

Module 16: Relapse Prevention

Objectives

You've got this far – well done. We hope you've stopped offending. We know you want to and we know you want it to stay that way...but that can be hard. This module is going to:

- Help stop you falling back into bad old ways
- Try to keep you getting moving forward positively in life

And before you get started on this module, you can watch this short video. It features a man who describes some of the steps he has taken to help prevent him relapsing into offending.



Recap

In other words, this section is all about relapse prevention – how to prevent a relapse and, if the worst comes to the worst and you do slip, how to pick yourself up and get building again.

We think you've learnt a lot about what yourself and what you've been doing by now. This is where we pull all that together.

You've learnt:

- How you used illegal images
- Why you used illegal images – or at least some of the reasons why

You know:

- Sexual images of children harm children – no excuses, no denial
- Sexual images of children harm you and people around you

But you also know:

- Things we do again and again become habits
- And habits are hard to break.

So stopping yourself from offending again might seem difficult but think about what you've achieved so far.

- You *came* here because you wanted to stop offending.
- You've *learnt* a lot about yourself and your behaviour.
- You've *challenged* thoughts and feelings which led to your offending.

And that gives you the **POWER** to **THINK** differently, **FEEL** differently and **ACT** better.

The following sections should give you the understanding and tools you need to stop you slipping...and the support you need just in case you do.

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What is a relapse?

Firstly, what we do mean by a relapse? Straightforwardly, a relapse is anything you do on the internet that is illegal...

...but it might not only be that - a relapse might be anything you know that is wrong or anything you think is dangerous for you. For example, looking at adult pornography might be legal but you know for yourself it's wrong – it just *feels* wrong or it brings you too close to the illegal stuff you used to do.

But bad things – or difficult times – can happen. The important thing is to be prepared for them.

When's a relapse more likely?

Firstly, relapses often happen when you're feeling bad about something. You might be feeling bored or anxious or depressed or lonely. And that can be risky – it's probably been risky in the past – because:

- You might want to do something exciting which will distract you from those bad feelings or cover them up.
- Or sometimes when you feel bad about yourself, you might even want to do something bad, almost as if to prove what a bad person you are.

But you understand yourself better than anyone else. Think back to what you learnt in [Module 11, 'Dealing with feelings'](#) or read it again if you need to. And just be aware of how things work for you and how they might have worked in the past when you've offended.

AND REMEMBER THIS:

- These are people with their own problems.
- And they are a problem to you if they're encouraging you to do something wrong or illegal.

A relapse usually happens in a number of stages, sometimes in quick succession. Just being aware of how these things can work will give you greater control. And with self-control and determination, you can stop a relapse even at the very last stage.

The next section looks at how a relapse might happen. Then we'll talk about everything you can do to stop it happening.

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How might a relapse happen?

Look at the steps to relapse described below. Maybe you recognise them from the past. It's very likely you might experience them – or some of them – in the future. Being prepared and understanding what's going on and what could happen is your best defence against offending again.

1) Abstinence

At this stage you're not doing anything illegal on the internet. If you're lucky, this might come easily but, for some people or at some times, this might need quite a bit of self-control. But it's OK – you're coping and you know you're doing the right thing.

2) Small decisions

Maybe you're just on the web reading about a celebrity, there are some photos too... There's nothing wrong with this but you're a bit closer to the possibility of doing something illegal. Maybe a part of you feels a bit uneasy or even a bit excited.

3) Danger

Now let's look at the situation and your state of mind.

- *Where are you?* Perhaps you're on your own with time on your hands.
- *How are you feeling?* Are you feeling down? You might be more tempted to do something wrong.

Maybe you're just surfing the net – nothing illegal. Even so, you can sense the danger here. But understanding that and staying determined to do the right thing can be enough to help you stop right there.

4) Lapse

A lapse is something that brings you very close to offending. For some people, looking at adult pornography might be a lapse; it can certainly be a slippery slope. Or a lapse could be putting certain words into a search engine, knowing it will bring up illegal sites. Or it could be a fantasy about looking at illegal images of children.

