
Module 12: Disclosure

Objectives

This module aims to help you:

- Disclose your offending or arrest
- Talk to your partner, children, family, friends and employer



Talking about sex and sexual offending

Talking about sex and in particular sexual offending can be particularly difficult. It can be difficult to know who to tell and what to say. This next section will help by looking at some of the key skills that can help with communication.

Perspective taking

This is trying to understand someone else's view.

When thinking about your behaviour online, other people may feel a number of emotions, for example your partner would feel confused, betrayed, hurt, worried, scared. Complete the table below with behaviours you think you would notice due to the feelings listed. Add any extra feelings that you think are likely.

Feeling	Behaviour
<i>Confused</i>	<i>Ask lots of questions, ask the same question more than once</i>
<i>Betrayed</i>	<i>Cry, ask what they have done wrong, be suspicious about future behaviour.</i>
<i>Hurt</i>	
<i>Worried</i>	
<i>Scared</i>	
<i>Shocked</i>	

How does knowing this help you to talk?

Understanding how someone might feel can help you understand how they might react. Your online sexual behaviour will be something that others did not expect and they will have a lot of questions. For example your partner will be wondering why you did this, what will happen to you, how it will affect them, if you have children the impact on them and what will happen in the future. Think about how scared and upset you are. They are likely to feel like this but with added shock as they didn't know this behaviour was happening until you told them or the Police arrived.

Active listening

An important part of communication is listening as well as talking. To really know how someone feels you need to ask them and listen to what they say, although sometimes it might be really hard to hear what they are telling you, especially if it is very negative about your behaviour or if they are very angry and/or distressed.

Why is it important to listen?

- You accurately hear what is being said
- People feel worthwhile if they are listened to
- It is respectful
- It makes the other person feel valued and that you are interested in them
- The above makes them feel more positive towards you and more likely to talk to you in the future

Ways to show you are listening

- Body language – person nods and gestures appropriately
 - Verbally – the person makes appropriate comments and sounds and asks relevant questions
 - Eye contact – the person makes eye contact with the speaker.
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We will now look at how these skills can be used with different people in your life

Talking to Your Partner

All of the skills described above are really important when talking to your partner. In addition here are some suggestions about how to support your partner:

Allow partners time to process the information

It is always a shock to the family members but incredibly so for a partner. While you will have known that getting caught was a possibility they will have been unaware of your behaviour. They will need time to process what is happening and to make sense of what this means for them.

Be aware of how they are coping

In some cases the arrest will be so distressing that the partner may struggle to cope and experience mental health difficulties. In some cases the partner may find talking to the Stop It Now! Helpline (0808 1000 900) or someone close to them about how they are feeling will be sufficient. However, any of the following may be indicators that your partner could benefit from being signposted to a GP or counselling service:

- Persistently (i.e. for weeks/months, rather than days) having difficulties with eating and/or sleeping
- Drinking more alcohol than usual or drinking alcohol more frequently
- Frequently crying
- Low mood that affects their ability to go about daily activities
- Persistently unable to go to work due to how they are feeling
- Becoming socially isolated (avoiding family and friends)
- Difficulties with separating thoughts and reality
- Loss of interest in the things they used to enjoy
- Persistent feelings of fear or anxiety

The above is not an exhaustive list. Any persistent changes in mood, thinking or behaviour that do not subside after a few weeks are worth checking out with a GP.

Understand the problem

To help your partner make sense of her situation, it helps to understand the phenomenon of internet offending. To get this kind of information they can visit the [Stop It Now! Get Help website for Family and Friends](#) or call the **Stop It Now! free and confidential helpline - 0808 1000 900** and speak to one of our trained staff who can explain this and give information on the Criminal Justice System and what impact the arrest might have for them.

