sexual identity in a healthy way.

The five competencies mentioned above, consist of 17 elements that help support healthy sexual development. Every element is specified in terms of several behaviour characteristics or indicators. This is done with help and input of professionals working in, and young people living in, the organisations of partners within the Safeguarding project.²

Based on these indicators you can reflect on the way you or your colleagues might use these elements: a score of 7 to 9 means 'good work'; a score of 4 to 6 means 'acceptable', and a score of 1 to 3 suggests that more work is needed to understand these issues. It is important to note that the scores are meant to reflect upon competencies and talk about it. They are intended as a tool to reflect and discuss, not as a kind of 'rigid' judgement.

1 See Bernaards, Walpot, Riss Hansen & Moentjens, 2017.

2 See <http://www.amsterdamuas.com/safe>




The tool may be used in different ways. However, it is very important to use it to reflect on observable behaviour and learn from that. This observable behaviour may happen in the everyday routine of practice in a group home or other situation, or it may be based on an audio or video recording.

- It may help (future) professionals to learn to talk about sex and sexuality in the everyday routine of working in a group home, for example by scoring distinct elements after a conversation with young people or after a specific situation involving young people. Reflecting on the scores and the process will support workers to develop their knowledge and skills.
- In other situations, it may help to discuss the score with a colleague, coach or supervisor.
- It may help to discuss the score with young people.

Above all, it should be seen a tool for reflection and learning, either individually, or together with colleagues, such as in peer supervision. It is a tool for on-the-job training.

Symbols:

 explanation

 go back to chapter



I. Discussing sexuality

1. The carer, social worker or other professional has knowledge of healthy sexual development ? _____ 1 2 3

- Uses correct information 4 5 6
- Applies knowledge of the special needs 7 8 9

2. The carer, social worker or other professional talks about sex and sexuality in a calm and positive way ? _____ 1 2 3

- Uses neutral (non-accusatory) expressions 4 5 6
- Uses open and non-concealing (explicit) language 7 8 9
- Is visibly comfortable when talking about sexuality
- Normalises the experiences of young people

3. The carer, social worker or other professional uses existing methods and materials ? _____ 1 2 3

- Uses methodologies 4 5 6
- Uses games 7 8 9
- Uses materials
- The professional chooses the right moment of use



II.

Supporting young people’s needs concerning sexual development

4. The carer, social worker or other professional takes the young people’s needs as a starting point ? — 1 2 3

- Uses the knowledge of core questions of young people 4 5 6
- Creates relaxed situations 7 8 9
- Connects to the young person during conversations
- Take the (dis)abilities of the young person under consideration

5. The carer, social worker or other professional recognises the importance of social media for young people ? — 1 2 3

- Shows awareness of what’s ‘in’ on social media 4 5 6
- Can explain the risks to young people in a calm way 7 8 9
- Supports young people in case of social media problems

6. The carer, social worker or other professional stimulates young people to form their own opinions ? — 1 2 3

- Stimulates young people to talk about their ideas and experiences on daily live matters 4 5 6
- Explains that ideas on sexuality differ between people 7 8 9



III.

Dealing with sex and sexuality in a professional way

7. The carer, social worker or other professional considers distance–proximity ? _____ 1 2 3

- Only talks about his/her personal life when this contributes to the young person’s development 4 5 6
- Respects the young person’s privacy 7 8 9
- Respects the young person’s personal space, and teenage secrets

8. The carer, social worker or other professional uses language appropriate to the situation ? _____ 1 2 3

- Checks what language the young person finds comfortable 4 5 6
- Uses humour appropriate and subtle 7 8 9

9. The carer, social worker or other professional reacts to young people’s emotions in an appropriate and respectful way ? _____ 1 2 3

- Acknowledges emotions and thoughts 4 5 6
- Provides a broad availability, the social worker is easy to access 7 8 9



