

## HELP WANTED SESSIONS 1-5

The *Help Wanted Prevention Project* is an online course to provide help to individuals with a sexual interest in younger children. The course was developed by faculty and staff at the Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in collaboration with other national and international experts, people with sexual interest in children, and survivors of child sexual abuse. Resources on this site are not endorsed by the Moore Center or Johns Hopkins Institutions, and they are not a substitute for professional medical advice or treatment. Please take the steps to get the help you need. **You matter.**

### Help Wanted Developers

#### **Elizabeth J. Letourneau, Ph.D.**

Professor, Department of Mental Health, and Director, Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

#### **Ryan T. Shields, Ph.D.**

Assistant Professor, School of Criminology and Justice Studies, University of Massachusetts Lowell.

#### **Amanda E. Ruzicka, M.A**

Senior Research Associate, Department of Mental Health, and Director of Research Operations, Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

### Collaborators

#### **ATSA Collaborators**

Karen Baker

Aniss Benelmouffok

Maia Christopher

Geri Crisi

Gerald Hover

Jill Levenson

Kieran McCartan

Michael Miner

Daniel Rothman

Joan Tabachnick

#### **Students and Staff**

Cierra Buckman, research assistant

Maegan Ingarm, JHSPH doctoral student

Geoff Kahn, JHSPH doctoral student

Sarah Murray, JHSPH postdoctoral fellow

John Thorne, JHSPH doctoral student

#### **Supporters**

"Adam"

Anonymous individuals with sexual attraction to children who provided their stories

Anonymous survivors of child sexual abuse who provided their stories

Luke Malone

Virtuous Pedophiles

## **Organizational Partners and Funders**

**3C Institute**

**Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers | ATSA**

**Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse**

**RALIANCE: Ending Sexual Violence in One Generation**

**Sharper Future**

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## Session 1: What Is Child Sexual Abuse?

**NOTE:** This Help Wanted session may be useful to people of any age. However, it was originally designed with adolescents and young people in mind. When we refer to sexual interest in "younger children" we mean younger than you if you are under the age of 18. If you are 18 or older, please interpret "younger children" as referring to anyone under the age of 18.

### **Introduction**

In this session, we're going to talk about what child sexual abuse is and the effects and consequences of child sexual abuse for victims and people who commit abuse.

### **What Is Child Sexual Abuse?**

Not all people who are sexually attracted to children act on their attraction. To support yourself in not offending, it's important to understand what actions are considered child sexual abuse so you can avoid hurting others and yourself.

To be clear, when we discuss child sexual abuse, we're not talking about typical teenage sexual experiences between two willing teens who are about the same age.

'Child' refers to someone under the age of 18 and usually at least three years younger than the person committing the abuse.

Child sexual abuse is involving a child in sexual activity. That activity can be anything that feels sexual to the person committing the abuse. It might not even include touching a child.

Here are some examples of child sexual abuse:

- Touching a child's genitals, or private parts, for sexual pleasure
- Making a child look at or touch someone else's genitals
- Playing sexual games with a child
- Masturbating, or touching yourself, while you're with a child, or making a child touch their own genitals
- Putting body parts (such as tongue, fingers, or penis) or objects in the mouth, vagina, or anus of a child
- Sexual phone calls, text messages, or online communication
- Inappropriately watching a child undress or use the bathroom
- Child pornography; creating, owning, sharing, or viewing sexual images or movies that include anyone under the age of 18--even yourself or a same-aged romantic partner

### **Grooming**

Some people try to prepare a child for sex. This is called "grooming," and it can lead to child sexual abuse.

Grooming can include things like:

- Spending time alone with a child when sexually interested in that child
- Sharing secrets with a child
- Giving a child gifts or special attention
- Telling sexual jokes or stories to a child
- Having close physical contact with a child, such as massage, showers, or piggy back rides

Someone who doesn't intend to groom a child for sex but gets emotionally or physically close to a child might end up taking advantage of that closeness and sexually abuse the child.

### **Now You Know**

Sexual attraction is personal—we know that people attracted to younger children aren't all attracted in the same way. Knowing what actions are child sexual abuse or could be grooming can help you set boundaries and make good decisions about what situations *you* should avoid.

A good way to think about it is that any behavior with a child that makes you feel sexually excited or "turned on" is not okay. Those behaviors with that child make it more likely you will abuse a child.

You should also use good judgment to avoid situations with children that *could* become sexual—even if that isn't what you intended.

Some people who commit child sexual abuse might tell themselves, 'the child wanted to' or 'the child liked it' if a child responds sexually or participates willingly. But children cannot consent to sex of any kind, and these behaviors are harmful and illegal.

### **Is This Child Sexual Abuse?**

Are you unsure if a behavior you're thinking about would be child sexual abuse?

If you're ever unsure if something you want to do with a child would be considered child sexual abuse, ask yourself, "Could this make me feel sexually excited?"

