Module 5: Images Are Children

Objectives

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

- The false justifications offenders use to avoid responsibility for their actions
- That these images are of real children being abused
- The effects of being photographed on the children in the image

---

Introduction: The Reality of Sexual Images

In order to allow yourself to access Sexual Images of Children, you will generally be using a number of 'self-justifications' to persuade yourself that it is ok to do what you are doing. Self-justification describes how, when a person encounters a situation in which their behaviour is inconsistent with their beliefs, that person tends to justify the behaviour to allow themselves to continue what they are doing. You might at first be aware that you are using self-justifications to let yourself carry on looking at images, but these justifications might become subconscious over time, the more they are used.

Starting Point

Identify your current level of knowledge and understanding around your awareness of the child abuse taking place in these images (1 = very little understanding; 2 = some understanding; 3 = secure understanding).

I understand how illegal images victimise children.	1	2	3
I understand justifications I have used to allow myself to continue offending online.	1	2	3
I understand the effects of being photographed on the child in the image.	1	2	3

Regardless of where you have scored yourself, it is important to work through the material in this module. We find that if people accept the reality of the harm caused to children, then they are less likely to continue with their illegal online behaviour.

Exercise 1: Understanding and Responding to Justifications

In the box below, the left hand side column contains some self-talk justifications you might have used to justify your use of Indecent Images of Children. In the right hand side column list self-talk statements which you could use in response to the matching justification to dissuade yourself from engaging in the behaviour. Please add at the bottom of the table any additional self-talk justifications that you use, along with a matching response. You should repeat all the phrases you write in the "Responses" column in your head, so that this sort of thinking becomes automatic if you start to experience offence-supportive beliefs:

There is an example provided:

Justifications	Responses
"I am only looking at pictures."	*"The children in the images are real children who are being sexually abused."*
"The images were already online."	
"I did not directly abuse the child in the image."	
"The child in the image is smiling, so they must be enjoying it."	
"I didn't produce the pictures, and they were already there."	
"I've had no direct contact with the child."	
"The children are clothed, so these images cannot be illegal."	
"This isn't abuse because no adults are in the images."	
"The child took this photograph of themselves."	

Module 5: Images Are Children

Exercise 1: Understanding and Responding to Justifications

In order for people to allow themselves to access Sexual Images of Children, they will generally be using a number of 'self-justifications' to persuade themselves that it is ok to do what they are doing. This process of persuading oneself that it is ok to access sexual images of children is called 'self-talk'. Self-talk is the internal argument someone uses to give themselves permission to do something they know they shouldn't be doing, and is demonstrated in the image below:

People will be persuaded by the self-talk process if their 'yes' justifications in favour of doing the behaviour are stronger than their 'no' arguments dissuading them from doing the behaviour. By increasing your awareness of the self-talk process you go through, and the negative effects of offending for yourself and others, you will increase your ability and motivation to avoid further offending.

In the box below, the left hand side column contains some self-talk justifications you might have used to justify your use of Sexual Images of Children. In the right hand side column list self-talk statements which you could use in response to the matching justification to dissuade yourself from engaging in the behaviour. Please add at the bottom of the table any additional self-talk justifications that you use, along with a matching response. You should repeat all the phrases you write in the "Responses" column in your head, so that this sort of thinking becomes automatic if you start to experience offence-supportive beliefs.

There is an example provided.

Justifications	**Responses**
“I am only looking at pictures.”	*“The children in the images are real children who are being sexually abused.”*
“The images were already online.”	
“I did not directly abuse the child in the image.”	
“The child in the image is smiling, so they must be enjoying it.”	
"I didn't produce the pictures, and they were already there."	
"I've had no direct contact with the child."	
“The children are clothed, so these images cannot be illegal.”	
“This isn’t abuse because no adults are in the images.”	
“The child took this photograph of themselves.”	

Module 5: Images Are Children

Consent

'Consent' means to give permission for something to happen. It is important for us to consider the issue of consent when we are talking about the children in the images because children, by nature, are unable to consent to sexual activity.

Why Children are Unable to Consent to Sexual Activity

Children are unable to give consent because they are unable to fully understand what they are consenting to, or the emotional impact and consequences of sex. Adults in comparison are generally able to give informed consent about sexual activity and photographs of them unless they are under the influence of alcohol/drugs or have some kind of vulnerability. Some people disagree about the age at which children hit the maturity to be able to give this permission, however, in the UK the age of consent for sexual activity is set at 16. With regard to viewing images of children, any sexual picture of a child under 18 is illegal.