IV

Dealing with differences in values and cultures regarding sex and sexuality

10. The carer, social worker or other professional knows how to deal with his/her own values and prejudices ? — 1 2 3

- Shows awareness that his/hers own background influences his/her behaviour 4 5 6
- Shows respect for different opinions 7 8 9
- Is aware of the difference between expressing personal opinions and providing information
- Asks for assistance in difficult situations

11. The carer, social worker or other professional knows how to deal with other people's values and prejudices ? — 1 2 3

- Is sensitive about cultural and religious differences 4 5 6
- Corrects negative remarks 7 8 9
- Corrects negative behaviour

12. The carer, social worker or other professional knows how to deal with sexual diversity ? — 1 2 3

- Applies his/her knowledge of sexual diversity 4 5 6
- Teaches young people that gender roles are not necessarily fixed 7 8 9
- Responds to negative remarks
- Corrects negative remarks
- Corrects negative behaviour
- Encourages young people to develop their own identities



V.

Recognising and responding to harmful sexual behaviour

- 13. The carer, social worker or other professional knows the signs of harmful sexual behaviour** ?
-
- Uses knowledge of risk- and protective factors 1 2 3
4 5 6
 - Uses knowledge of trauma related behaviour in sexually abused children and young people 7 8 9
 - Uses knowledge of the sexual development of children and young people with special needs
- 14. The carer, social worker or other professional recognises and discusses harmful sexual behaviour** ?
-
- Recognises signs of harmful sexual behaviour and discusses these with colleagues 1 2 3
4 5 6
 - Recognises signs of harmful sexual behaviour) and discusses these with (foster) parents 7 8 9
 - Recognises signs of harmful sexual behaviour and discusses these with children and young people
- 15. The carer, social worker or other professional responds adequately to the disclosure of harmful sexual behaviour (towards both victim and perpetrator)** ?
-
- Knows and applies the local policy on sexual abuse 1 2 3
4 5 6
 - Does not promise confidentiality 7 8 9
 - Responds in a sensitive way.
 - Does not deter (scare) the young person from talking further
 - Judges the behaviour as objectively as possible
 - Condemns the behaviour, not the individual
 - Is aware that the emotional conditions can alter the story during time



- Creates room for young people to admit their mistakes
- Act to prevent immediate reoccurrence
- Applies suitable consequences, to prevent consequences on a longer term
- Gives the young person a chance to a fresh start

16. The carer, social worker or other professional responds to on the spot (not severe) situations ?

- | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| - States what he/she is observing | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| - Investigates the situation, and asks what it's like for the young person in question and the others involved | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| - Explains what is and isn't right about the situation, and states what behaviour he/she would like to see | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| - Sets rules with the young person, and gives consequences as required | | | |
| - Discusses the incident with colleagues | | | |
| - Guides the young person in complying with the agreed upon rules | | | |

17. The carer, social worker of other professional responds to on the spot (severe) situations ?

- | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| - Acts to stop the behaviour immediately | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| - States what he/she is observing | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| - Explains what is and isn't right about the situation, and states what behaviour he/she would like to see | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| - Sets rules with the young person, and gives consequences as required | | | |
| - Discusses the incident with colleagues | | | |
| - Guides the young person in complying with the agreed upon rules | | | |
| - Asks what it's like for the young person in question and the others involved | | | |



Explanation



I. Discussing sexuality



1. The carer, social worker or other professional has knowledge of healthy sexual development

- *Uses correct information*

Explanation: Uses correct information on sexual development in different age groups when talking to young people, colleagues or (foster) parents. For example, when explaining that playing doctor is healthy behaviour for four-year-old children.

- *Applies knowledge of special needs*

Explanation: Applies knowledge of the special needs of vulnerable young people concerning sexual development when talking to young people, colleagues or (foster) parents. For example, understanding that young people who have experienced sexual trauma can sometimes exhibit sexualized behaviour.

2. The carer, social worker or other professional talks about sex and sexuality in a calm and positive way

- *Uses neutral (non-accusatory) expressions*

Explanation: For example, instead of saying 'oh wow, and you're not even in a relationship,' you say: 'Oh, would you like to tell me more about that?'