If the answer is yes, avoid the activity and avoid being alone with the child. If you're still not sure, you can visit [StopItNow.org](http://StopItNow.org) and anonymously chat with a counselor.

### **Attraction Versus Action**

When we're talking about child sexual abuse, there is a big difference between *having* an attraction to children and *acting* on an attraction to children.

Just because someone has an attraction to children doesn't mean they will sexually abuse a child—most people have sexual attractions they choose not to act on.

There are many people who are attracted to children who haven't harmed children and won't harm children. Likewise, there are many people who have sexually abused children who are not attracted to children.

Let's take a minute to review some terms.

**Term:** Child sexual abuse

**Definition:** Involving a child in sexual activity

**Term:** Person with pedophilia

**Definition:** Someone over the age of 16 who is attracted to children who haven't reached puberty

**Term:** Sex offender

**Definition:** Someone who commits child sexual abuse

**Term:** Grooming behaviors

**Definition:** Actions to create a close emotional or physical relationship with a child to more easily abuse them sexually

**Term:** Consent

**Definition:** To give permission to participate in sexual activity; children can't consent

### **What Are the Effects of Child Sexual Abuse for Victims?**

Sexual abuse can be painful, scary, or confusing for a child. Many children who are sexually abused know and trust the person who abuses them. They often don't understand they are being abused.

Children become aware of sexual abuse in different ways and over time. It can be extremely upsetting when they realize what really happened to them.

The consequences of child sexual abuse can stay with victims their entire lives. Studies tell us that children who are sexually abused can experience problems with their physical and mental health from childhood through adulthood.

Victims of child sexual abuse are also at risk of having relationship problems and educational problems, and they are more likely to be victims of other sexual and nonsexual abuse.

In the following section you'll hear victims of child sexual abuse share how the abuse affected them.

### **Survivor Stories**

Below are three personal accounts of how child sexual abuse affected the victim.

#### **Survivor Story One**

"We met at the start of middle school, and he became my best friend. When I disclosed to him that my uncle had molested me, I think that was the catalyst for him, what started him thinking of me as someone who was already a victim. And so, it started with really demeaning comments and constantly down playing my work. The first time he sexually assaulted me was at a friend's birthday party. And then, it just kind of continued and got worse until eventually I transferred from that school.

I went from being a straight-A student and being really engaged in class, really enjoying school, to developing a pretty severe anxiety around school. My grades plummeted. Even now, I have a really hard time interacting with men. Not just around romantic and sexual interactions. It's when a guy gets too close to me, I flinch. When a man raises his voice, I freeze. Walking down the street, I have to look behind myself at least probably every 20 seconds. My sense of safety is pretty nonexistent. The sense of self-worth that I struggle with has gotten better as I've gotten older, but it's still really hard."

#### **Survivor Story Two**

"My experience happened when I was eight years old. The person who abused me, the older child, he was about 15 or so. I knew him from the apartment complex where I lived. Anyway, I was walking back to my apartment and he wanted me to come into his bedroom. I thought that was really cool, because here's this older kid that wants to do something with me. I went in the bedroom and he wanted me to take off my clothes, and I did. He also took off his clothes and I remember him talking to me about how I needed to learn how to have sex with girls. He asked me to lay down on his bed, face down and he got on top of me, and I don't remember a great deal after that. I remember that I came home later that evening and I still didn't really have an understanding about what had happened.

I told my mom, and of course my mom and my dad both were really upset. I remember talking to a police officer. I felt like I had done something really wrong, and that I was the reason that my parents were so upset. My parents sat me down and told me, "We're not upset with you. You did nothing wrong." But that didn't change how I felt about it. I still felt incredibly guilty.

Of course, now I know that I didn't do anything wrong. But, it was a hard few years for me as a kid. I suffered from some depression and feeling that I was pretty different from other people. I struggled for a lot of years with compulsivity and addiction.

And for a long time, sex was really terrifying for me, actually being physically intimate with a woman. With my first three girlfriends, I don't think I actually ever had sex with any of them. I was just so scared. There was a lot of fear, there was a lot of shame, there was a lot of embarrassment.

Being introduced to sex in that context, and that young, it harmed me, for sure."

### **Survivor Story Three**

"I remember these teenage girls from the neighborhood showing up at the door and asking if I could come out and play. They had a little girl with them who was about the same age as me, about seven, and I thought, "Okay, cool."

We wound up in the woods. They instructed me and this little girl to take off our clothes, and then they were having us do various sexual things with each other. Mostly touching, none of it involved penetration, but I just remember thinking it was just weird.

They wanted us to kiss each other's privates and stuff like that. I remember being, I guess a seven-year-old version of "sexually excited" at the time. I didn't even know what sex was or what we were doing. Not too long after that we moved out of state, and it was one of those things that I put in the back of my mind. Then when I was almost 19 I was going through a really, really desperately suicidal period.