Children are not able to give consent to engage in sexual activity, and consent is further taken away from children when sexual images of them are taken and posted on the internet. Once an image is posted online, all control is lost over that image. The victim will experience further abuse with the knowledge that their picture is out there, being shared, and viewed, beyond their control.

What have you been looking at online?

The concept of 'justifications' can also be extended to the type, or category, of sexual image you are looking at online. The important point to remember is that any sexual image of a child is illegal.

- Naturist images
- 'Modelling' images
- Images of children with no adult present in the image
- Cartoon/Manga images

Or

- Self-taken sexual images

are abusive when used for sexual purposes.

The reality is that any sexual image of a child, used for a sexual purpose, is illegal. Abuse not only refers to the victimisation at the time when the photograph was taken, but it also refers to the continuation of victimisation the child will experience in knowing that images of themselves are circulating on the internet beyond their control, being used for inappropriate sexual reasons.

The reality of viewing naturist, modelling or cartoon images is that this behaviour may act as a 'slippery slope'. These sorts of images might act to reinforce sexual interest in children and lead the person viewing the images to become curious about what other sorts of material might be available. When children are depicted in images either on their own or with other children, where no adult is present in the image, it is important that you remind yourself that an adult will have been behind that camera. An adult will have coerced the child(ren) into posing for the camera and an adult will have taken and shared that photograph to be used for a sexual purpose.

Regarding self-taken sexual images of children, it is important to remember that even though the child may have consented to taking the photograph in the first place, they almost certainly will not have consented to the world-wide sharing of that image. Children do not have the foresight to understand the consequences that sending an image of themselves may bring. They do not understand that once an image is sent that it cannot be retrieved. Once the reality of this becomes known it can be very distressing and have a significant emotional impact on them.

Child Sexual Exploitation

Consent is further removed from children if there is a power difference between them and the person who is inciting sexual activity. It is not uncommon for children to be sexually exploited as a part of the process of producing illegal images – for example, by receiving gifts, drugs, affection or accommodation – in exchange for engaging in sexual activity.

Sometimes pictures are taken of children without them knowing – for example, at the beach – and sometimes pictures are taken with the child's knowledge. Sometimes a child will be coerced into taking and posting an image of themselves, without fully realising the consequences of doing this.

As part of this module in helping you recognise and acknowledge that the children in the images are real children, it is helpful – although difficult – to get yourself to think about how that child got to be in that situation of being in front of that camera. This is what we will be asking you to consider in the following exercise.

Exercise 2: Empathy

HEALTH AND SAFETY WARNING: This exercise is challenging and emotionally demanding. It is important that you take a break during this exercise if you feel you need to. Consider self-care, such as having someone you can talk to if you are feeling emotional afterwards or making sure that you have something nice planned to do. Remember negative mood states often put you at risk of further offending.

PART A: How have you got to where you are?

i. As part of this exercise you should think of a child in a photograph that you have seen. Answer the following questions as realistically as you can:

1. Why are you looking at this image?

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. How did you come across this photo?

   _____

   _____

   _____

3. What do you gain from looking at this image?

   _____

   _____

   _____

4. What brought you to the point of looking at these types of images?

   _____

   _____

   _____

PART B: Who is directing the action and why?

Using the same image you have recalled for the previous part of this exercise, extend the image to include the room where it is happening, the person taking the photograph and the instructions being given. Answer the following questions:

1. Who is taking the photograph and why they are taking it?

   _____

2. What cues are they ignoring in the child's behaviour?

3. What are they telling themselves in order to justify taking the photograph?

4. What do they plan to do with the photograph after it has been taken?

PART C: The Child in the Image

i. One common justification people use to allow themselves to continue accessing Indecent Images of Children is that the children in the images are "not real children" – that what is being looked at online is only a picture on a screen. This next exercise asks you to try and get to know the subject of an image you have seen and help you understand that this child in this image is a real child – who has thoughts, feelings, hopes and dreams - who is being sexually abused. Still recalling the same image, create a character sketch about them by responding to the following questions. Although the image in your head could be of a boy, girl, or both, the prompts given will reflect a female.

Prompt	Response
Who is the girl in this photo?	
Where was she born? Where does she call home?	
What makes her laugh out loud?	

What is her most treasured possession?	
What does she do in her free time?	
Who does she admire? Who is her hero? Why?	
What is her biggest fear? Who has she told this to? Who would she never tell this to? Why?	
What does she hope to be when she grows up?	
Who does she go to when she is scared?	
Who are the girl's family? Who are her parents? Does she have siblings?	
Who are her friends?	
How did the girl get to be in front of the camera?	
What does she think is happening?	

If she has been told to keep what has happened a secret, how would that make her feel?	
What will she think about before she goes to sleep at night?	

