

Masturbation

TITLE
07



PUBLIC



PRIVATE

Masturbation

This unit aims to enhance the learners’ understanding of their body and that a person can feel pleasure from touching the private parts of their body. Young people are supported to learn that touching their private parts/masturbation should be done in a private place and when on their own. Understanding is developed and embedded through a range of carefully planned and personalised learning experiences. The activities are suggestions only. You can adapt or extend them to suit your learners’ age, cognitive ability and specific needs.



Links to Curriculum for Excellence	Learning intentions	Success criteria
<p>I am aware of the need to respect personal space and boundaries and can recognise and respond appropriately to verbal and non-verbal communication. HWB 3-45b</p> <p>I am developing skills for making decisions about my relationships and sexual behaviour. I am able to apply these to situations that may be challenging or difficult. HWB 3-46c</p>	<p>With the appropriate level of support and resources children and young people learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ To accept redirection when they self-sooth/masturbate in an inappropriate place.▶ That masturbation is okay and should only be done in a private place.▶ That a private place is the young person’s bedroom.▶ That no one else should watch them when they masturbate.▶ To indicate to an adult if upset.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ I can accept redirection when I self-sooth/ masturbate.▶ I can identify my bedroom is my private place.▶ I can manage waiting until I am in my private place to masturbate.▶ I can indicate to an adult if I am upset.

Links to other themes

In the identification of which CfE Experiences and Outcomes are of relevance to our learners with complex needs we have drawn, in this unit, on those at Third Level. This is not because we expect our learners to be learning at these Levels for say Literacy or Numeracy, but because they remind us that much of what we do needs to be age as well as developmentally appropriate.

- Learning within these other thematic units will support learning on this theme:
- ▶ My Body
 - ▶ Personal space and boundaries
 - ▶ Puberty

Why this learning matters

It is a normal part of a child's development that they find it soothing or comforting to touch their private parts. When children are young we usually try to divert them from this behaviour if it is done in sight of others, or in public places. For typically developing children there will be opportunities to pick up messages about this behaviour directly or indirectly from adults or from peers. As children grow, when they reach puberty, it is also normal for them to continue to find touching their genitals/breasts/nipples to be pleasurable, and so we might begin to think of this behaviour as masturbation.

For children and young people with complex additional support needs the messages about what is acceptable or not when it comes to touching one's genitals/breasts are not so easily understood. While this might be a difficult or embarrassing topic for adults to talk about, or to support the young person to learn about, it is an important part of helping to protect children and young people. This means not referring to masturbation as 'bad touch' but rather building understanding and behaviours that means it does not happen in the wrong place or at the wrong time.

The activities in this unit are provided to help (when necessary) to redirect children and young people from self-soothing behaviours that include touching their genitals/breasts (when this might be necessary is explored later). Then, when young people masturbate for sexual pleasure, the activities will help them learn where and when it is appropriate to do so. This learning will help keep them safe from abuse and also from any misinterpretation of their behaviour as a danger to others.

A further important consideration is that as they grow into young adulthood, learners with complex needs might not understand that exploring one's body, pleasure and masturbation are positive things. It may be the case that masturbation may be the only sexual experience that some young people/young adults will have, and so we want them to understand that it is common to do it, feel okay about doing it and to do it safely.

Activities, ideas and supports for learning

There are 3 sections in this booklet.

1. Redirecting children and young people from self-soothing behaviours that include touching their genitals
2. My bedroom is my private place
3. Key messages about masturbation

1. Redirecting children and young people from self-soothing behaviours that include touching their genitals

Self-soothing is used by a child or young person to regulate emotions. These behaviours are repetitive and likely begin when the child feels under stimulated or does not know how to respond to meeting their emotional need at the time. The behaviours are not necessarily only about touching one's genitals, they can include rocking or head banging for example. As an educator, you know the children/young people in your class, and so you will recognise ways in which a repetitive behaviour can be used by them to self-regulate.

In this unit we are thinking about self-soothing behaviours that include touching the genitals or breasts/nipples (for girls, self-soothing or masturbation can often mean touching nipples or breasts through clothing and not necessarily involve touching or rubbing the vulva). It is a useful starting point to use the *My Body* unit materials to support children and young people to learn the names for parts of their body, and to learn that parts of their body are covered by their underwear. Any work we do to redirect learners from touching their private parts will be enhanced by us simply using the names of parts of the body that we want them to stop touching or rubbing.