Talking to Children

What to say to children and how to talk to them can be difficult for parents. Here are some issues for parents to be aware of / consider;

1. In the absence of explanations as to why significant changes have occurred in their family, children will try to make sense of it by guessing, 'filling in the gaps' and sometimes making wrong assumptions –for example they may feel they are part of the problem and feel rejected by a father who now is not allowed to see them as often.
2. Children will probably, at some stage, want to know WHY dad did what he did. It may help them to know that the adults are struggling to make sense of this also as it is usually very complicated. In some cases dad may be getting some help to try and work this out.
3. Children will have numerous, often complex, feelings about their father's offending: They will need time to process the information. They may well feel extremely angry about the impact the offences have / will have on their own, and others' lives; they may be worried about friends finding out; they may be anxious about their father's future behaviour; the possibility of him going to prison and being able to cope. Children may feel unable to express / discuss these feelings with parents as they may worry about upsetting them further – they need to know that parents understand this, and, if possible, be directed towards another trusted adult they may be able to talk to and confide in.
4. Often, one of the greatest difficulties for a parent is facing up to the effects of their offending upon their own children. It is important to bear in mind however that the child is likely to find out at some point and it is better that they find out in a controlled way from a supportive adult than by other means – children can often be angry when they feel significant information has been withheld from them, if they feel they had a right to know about it. Timing is important however.
5. Too much detail can be very disturbing for children – keep the details to a minimum when young – but let the child know it's ok to ask questions, although you may not be able to answer them all

Below are some thoughts about possible ways in which the offences might be conveyed – they are purely for consideration as each child and his/her functioning is different. Families will also differ in terms of the language they will be most comfortable with.

"Dad's done something very wrong. He's been looking at rude things on the internet. Sexual things. And some of those things were to do with children, which is against the law, so the police are involved and are deciding what to do about it."

"Dad's got problems with his thinking about 'what's ok and what's not' when it comes to sexual things. He's been looking at a lot of sexual stuff on the Internet and some of it was to do with children, which is against the law."

If relevant, you MAY want to include comments regarding

1. dad being very upset to have caused so much upset for all the family;
2. he is trying to get some help with his problem;
3. we really didn't want you to have to hear this but thought you had a right to know what was going on.

It is best for the child if the parents can agree on what the child is to be told.

It's also useful to remember:

- Avoid anxiety e.g. control your own emotions
- It's best to have more than one discussion, let them know they can talk any time and ask questions as they think of them
- Consistent messages from all care givers
- Listen
- Evidence suggests that if children see their parent is coping, then they do!

Finally – Parents are likely to know their child best and be the best judge of how to talk to him/her.

Talking to friends/other family

The most important person in the conversation is the person you are talking to, and their feelings and reactions must come first. Here are some things you should consider. The advice has come from someone who has disclosed to over 50 family and friends:

- It is probably best to choose a neutral location. If you meet in your home then the person you are talking to may feel uncomfortable at the thought that that was where the offence may have been committed and may wish to leave. If you go to their home you risk them asking you to leave. A neutral place feels more comfortable and reduces the pressure.
- Think about where and how you sit. Try to choose a table in a quiet area as you won't want to be overheard. Try not to be in a location that has children or young people as that will add to the pressure on both of you. Place your chair so that you are facing away from anyone else in the room - that way you are likely to feel more comfortable about being open and discussing the issue.
- Try and have a table between you. It creates a low barrier but also can work as a useful prop for both of you as you will be able to pause more easily if there are things to pick up and a place to put your drinks.
- Think about how you speak and how you break the news to them. It is very important that they do not feel intimidated as you are probably about to say something that will shock, hurt and anger them.
- Try to keep your voice at a low level and don't speak too fast.
- It can be helpful to have a few minutes small talk first and to thank the other person for coming to meet with you, to apologise for that fact that you are about to have a very difficult conversation and to make it clear that you are fully prepared for any reaction and will respect how they feel at the end of the conversation.
- It may also be wise to tell the other person that you wanted to talk to them personally as they are an important part of your life and that you would like to first explain what has happened and then you will be happy to answer any questions.
- It is useful to have an agenda and let the other person know that is the case. Firstly explain what has happened, then update them on the legal process and how you are addressing the problem ie going to LFF, seeing a doctor or psychiatrist, and then some more background to the offence and why it happened.
- By offering structure to the conversation it enables people to sit back and listen, as they know roughly what to expect.
- Be prepared to take breaks - it is a lot for both of you to deal with and take in.
- It is recommended to not, under any circumstances, describe what was in the photographs. The other person will not want or need that to go into their minds. They may press and may think that they do - but they don't. An example you might use is saying that there were some very difficult images – people are likely to understand what that means.
- Try to judge how much you tell people, based on your knowledge of them. There is already a lot for them to deal with - they do not necessarily need to know everything at the first meeting.
- It is very important to make it clear that you know that what happened was wrong and that, regardless of the reason for the offence happening, you take full responsibility for it as an individual and that you recognise and understand that what was virtual for you was very real for the children in the images.