You will know what a lapse for you. You can use that knowledge. You can stop right there.

5) Giving up

The danger by this stage is that you believe you've failed already. You tell yourself nothing's changed – you're as bad as ever, you still have the same feelings...

When you feel that way, it's really easy to think 'I might as well just do it'. Remember though, you still have a choice and you can still choose to do the right thing – right for you and right for others.

6) Offending

You didn't stop yourself this time; you've accessed illegal images. Don't make excuses for yourself – you know you chose to do something wrong.

You're here, reading this, so it's something you really don't want to do and something you feel bad about. So, USE those feelings and LEARN from what went wrong. Next time – if there is a next time – you're going to do the right thing.

No going back! The next sections look at how to avoid a relapse.

No going back

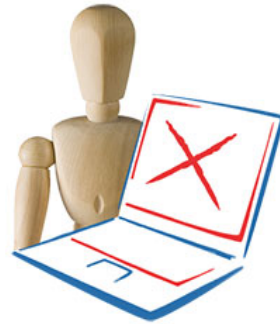
The last section might have seemed a bit depressing but it's important to be realistic – those risks and temptations do exist. But you still have the power and the will to stop yourself offending again.

Firstly, we'll review the practical things you can do which will make it much less likely you'll relapse.

I've done a lot of right things since the offending. I kept away from the internet obviously, that's the main thing...The days I did have off...I kept myself occupied, I planned out my day so I didn't waste it.

1. Don't use the internet.

OK, that might seem a tall order nowadays but, remember, there are alternatives. You can get information or entertainment from all kinds of other sources – shops, newspapers, libraries, TV, even just talking to people. And none of these is illegal or risky to you.



2. Don't use the internet at home.

- Remember you can use the computers in a library or internet café.
- Or you could take your laptop to somewhere public which has free wi-fi.

If you sometimes feel lonely, this is also a way of getting out and about and maybe meeting people. It can be healthier than feeling stuck at home.



3. Protect yourself when you're using the internet

There are lots of ways to lessen the temptation or opportunity to use the internet illegally.

- *Keep the computer in a shared space* so you know other people can see what you're doing.
- *Limit the time you spend on the internet.* Set yourself a time limit or just use it for some specific task.

Remember the earlier module on how you used the internet? You know how easy it is to get sucked in. Make sure you control the internet and it doesn't control you.



- Restrict your access to risky sites using internet filters such as Netnanny (<https://www.netnanny.com/>) or install internet monitoring software such as Covenant Eyes (<http://www.covenanteyes.com/>) so that your internet use is monitored to help you manage any temptation.
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4. Talk to people!

- Is there anyone you feel close to who you might confide in? Sometimes just talking can make it feel like a huge burden has been lifted. They might even be willing to be a support person for you – someone you can ring when things seem particularly difficult.
- If you don't feel there's anyone you can confide in, remember you can talk to the Stop It Now! Helpline or the Samaritans. They will always be there and always willing to listen. And they're completely confidential.



Finally, it's really important to understand that giving up offending isn't just all about things you can't do or shouldn't do. You're here because you want to feel better and live better. The last section will give you some ideas how to do that.

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Reflection - My personal risk factors

Spend some time identifying your own risk factors so you are aware what they are and how to manage them. The following questions (available in the downloadable worksheet) could be helpful to do this.

[Download printable worksheet >](#)

Risky situations/places

Why are these risky for me?

How have I coped in the past?

Did this work and why?

Risky feelings

Why are these risky for me?

How have I coped in the past?

Did this work and why?

Risky thoughts

Why are these risky for me?

How have I coped in the past?

Did this work and why?

Risky behaviours

Why are these risky for me?

How have I coped in the past?

Did this work and why?

Risky people

Why are these risky for me?

How have I coped in the past?

Did this work and why?

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.