

PHSB and protective factors in out-of-home care



Protective factors are skills and supports that help lessen behavioural difficulties. Kids in out-of-home care often have limited protective factors in their lives. This can lead to social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, including instances of problematic and harmful sexual behaviours (PHSB).

Protective factors help to prevent PHSB by enhancing kids' ability, motivation and/or competency to heal from the impacts of trauma, while building skills that make PHSB less likely to occur. There are several ways to build protective factors:

- **Fostering prosocial behaviours** – increasing understanding of interpersonal boundaries; delivering sexual education; developing communication and social skills; and providing opportunities to build respectful relationships.
- **Developing decision making and critical thinking skills** – this helps kids make better decisions relating to their behaviours and relationships.
- **Attuned carer responses** – protective factors increase when carers support, model and monitor appropriate behaviours in relationships, and emotional regulation skills. Where behaviours of concern occur, it's important that carers respond quickly and appropriately.

Building protective factors

It's important to identify kids' support needs in order to build protective factors. To do this, think about your child/teen and consider the following questions:

- what are they currently doing well at home; at school; with others; and in the community?
- which tasks do they need adult support with?
- can they identify and manage their emotions?
- have they received comprehensive age-appropriate sexual education?
- are they given choice and decision-making opportunities?
- do they follow your rules and boundaries?

If you're unable to answer all these questions, collaborate with the child support team to gather information. Once you have identified both strengths and support needs, work with your child/teen and their support team to build skills through conversations, education, practice and role modelling.