- To end the conversation try saying that that was the full awful story, by thanking them again for listening, saying how sorry you are that the offence happened but that you wanted them to hear it from you and that you fully understand that they may not want to meet or speak again.
- Consider a short text the following day that just thanks them for coming and apologises for what they had to listen to
- Then leave it up to them to choose whether or not to get in touch.

Talking to employers

It is a criminal offence not to disclose convictions if you are asked. However, if you are not asked and you are not breaching any restrictions (such as Sexual Harm Prevention Order requirements or Licence conditions) then you do not have to disclose. If you are arrested and continue with your employment you should check your contract to see if you need to disclose your arrest or conviction.

Here are some tips for disclosing to employers:

- Always be ready to discuss past offences- use a script, and learn it
- Make sure you know exactly what is on your criminal record, and what that means with regard to your ability to apply for certain work
- Before applying for a role, get an informal view from the employer to see if you would stand a fair chance
- If there is one, get a copy of the employers' policy on recruiting offenders
- Full disclosure on application forms is not always required, instead confirm there are convictions to be discussed at interview, and confirm whether they are spent or unspent
- Explain what the offence was (keep it simple)
- Explain a little about what was going on in your life at that time (but don't use it as an excuse for the offence)
- Explain what you have done since then to make sure you don't re-offend (e.g. working with your Offender Manager, courses or training you have attended)
- Tell them why you will not be in this position again, and that your offending is in the past
- Explain that you know what you did was wrong but that you have a lot to offer and are looking for a chance to prove this. You have more to prove than most people and will work harder to prove your worth as an employee
- Don't make light of the situation, be confident, be yourself
- Create a "mustard" sandwich- begin and end with the positives and what you have to offer, putting the hot bit in the middle
- Provide a supporting disclosure letter marked confidential to be given at interview as needed. (Stating the offence and date of conviction but also the changes you have made since and why this makes you a better candidate e.g. I am therefore more hardworking and committed to prove how I have made these changes in my life; again think of the "mustard" sandwich.)
- Be prepared to discuss face to face at interview, provide the supporting letter and other relevant documents if available (e.g. Pre-Sentence Report, letter from Offender Manager, sentencing remarks, references). If done in the right way, this can show a desire to be honest, taking responsibility for the offence, context and a sense of remorse
- If you are required to disclose, don't leave it until the job offer stage- the employer can be left feeling deceived
- Be prepared for what an employer might ask about any convictions. For example, "have you had any convictions in the last five years?" requires a different response to "do you have any unspent convictions?"
- Disclosing more information than is required of course shows great honesty, but also runs the risk of disclosing too much, and the employer may have second thoughts.

Reflection

Think about:

- Who you need to disclose to
- What they need to know
- Where you would tell them
- How you would tell them
- How they can help you
- Why they are important to you

Plan and practice. For further support and advice please call our Stop It Now! Helpline on 0808 1000 900.

