

Module 10: Recognising and Dealing with Feelings

Objectives

This module aims to help you explore and gain an understanding of the following:

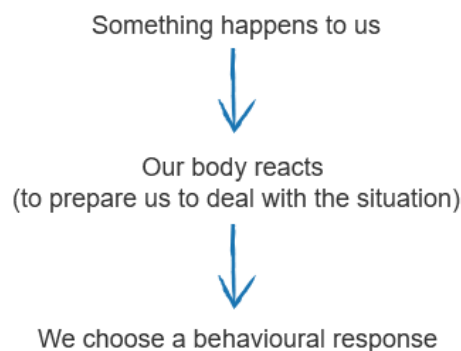
- How your emotions influence your thinking and behaviour
- How you cope with difficult emotions e.g. anger
- How to become more assertive



What are emotions?

"An emotion is a complex psychological state that involves three distinct components: *a subjective experience, a physiological response, and a behavioural or expressive response.*"
(Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 2007)

The follow diagram helps to explain this:



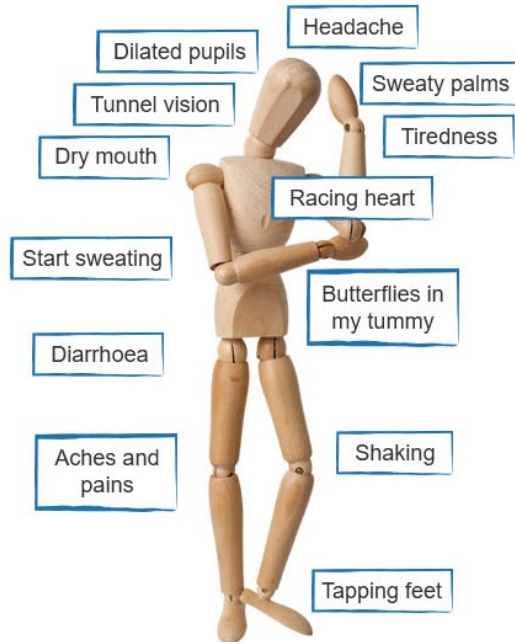
Starting Point

Identify your current level of confidence (1 = no confidence; 2 = some confidence; 3 = very confident).

<i>I can recognise changes in my body and identify how I feel</i>	1	2	3
<i>I can understand how my emotions influence my thinking and behaviour</i>	1	2	3
<i>I know how to manage negative emotions</i>	1	2	3
<i>I can identifying the warning signs when I am becoming angry and upset</i>	1	2	3
<i>I know how to be assertive</i>	1	2	3

What happens in my body?

Here are some of the physical reactions we have to situations:



These reactions are generally preparing us for a 'fight or flight' response (so we could face a predator or flee to safety) which would have helped ensure our survival. Now these signs can be used to help us identify what we are feeling.

Exercise 1 - How in-tune with your feelings are you?

Below is a worksheet which will help you to identify what happens to you physically and how this affects you. By completing this in different situations you should be able to decide what emotion you experience.

Ask others	Ask myself
What expression does my face show?	What does my body feel like?
How do I say I feel?	What am I thinking about?
What do I do?	What do I feel like doing?

How does understanding my feelings apply to viewing sexual images of children?

Some of the common reasons identified by individuals who have accessed sexual images of children include dealing with negative emotions such as stress, loneliness, frustration, depression and anxiety.

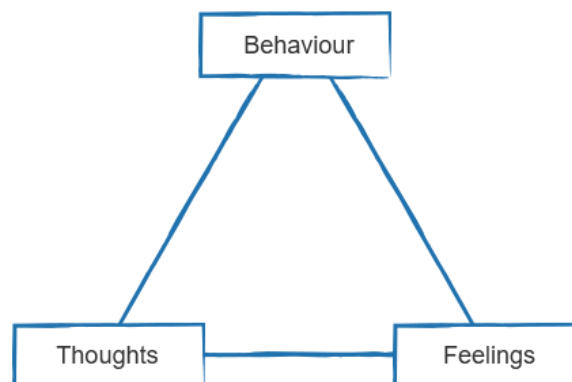
They describe their on-line behaviour as a way of coping with negative feelings and situations -a form of escapism and stress relief.

They may be aware that viewing sexual images of children is not an appropriate coping strategy but for a variety of reasons struggle to identify other more positive ways of dealing with these feelings. Improving your ability to regulate and manage your emotions and deal positively with problems in your life is likely to reduce the probability of engaging in problematic on-line activity.