- *Uses open and non-concealing (explicit) language*

Explanation: For example, by asking about penetration and oral sex when the situation demands you know exactly what transpired.

- *Is visibly comfortable when talking about sexuality*

Explanation: Is visibly comfortable when talking about sexuality (is not emotional or red-faced), including the topic of harmful sexual behaviour.

- *Normalises the experiences of young people*

Explanation: Reacts in a calm and comforting way. For example, when a young person expresses regret about consensual oral sex with a classmate.

3. The carer, social worker or other professional uses existing methods and materials

- *Uses methodologies*

- *Uses games*

- *Uses materials*

- *The worker chooses the right moment of use*

Explanation: Was it appropriate at that time, was it planned, was it to use specific goals, did you think about these goals beforehand?



II. Supporting young people's needs concerning sexual development



4. The carer, social worker or other professional takes the young people's needs as a starting point

- *Uses the knowledge of core questions of young people*
Explanation: The professional shows knowledge of the questions young people have about sexuality and sexual behaviour. For example questions like: How do I sustain a relationship? How does a STD test work? How do I use a condom?
- *Creates relaxed situations*
Explanation: Creates relaxed situations when talking about sexuality. For example by creating informal moments – during a walk or doing the dishes – or by playing a game.
- *Connects to the young person during conversations*
Explanation: Connects to the young person during conversations by using appropriate books, websites, or pictures.
- *Take the (dis)abilities of the young person under consideration*
Explanation: Also talks about sexuality with young people with a (physical or mental) disability.

5. The carer, social worker or other professional recognizes the importance of social media for young people

- *Shows awareness of what's 'in' on social media*
Explanation: Is informed of popular apps and the ways young people use them.
- *Can explain the risks to young people in a calm way*
Explanation: For example, by asking questions like: 'If you meet somebody on social media, how do you know they're really who they say they are?'
- *Supports young people with social media problems*
Explanation: For example, does not get angry with them for spreading a nude picture of him/herself and realising the consequences too late, but supports them and advises them to prevent further spread and reoccurrences).



6. The carer, social worker or other professional supports young people to form their own opinions and make responsible choices



- *Stimulates young people to talk about their ideas and experiences on daily live matters*

Explanation: For example during discussions, when seeing certain images on TV, or hearing certain lyrics.

- *Explains that ideas on sexuality differ between people*

Explanation: For instance, explain that boundaries differ between people, and that everyone is free to indicate their own boundaries. "It's all right if you do not want to answer certain questions, like 'How many people have you slept with?'".



III. Dealing with sex and sexuality in a professional way



7. The social worker considers distance–proximity

- *Only talks about his/her personal life when this contributes to the young person's development*

Explanation: Only when it contributes to the development of self-respect, confidence, resilience, or to the abatement of shame/guilt in a young person. For example: 'When I was thirteen, I was also insecure about my body'.

- *Respects the young person's privacy*
- *Respects the young person's personal space, and their teenage secrets*

Explanation: For example, a professional will always knock before entering a young person's room, so as not to intrude on a private situation, like inspecting their own body in the mirror, or masturbating.

8. The carer, social worker or other professional uses language appropriate to the situation

- *Checks what language the young person finds comfortable*

Explanation: For example, penis/member/willy.

- *Uses humour appropriately and subtle*

Explanation: Depersonalize the humour, 'I heard about a story...' For example: be aware of the trauma many young

people experienced. So be sensitive and make no jokes on 'always use a condom' when staff knows a child has been raped. Or when a child is coming from a limitless situation at home, don't make a joke about bumping into parents having sex on the sofa.

9. The carer, social worker or other professional reacts to young people's emotions in an appropriate and respectful way

- *Acknowledges emotions and thoughts*

Explanation: For example, responds appropriately when a young person is nervous about discussing sex, and doesn't say things like: 'Oh come on, everyone has sex'.