Hopefully this exercise has helped you "get to know" the human being behind the photograph with his/her own thoughts, feelings, problems, and life.

PART D: Effects of Victimisation

i. Return once again to the original picture during the time at which the photographs are being taken. Consider the child's perspective of what is happening while this photographic shoot is taking place, and the effects that having this photograph taken might be on the child, by responding to the following.

1. What might he/she think and feel while being abused?

2. For what other reason might he/she be smiling in the photograph? Focus on the reality that may lie behind that smile.

3. Try to imagine how he/she might behave, think and feel after being abused.

4. What impact might the continuing presence of photographs on the Internet have on the child?

5. How might the child behave, think and feel if they try and talk about the abuse to another adult?

   5a. How might this affect their relationship with the adult?

   5b. How did this disclosure come about?

6. Try and describe what the long-term consequences of the abuse may be for the child. Pay attention to the particular role that being photographed may have played.

Module 5: Images Are Children

Exercise 2: Empathy

Empathy means trying to understand what another person is likely to be thinking and feeling in a given situation or "putting yourself into their shoes". Empathy means more than understanding another person's views and feelings at a cognitive level – it means having insight at an emotional level as to what it would feel like to be that person.

Why is empathy hard?

We generally find it harder to empathise or identify with other people who are "not like us". For many people looking at illegal images on the internet, the ability to empathise is difficult because you cannot identify with any one child. A child in an image can be seen as being "far removed" from the person looking at images of this child online. This may be because of the physical distance created by the computer screen, or because the child is unlike the individual looking at the image. The child may be underprivileged, isolated or without a voice, they may be an orphan, or in care, or being controlled by an abusive family. This means it is harder for the person looking at the image to feel empathy for the victim in the image. This exercise is designed to help you "get to know" the human being behind the photograph with his/her own thoughts, feelings, problems, and life.

HEALTH AND SAFETY WARNING: This exercise is challenging and emotionally demanding. It is important that you take a break during this exercise if you feel you need to. Consider self-care, such as having someone you can talk to if you are feeling emotional afterwards or making sure that you have something nice planned to do. Remember negative mood states often put you at risk of further offending.

Download printable version of Exercise 2, with space to fill in answers >

PART A: How have you got to where you are?

As part of this exercise you should think of a child in a photograph that you have seen. Answer the following questions as realistically as you can:

1. Why are you looking at this image?
2. How did you come across this photo?
3. What do you gain from looking at this image?
4. What brought you to the point of looking at these types of images?

PART B: Who is directing the action and why?

Using the same image you have recalled for the previous part of this exercise, extend the image to include the room where it is happening, the person taking the photograph and the instructions being given. Answer the following questions:

1. Who is taking the photograph and why they are taking it?
2. What cues are they ignoring in the child's behaviour?
3. What are they telling themselves in order to justify taking the photograph?
4. What do they plan to do with the photograph after it has been taken?

PART C: The Child in the Image

One common justification people use to allow themselves to continue accessing Sexual Images of Children is that the children in the images are "not real children" – that what is being looked at online is only a picture on a screen. This next exercise asks you to try and get to know the subject of an image you have seen and help you understand that this child in this image is a real child – who has thoughts, feelings, hopes and dreams - who is being sexually abused. Still recalling the same image, create a character sketch about them by responding to the following questions. Although the image in your head could be of a boy, girl, or both, the prompts given will reflect a female.

- Who is the girl in this photo?
- Where was she born? Where does she call home?
- What makes her laugh out loud?
- What is her most treasured possession?
- What does she do in her free time?
- Who does she admire? Who is her hero? Why?
- What is her biggest fear? Who has she told this to? Who would she never tell this to? Why?
- What does she hope to be when she grows up?
- Who does she go to when she is scared?
- Who are the girl's family? Who are her parents? Does she have siblings?
- Who are her friends?
- How did the girl get to be in front of the camera?
- What does she think is happening?
- If she has been told to keep what has happened a secret, how would that make her feel?
- What will she think about before she goes to sleep at night?

Hopefully this exercise has helped you "get to know" the human being behind the photograph with his/her own thoughts, feelings, problems, and life.

PART D: Effects of Victimisation

Return once again to the original picture during the time at which the photographs are being taken. Consider the child's perspective of what is happening while this photographic shoot is taking place, and the effects that having this photograph taken might be on the child, by responding to the following.