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How you feel can influence your thinking and behavior.

Our thoughts, feelings and behavior are all linked:



An example: If you hear a loud bang in the middle of the night, what do you think it would be? How would you react? If you have a dog you might think something has been knocked over, feel annoyed but turn over and go back to sleep, if you live alone you might think it was a burglar, feel scared and call the Police. It is your thoughts that have affected how you feel and react in that situation.

This includes how you feel about yourself-(your self-esteem); how you feel about your situation and your feelings towards other people. For example an individual who feels powerless may lose motivation and believe that there is no point in trying, as he will not succeed. He may withdraw and isolate himself. Similarly an individual who ruminates on problems and focuses on negatives is unlikely to see the positives in other people or situations and this can increase his feelings of isolation.

What is positive and negative thinking?

If you are unsure of negative and positive thinking (otherwise known as self-talk) then please work through our [self-talk section](#).

Positive thinking encourages healthy behaviour.

Negative thinking comprises thoughts in which you see the worst in everything. It reduces your expectations by expecting the worst. Negative thinking tends to manifest itself in patterns of behaviour which are characterized by stress, worry, anxiety and frustration.

Exercise 2 – Your negative thoughts

Write down a list of your most common negative thoughts.

With each of these, identify the associated feeling.

Now list your behaviour that resulted from the thoughts.

Here is an example:

Thought- 'what's the point?'
Feeling - hopelessness
Behaviour - give up trying

Once you have done this, identify how negative thoughts and feelings could contribute to the decision to view sexual images of children.

An example of this might be:

Thought – I am never going to have a sexual relationship
Feeling – frustration/loneliness
Behaviour – access sexual images of children

Negative thinking is often triggered by thinking errors which fall into three main categories:

- **Catastrophising/Awfulising** - making things seem worse than they really are, getting things out of proportion
- **Generalising** - taking one occurrence and thinking it will always apply e.g. believing you will never pass your driving test because you failed the first time
- **Negative focus** - always focusing on the negative aspects of a situation rather than looking at the positives e.g. rather than be pleased about passing an exam, being upset that you did not get a higher grade.

If you need help to change negative thinking into positive thinking then complete our self-help module on [Self-Talk](#).

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How to Manage Negative Feelings

The following will help you deal with some common negative emotions but can also be applied to others.

Worry

Worry tends to involve lots of thoughts that come one after another, which involve events in the future or in the past.

Frequently, worry thoughts begin with things like “what if... if only I had”... or “I must remember to...”

Sometimes worrying can help make us do helpful things such as checking that we have turned off the oven but it can become a significant problem.

If you answer “yes” to the following questions, then worrying might be a problem for you.

- Do you spend a lot of your time worrying?
- Does worrying make you feel really upset and anxious?
- Does worrying stop you getting a good sleep at night?
- Does worrying prevent you enjoying yourself and getting on with things during the day, at home or at work?
- Do you feel that your worrying is “out of control” or that once you start you just can’t stop?
- Do you feel worrying has affected your health (for example given you stomach aches, headaches, or diarrhoea)?

Worrying about things can make you anxious. Many people suffer from anxiety without realizing what it is. When you are anxious you may notice things like:-

- Heart rate speeding up, sweaty skin or going pale
- Feeling upset, irritable angry, or on edge
- Feeling that something terrible is about to happen
- Dry throat or mouth
- Muscular aches and pains and headaches
- Feeling tired, lacking energy
- Poor digestion – stomach aches
- Concentration problems, mind racing, sleep problems

The more anxious you get, the more you worry and the more you worry, the more anxious you become! It becomes a vicious circle, this is why it is really important to learn how to manage your emotions in a healthy way.

What can you do about it?

Step 1 – Notice it

Notice when you are worrying or feeling anxious. If you recognise the signs of anxiety mentioned above, or you notice you are thinking thoughts like those outlined, take notice of them- don’t ignore them.

Step 2 – “Stop”!

When you notice you are worrying, say “STOP!” to yourself, and concentrate on a different thought and/or do something else to actively distract yourself. Try to think/do something that is positive, relaxing and/or enjoyable e.g. reading, watching TV, cooking, calling a friend, doing a hobby, or playing a sport.