One thing to consider is early recognition of the child touching or rubbing their genitals or breasts as a soothing behaviour. Sometimes adults do not want to acknowledge that the way the child/young person touches themselves, or rubs against something, is actually self-soothing. The sooner adults recognise behaviour as such it will be easier to address it, rather than leave it to establish itself.





Approaches to redirecting the young person

In terms of responses, these need to be planned with the individual child or young person in mind and should be discussed, decided and shared as approaches by the adults in the child's life. Do remember that changing an established behaviour may take time. Here are some suggestions in terms of responses/redirecting from the behaviour:

- ▶ To begin, something **not to do** - do not shame or express anger toward the child or young person for this behaviour. This will not be understood, it might create negative associations with private body parts, and will not help redirect them from doing it.
- ▶ It can help to take a note of where and when the behaviour is happening. Are there any patterns emerging? Time of day? Certain lessons or triggers? Could the young person be tired or bored or frustrated?
- ▶ It is worth considering whether anything is stressing the child/young person before the behaviour starts. What can you do to avoid things that are stressful, can you make transitions slower or easier, or how can you reassure?
- ▶ You can make sure that the child is receiving enough sensory stimulation – play more and regularly, use a fidget object, sing together, have a snack or a drink, visit the gym/sensory room, expend some energy, do something they enjoy.
- ▶ You can pre-empt or distract from the behaviour by offering the child/young person an object that you know is comforting to them – a favourite doll, a blanket they hug.

- ▶ If the behaviour starts you could try some gentle redirection of the child/young person's hands or body.
- ▶ You could develop a script to use along the lines of 'hands off and wait': *"that's for your bedroom" with a photo of their room.*
- ▶ Think about how you can acknowledge and celebrate success, if a young person responds to rewards or star charts you can recognise their learning and behaviour change

It may not be possible to redirect a young person from self-soothing/masturbation.

When this happens it is necessary to manage the situation as best we can, offering privacy and protection to the young person and preventing others from witnessing the behaviour if possible. If a young person has not yet learned to manage this behaviour, and masturbates in an inappropriate place, then adults can cover the young person's genital area or place a screen around them until the behaviour stops. If this is a regular issue, it is best to plan for this if at all possible which can mean having a cover/throw or movable screens to hand. Communication between home and school is essential to establish where and when the young person can have enough private time/space at home to explore their own body, touch themselves and masturbate. This can reduce the need to masturbate at other times.

Communicating as you go

As you try out any of the approaches it might be helpful to have a script that you use to communicate with the young person. They may not comprehend all the language but a script helps you set the right tone so that you present as caring, firm and consistent. So, you could say things like: *I know this feels good but this is for your private place at home in your bedroom.* Using the script alongside a photo of the young person's bedroom can help with understanding. As already stated, home/school liaison, planning and co-operation is a crucial part of any plan.

If a young person is masturbating in school and you need to wait until they stop, having put them in a safe and discreet area, it will be necessary to return to see if they have finished. For a young man you could develop a script to manage this, for example saying; *Penis hard, not finished* (and exit) or *Penis soft, finished* (and do any personal care necessary). For a young woman it might involve a script such as *Touching vulva/Touching breasts not finished* (and exit) or *Touching vulva/Touching breasts finished* (and do any personal care necessary).

2. My bedroom is my private place

With the understanding that masturbation is a normal, healthy behaviour we want to establish the place where the young person can do this, if they wish to do so. Directing a young person that this place should be private may not be enough and could cause confusion – they may hear that the toilet/ bathroom is a private place, which it may be at home, but is not at school.

To help develop understanding of the key message *my bedroom is my private place*, and before or as you address masturbation specifically, you could create your own social story/PowerPoint for your learner and use photographs of actual places known to them. We suggest a script here to go along with the images. You can add any mention of places with photographs that the young person needs to understand are not private places. The story/PowerPoint starts and ends with the affirmative message about the bedroom as their private place.

As with much RSHP learning this is best done as a partnership between home and school. This will be particularly important here, but also even more so when a young person has not had much 'private time' or perhaps shares a bedroom, and so some additional parameters and safeguards need to be in place. This approach needs to be bespoke, and shared by the adults who support the young person. The approach also has to be very clear, for example to establish my bedroom is my private place, and not just any bedroom.