- *Provides a broad availability, the social worker is easy to access*

Explanation: The social worker doesn't run away from discussions about sex. Is there for the young person when he/she needs it (both physically and emotionally) (for example, stays after a difficult conversation, even when their shift has ended).



IV. Dealing with differences in values and cultures regarding sex and sexuality



10. The carer, social worker or other professional knows how to deal with their own values and prejudices

- *Shows awareness that his/her own background influences his/her behaviour*
For example, "My experience, from my background is..."
- *Shows respect for different opinions*
Explanation: For example, by reacting in a respectful manner to a story about a homosexual girl, even if homosexuality is viewed negatively in their own culture.
- *Is aware of the differences between expressing personal opinions and providing information*
- *Asks for assistance in difficult situations*
Explanation: For instance, in a situation when your own background influences your actions towards young people. For example, when a young person has a decidedly negative opinion on homosexuality and the professional feels personally attacked.

11. The carer, social worker or other professional knows how to deal with other people's values and prejudices

- *Is sensitive about cultural and religious differences*
Explanation: Acknowledges young person's views relating to their background, culture, or religion. For example, by giving space to feelings of shame or resistance if a young person is not used to talking about relationships and sexuality, because of their religious upbringing.
- *Corrects negative remarks*
Explanation: Corrects negative remarks/behaviour (like "Hee, Poof, pass me the ketchup. You're gay yourself, homo") from young people as well as parents and colleagues.



12. The carer, social worker or other professional knows how to deal with sexual diversity



- *Applies his/her knowledge of sexual diversity*
Explanation: Applies his/her knowledge of sexual diversity (identity, expression, gender, orientation) when young people have questions about this, or for example, during a group session on sex and sexuality.
- *Teaches young people that gender roles are not necessarily fixed*
- *Responds to negative remarks*
Explanation: Responds to negative remarks from young people about sexual diversity (identity, expression, gender, orientation). For example, by pointing out that everybody is different.
- *Corrects negative behaviour*
Explanation: Correct negative remarks from young people as well as parents and colleagues. For example, when parents say they don't want to see their son/daughter anymore, because he/she is homosexual.
- *Encourages young people to develop their own identities*
Explanation: For example during discussions, when seeing certain images on TV, or hearing certain lyrics.



V. Recognising and responding to sexually harmful sexual behaviour



13. The carer, social worker or other professional knows the signs of harmful sexual behaviour

- *Uses knowledge of risk- and protective factors*
Explanation: Uses knowledge of risk- and protective factors that can influence sexual development and sexual behaviour of young people. For instance, during case study discussions and deliberations with colleagues.
- *Uses knowledge of trauma related behaviour in sexually abused children and young people*
Explanation: For instance, during case study discussions and deliberations with colleagues.
- *Uses knowledge of the sexual development of specific groups of children and young people who are at risk of a problematic or potentially damaging sexual development*
Explanation: For instance, during case study discussions and deliberations with colleagues. For example, young people with autism or with low intelligence.

14. The carer, social worker or other professional recognises and discusses harmful sexual behaviour

- *Recognises signs of harmful sexual behaviour and discusses these with colleagues*
Explanation: For example, during team meetings or case study discussions.
- *Recognises signs of harmful sexual behaviour) and discusses these with (foster) parent(s)*
Explanation: for instance during a visit
- *Recognises signs of harmful sexual behaviour and discusses these with the children and young people involved*



15. The carer, social worker or other professional responds adequately to the disclosure of harmful sexual behaviour (towards both victim and perpetrator)

- *The professional knows and applies the local policy on sexual abuse*
- *Does not promise confidentiality*
Explanation: The professional makes sure young people know that information must be shared with other colleagues in the team when there is cause for concern.
- *Responds in a sensitive way*
Explanation: The social workers stays calm and serene when talking about harmful sexual behaviour and doesn't use value based statements. For example, Professional doesn't use value based statements. Don't say "oh, that's awful" but "I see you are moved by this, am I right?"
- *Does not deter the young person from talking further*
Explanation: 'keeps inviting the young person to tell what happened, but also gives the message that stop talking is fine too.'
- *Judges the behaviour as objectively as possible*
Explanation: For example, by using the Flag System.