1. What might he/she think and feel while being abused?
2. For what other reason might he/she be smiling in the photograph? Focus on the reality that may lie behind that smile.
3. Try to imagine how he/she might behave, think and feel after being abused.
4. What impact might the continuing presence of photographs on the Internet have on the child?
5. How might the child behave, think and feel if they try and talk about the abuse to another adult?
    a. How might this affect their relationship with the adult?
    b. How did this disclosure come about?
6. Try and describe what the long-term consequences of the abuse may be for the child. Pay attention to the particular role that being photographed may have played.

Having completed this exercise, read the next section to find out what is actually known about the effects of being photographed.

Module 5: Images Are Children

The effects on the child of being involved in the production of sexual images

Psychologists have tried to look at what it means to the child to be photographed and for these photographs to be used in a sexual way (e.g. fantasy and/or masturbation etc.).

During the abuse

While it is convenient to think about photography as being separate from the actual abuse, for the majority of children this is not the case. Very often being photographed is PART OF the abuse; victims see the lasting photographical evidence as a continuation of the abuse they experienced.

Knowing that images of them are circulating on the web, and that strangers use these photographs for inappropriate sexual purposes, causes ongoing victimisation for the children involved.

Abuse can produce physical symptoms, such as urinary infections and soreness around the genitalia or anus, headaches and vomiting. Depression, tiredness, difficulties in concentrating and nightmares are also common in such children. It can also lead to other problems, such as the child behaving or talking in a sexual way, acting out or behaving aggressively, as well as impacting on their relationships with other children and adult relationships when they are older.

During disclosure of what has happened

As with all forms of sexual abuse, children are reluctant to talk about what has happened. This may be very convenient for the adults involved, but increases the chance that the child will have problems in the future, such as depression or inability to form trusting or loving relationships with other adults. When the abuse is photographed, this seems to increase the child's fear of talking about what has happened. Disclosures, when eventually made, are often limited, with the child only telling as much as they feel the person questioning them already knows. Feelings of shame, humiliation and helplessness are often accompanied by feelings of anxiety, with the child worried that the photograph may be viewed as evidence of co-operation on their part. The child may also feel that the fact that they were smiling may be seen as evidence that he or she was enjoying the experience when they were being coerced or forced to smile.

The long-term consequences of having been photographed can include:

- Intense bad feelings, such as a negative picture of themselves, long-term feelings of shame, hopelessness, an inability to feel anything or relate to anyone.
- A distressing awareness that even though the abuse has stopped, others may still be able to access their photographs and that there is nothing that they can do about it.
- Worry that the photographs may encourage the abuse of other children.

Module 5: Images Are Children

Exercise 3: Effects on you

PART A: How would you feel about being there? Where do you draw the line?

Now consider how you would feel about how close you could get to the child abuse taking place. At what point does it become unacceptable for you? Draw a line between where you would and would not be able to voluntarily go forward with the action.

Explain why you have placed your line where you did.

- Finding images or downloading links and not reporting them to the police
- Watching/looking and trading the videos and images on your computer
- Listening to the abuse through a wall from a different room
- Seeing the abuse through a window
- Standing in the room and watching the abuse take place
- Being the person taking the video/photographs or directing the action
- Actively participating in the abuse

What might this tell you about downloading Sexual Images of Children?

Exercise 3: Effects on you

PART A: How would you feel about being there? Where do you draw the line?

Now consider how you would feel about how close you could get to the child abuse taking place. At what point does it become unacceptable for you? Draw a line between where you would and would not be able to voluntarily go forward with the action.

Explain why you have placed your line where you did.

- **Finding images or downloading links and not reporting them to the police**
- **Watching/looking and trading the videos and images on your computer**
- **Listening to the abuse through a wall from a different room**
- **Seeing the abuse through a window**
- **Standing in the room and watching the abuse take place**
- **Being the person taking the video/photographs or directing the action**
- **Actively participating in the abuse**

Why I could not continue to the next level of abuse:

What might this tell you about downloading sexual images of children?

Module 5: Images Are Children

Reflection

As with the Introduction to this module, identify your level of knowledge and understanding around your awareness of the child abuse taking place in these images (1 = very little knowledge; 2 = some understanding; 3 = secure understanding).

I understand how illegal images victimise children.	1	2	3
I understand justifications I have used to allow myself to continue offending online.	1	2	3
I understand the effects of being photographed on the child in the image.	1	2	3

Now, consider the following questions:

- Have any of your responses changed from 1 to 2 or 2 to 3 from since the start of this module?
- In what ways might your understanding have changed?
- Which part of the module has had the greatest impact on your understanding? Why?
- Has anything from this module prompted or encouraged you to change your behaviour? If so, what? How do you plan to act on it?
- Has this module raised any further questions for you or made you want to explore any ideas further? What steps do you plan to take to seek out this information?

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.