- ▶ **My bedroom is my private place**
Insert a photograph(s) of the young person's bedroom with a sign/symbol known to the learner to indicate YES
- ▶ **My classroom is not my private place**
Insert a photograph of the classroom with a sign/symbol known to the learner to indicate NO
- ▶ **My living room is not my private place**
Insert a photograph(s) of the family living room with a sign/symbol known to the learner to indicate NO
- ▶ **The supermarket is not my private place**
Insert a photograph(s) of a shop used by the family with a sign/symbol known to the learner to indicate NO
- ▶ **The bus is not my private place**
Insert a photograph(s) of the transport used by the young person with a sign/symbol known to the learner to indicate NO
- ▶ **My bedroom is my private place**



3. Key messages about masturbation

In the *My Body* unit we provide materials to support children to learn the names for parts of their body. When it comes to their genitals, bottom or breasts, they may understand the notion of *private parts*, or you may be working on understanding that *some parts of their body are covered by their underwear*. So far in this unit, we have supported the young person to accept re-direction if they touch their genitals in an inappropriate setting. And we have established that their *bedroom is a private place*.

With all this in place it is possible to support more specific learning about masturbation. You can use the materials provided in this unit that have been produced as BBC PSHE animations and social stories by Able2Learn and the SEN Resource Centre.

However, if these do not meet the needs of your learners we would suggest you create your own social story or PowerPoint. We provide a script here, you can use all the proposed content or elements that are relevant and useful for your learner – oftentimes the work you do in this topic will be very personal to the young person, and so you can design what works best to support adults at school and home deliver consistent approaches. You will need to encourage communication between home and school to best understand if your shared approaches are effective.

In terms of images that support the text you can use whatever symbol system the young person knows. If you want to use graphic/unambiguous images we have curated a number of images about masturbation that can be used with learners in secondary school or young adult learning contexts. As an educator you are required to make decisions about what is appropriate for your learners, and build an approach which is supported by your setting and ongoing engagement with parents and carers. The password protected section with additional images is here [IMAGES - RSHP](#)

Social story/PowerPoint text: The text provides options, shown when we use *italics* and the symbol /. You need to make a choice about what language to use. You should use or delete text depending on what you have established as the language you use with the young person. Begin and end with the positive affirmative message.

- ▶ It is okay to touch *my private parts/ the parts of my body covered by my pants/ my penis and testicles/ my vulva and my breasts* in my bedroom.
- ▶ Touching *my private parts/ the parts of my body covered by my pants/ my penis and testicles/ my vulva and my breasts/ my nipples* feels nice.
- ▶ I must only touch *my private parts/ the parts of my body covered by my pants/ my penis and testicles/ my vulva and my breasts/ my nipples* in my bedroom.
- ▶ If I want to touch *my private parts/ the parts of my body covered by my pants/ my penis and testicles/ my vulva and my breasts/ my nipples* I must wait until I am in my bedroom.
- ▶ (For young men): My penis might get bigger.
- ▶ (For young women): My vulva might get wet.
- ▶ White fluid might come out of my *vagina/penis*. This is okay.
- ▶ I can clean myself with a tissue and put the tissue in the bin.
- ▶ I can wash my hands.
- ▶ No-one should watch me when I touch *my private parts/ the parts of my body covered by my pants/ my penis and testicles/my vulva and my breasts*.
- ▶ It is okay to touch *my private parts/ the parts of my body covered by my pants/ my penis and testicles/ my vulva and my breasts* in my bedroom.

The agency CHANGE have now put their easy-read books on to YouTube as animated videos. The animation on *Sex and Masturbation* and other images about masturbation can be accessed via our ASN Images password protected space on the RSHP resource: [IMAGES - RSHP](#)

If you have concerns

If you have concerns about a young person when it comes to masturbation speak to allied health professionals. Concerns might be in connection with frequency of masturbation or perhaps whether the young person is doing it safely and without harming themselves. It may also be the case for a young person that when they masturbate they do not orgasm/ejaculate. This can cause frustration and so again, seek some professional support for any concern.

And finally....

I can indicate to an adult if I am upset

Children/young people may be upset about aspects of their RSHP learning. As they learn we want them to understand and remember who they can find support from. The My Circle exercise described in the unit called Personal Space and Boundaries can support children and young people to identify who they can tell if they are upset. Of course it is also the responsibility of adults who provide education and care to know the learner well and to be aware of changes in behaviours that might communicate worry or distress.

Learner evaluation

Learners should be asked to show a preference as to whether they like or dislike the activities that are part of their RSHP learning. It may be possible to tell if the child/young person is enjoying their participation as it happens, this is facilitated when the adult knows the learner well and is able to interpret reactions. Whether at school or at home, you may have already worked on developing an object of reference or signifier for when you want to know a child/young person's opinion. Learner evaluation will help you to make learning more enjoyable, relevant and useful for the learner.