Step 3 – Worry Time

Think about identifying a certain time in your day when it would be okay to worry -but limit the amount of time you spend worrying – no more than ten to fifteen minutes is needed. This is your “worry time” when you can focus on what it is that is causing you to worry and try to generate some solutions. If you find yourself worrying at a time when you have other things to do (such as when you are at work or at bedtime, or while you are trying to concentrate on something else), tell yourself to stop and put off the worries until later. This is not about avoiding problems but is about putting what is worrying you into perspective and dealing with it when you are not distracted by other things.

Step 4 – Self-talk

If you find yourself worrying about the same thing over and over (for example, “I’ll start my new job and no one will like me”) then write down the opposite, “positive” thought (for example, “People will like me- I’m a nice person”). Every time you notice yourself worrying about this thought challenge your thinking. Use the ‘questioning yourself’ strategy identified earlier in the module and counter your worry with the positive thought. You could even write the positive thought or statement down on a small card and carry it with you to remind yourself of it.

Step 5 – Problem Solving

This is something you can try by yourself, or with another person. A problem shared is a problem halved! If you can tell someone you trust what your problem is, they can often help you with solving or coping with it. See the [module on problem solving](#) to learn how to improve this skill.

Anger

People express anger in different ways; it can take many forms. Below are some of the ways that anger can be experienced.

Head in the Sand

Some people find anger scary and frightening. They shy away from admitting they are angry and avoid expressing angry feelings. They try to convince themselves that they are not angry. This can be problematic as consequently they do not let go of and express their feelings which can result in a build-up of pressure, frustration and unhappiness.



Retreating to the Cave

Some people find anger too hard to deal with, and they do everything they can to avoid it. The escape into their ‘cave’ when they feel angry or when other people around them become angry. Consequently they do not learn to manage their own or other people’s anger.



Bottlers

Other people find it difficult and scary to express their angry feelings so they stuff them down deep inside. This might be because they worry about getting into trouble or saying or doing the wrong thing. Whatever the reason, bottling up angry feelings can feel like a pressure cooker or a champagne bottle in which the pressure is building. Over time, if the angry feelings are not released they can result in an explosion.

Exploders

Some people shout and scream and blow off steam when they feel angry. They lash out physically and/or verbally. In the short term this can produce an immediate release but such outbursts of anger can have negative long term consequences for themselves and their relationships with other people.



Which category do you identify with?





If you are not sure then use the table from exercise 1 to help you tune into your feelings. The worksheet in Exercise 3 will also help you to identify things that you can do, and things that other people can help you with, that will assist you to get back to feeling calm and in control. Recognizing the warning signs that you are getting angry early on can help you to avoid expressing your anger in negative and destructive ways.

Exercise 3 - How to get back to feeling ok and in control

Things another person can help me with	Things I can do on my own

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Exercise 3 – How to get back to feeling ok and in control

Things another person can help me with	Things I can do on my own
 	 

Stress

When our body prepares us for the 'fight or flight' response it releases hormones such as adrenalin and cortisol to help us have the energy and focus to respond to the threat. Our bodies are designed to deal with short periods of threat. However in the modern day we are exposed to longer term threats or stressors which results in our body releasing these hormones for longer periods of time. This can be really harmful and effect our sleep, concentration, memory and drive us to look for short term 'fixes' such as caffeine, sugar, alcohol, drugs and sex.

How to deal with stress

1. **Reduce the amount of stress in your life**, for example if your job is highly stressful then consider if there are alternatives.
2. **Change how you manage stress**, for example can you delegate some tasks or learn that good enough is ok rather than striving for perfection.
3. **Look after your physical health**, for example eating healthily and doing exercise even if you don't feel like it.
4. **Learn to relax**, for example making sure you have time to yourself to do healthy things you enjoy, this can be as simple as listening to music or reading a book.
5. **Be sociable**, even if you feel like everything is getting too stressful and too much for you, one of the best things you can do is to meet up with your family and friends – for example, meeting up for a coffee or going for a walk. Friends and family will be able to provide you a distraction from your stress and they can help you to see the situation from a different point of view.

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Reflection

- Reminders – What shows me that something is wrong?
- What can I do to manage negative feelings?

If you want to discuss anything covered in this module, have struggled with working through the self-help material or just want the opportunity to work through the self-help site with a practitioner to guide you then please [call the Stop It Now! Helpline](#) for confidential support from our trained staff.