- *Condemns the behaviour, not the individual*
Explanation: States clearly that a person is more than his/her behaviour. Talk about other aspects of the perpetrator then the assault only.
- *Is aware that the emotional conditions can alter the story during time*
Explanation: The emotional state of mind influence someone's responses. For example, sometimes a victim/perpetrator tends to change her/his story in connection to her emotional wellbeing.
- *Creates room for young people to admit their mistakes*
Explanation: For example, by giving time to think and returning to the subject at a later time.
- *Act to prevent immediate reoccurrence*
- *Applies suitable consequences*
For example, by setting rules to prevent recurrence.
- *Gives the young person a chance to a fresh start*
Explanation: In such a way that the young person can prove oneself again, without guilt or shame. For instance, by literally introduce oneself again to someone.





16. The carer, social worker or other professional responds to on the spot (not severe) situations

- *States what he/she is observing*

For instance: I see that you have nude pictures and posters hanging in your room.

- *Investigates the situation, and asks what it's like for the young person in question and the others involved*

For instance: How do you feel when we come in and see them? How do you think this makes us feel?

- *Explains what is and isn't right about the situation, and states what behaviour he/she would like to see*

For instance: It's okay that you want to look at those photos and that you have them in your room, but it is not OK to confront others with them without being asked.

- *Sets rules with the young person, and gives consequences as required*

For instance: It's okay that you want to look at those photos and that you have them in your room, but it is not OK to confront others with them without being asked.

- *Discusses the incident with colleagues*

For instance: If the posters and photos are no longer seen, compliment the youngster after a while. This moment can be cited in similar situations.

- Guides the young person in complying with the agreed upon rules. If the posters and photos are no longer seen, compliment the youngster after a while. This moment can be cited in similar situations.



17. The carer, social worker or other professional responds to on the spot (severe) situations



First:

- ***States what he/she is observing***
For instance: you are holding ...(name) and one of you is pulling of her cloths. That is intolerable and considered as a sexual assault.
- ***Act to stop the behaviour immediately***
Say for instance: Stop this immediately!
- ***Sets rules with the young person and gives consequences***
For instance: you are going to your room right now and wait there till we come to talk about this.
- ***Sets rules with the young person, and gives consequences as required***
For instance: you have to stay in your room for now. Later we will see if redress is possible. This could be reported to the police. I will report this according to the rules we have in this organisation.

Second:

- ***Discusses the incident with colleagues***
In the situation someone that living under one roof is not possible any longer, the perpetrator(s) have to move. Moving to another place could be seen as a punishment to the victim and would be traumatizing.
- ***Guides the young person in complying with the agreed upon rules***
- ***Asks what it's like for the young person in question and the others involved***
For instance: You did hold... (name) with violence and one of you pulled of off her clothes. How did you get to do this? How do you think she experienced this? You forced her into something she didn't wanted. This is a very traumatic situation for her. It's illegal and considered an assault.



Method

This reflection instrument has been developed based on:

- A review of publicly available materials on the competencies that professionals need to be able to support a healthy sexual development of young people growing up in care. This materials were (e.g.): guidelines, policy documents, educational programs, tools and websites.
See: Bernaards, Walpot, Riis Hansen & Moentjes (2017).
- Interviews and focusgroups with a specific selection of professionals in Belgium, Denmark and The Netherlands on competencies for supporting a healthy sexual development of young people in care. See: Walpot, Riis Hansen, Moentjes & Bernaards (2017)
- Work meetings with representatives of Qpido/Spirit (The Netherlands) and the authors between September 2017 and April 2018.
- A work meeting at the last international meeting of the Safeguarding Young People in Care Project (April 2018)
- Input from professionals working in residential care at Clemens (Denmark), Spirit (The Netherlands) and Wingerbloei (Belgium), who conducted a small scale pilot and commented on behaviour characteristics, examples, explanation and situations in practice.

Colophon

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