A lot of that had to do with me struggling with the fact that I was a pedophile, and that it was a big secret. I couldn't tell anybody, and I was really ashamed of myself. I finally broke down to a friend of mine, and I told him about everything, including the childhood experiences and the fact that I was a pedophile.

It hurt a lot more to talk about when I was 19 than it actually did to go through when I was seven, if that makes any sense. I guess it's because at that point I had perspective, and at seven, I didn't have any perspective on what had happened.

I think that experience, and some others, damaged me in a lot of ways, in terms of how I relate to people, how I do not feel comfortable at all in relationships, how I'm not attracted to other adults."

### **Consequences of Sexually Abusing Children**

In addition to the serious and long-lasting effects of child sexual abuse on victims, there are serious consequences for people who sexually abuse children.

People who sexually abuse children can be arrested, prosecuted, and sent to prison.

People who are convicted of child sexual abuse might be required to register on public sex offender registries for a long time, sometimes for life. This means that their name, address, photograph, and crime can be published online and in newspapers.

Being known as a 'registered sex offender' can make it hard to finish school, get a job, find housing, and maintain relationships with family members and friends.

People who sexually abuse a child can be required to go live in a residential sex offender therapy facility. They might not be allowed to return home if they have younger siblings.

Along with suffering legal and social consequences, people who sexually abuse a child often feel remorse and emotional guilt.

### **Conclusion**

It's wrong to involve a child in sexual activity. A child cannot legally or emotionally "consent" or agree to any sexual activity.

Child sexual abuse can have damaging and long-lasting effects for victims. And there are serious consequences—legal and emotional—for people who sexually abuse children.

If you're visiting this site for support, you're probably doing your best to manage your sexual attraction to children. What we can tell you is that we know that child sexual abuse is preventable, especially when you have the right supports.

Our research tells us many people who are sexually attracted to children will never sexually abuse a child. People don't have to act on their attractions. In other sessions, we'll provide strategies to help manage attraction to children and avoid child sexual abuse. You can also visit our [Resources page](#) for additional resources.

**END**

## Session 2: Disclosure and Safety Skills

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### Introduction

Telling someone about your attraction to younger children is a big step. There are some good reasons to share this information with important people in your life, even though these conversations can be hard.

It is helpful to think about the pros and cons of telling people about your attraction and decide what's best for you. We want to help you with your important decision.

In the following sections we'll talk about:

- Why you might want to tell
- Who to tell
- When to tell
- Where to tell
- What to tell

Later in this session, you'll hear the experiences of others who told someone about their attraction to younger children and others who decided not to tell.

Before we get started, here's some information to protect you as you consider telling someone about your attraction.

### Before You Tell Someone About Your Attraction

Some people you might tell—usually a professional such as a teacher, therapist, coach, or doctor—are required to call the authorities if they believe a child has been sexually or physically abused or could be abused in the future.

Even if you have never harmed a child or looked at child pornography, someone could still decide a child in your life (perhaps a younger brother or sister) is at risk because of your attraction and call the authorities. What the authorities do with this information (for example, whether they decide to investigate you) is completely out of the hands of the person making the report.

So before you discuss your attraction with any professional, it's important to know what could happen.

You could first ask them what they would do if someone your age disclosed a sexual interest in children to them. For example, "Ms. Jones, if a teenage client told you that they were sexually attracted to children but hadn't acted on it yet, would you be required to report that?"

If she says yes, you could say, "Thank you, that's helpful," as a way to end the conversation.

If she says no, she might be someone you could tell if you decided to do that. You can also research the reporting laws in your state online or by anonymously contacting the **Stop It Now! Helpline** (Please see our [Resources page](#) for a link to Stop It Now!)

Now let's get back to information that can help you make decisions about sharing your attraction.

### **Why?**

Why do you want to tell someone about your attraction?

Maybe you want help or guidance from a parent, friend, or counselor. Maybe you're tired of keeping a secret from people you love. Maybe you just want to know that someone loves you even when they know this about you.

It's important to remember that once you talk about your attraction to younger children, you can't control how others view or use the information.

### **Why Do You Want to Tell Someone?**

Take a minute to think about why you might or might not want to tell someone about your attraction, and write your reason below.

There are many reasons you might want to tell someone about your attraction, and only you can decide if you're ready.

But there are also some reasons not to tell:

- If telling might result in you feeling unsafe or not having a safe place to live
- If the person you're planning to tell might share this private information about you without your permission
- If you're just not ready.

**Who?**

Who are the people in your life you think you could trust with this information?

Talking to others who have similar experiences can be a good way to start. There are online forums where people discuss their experiences with their attraction to younger children and support each other in living safely, without harming children.

Family members or friends who have helped you with other problems might also be a good place to start.

There are some counselors with special training who can try to help you make sense of your feelings, and they can help you practice telling others about your attraction. Many of these counselors belong to **ATSA, the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers** (Please see our [Resources page](#) for a link to ATSA).

**When?**

When is the right time to tell someone about your attraction?

You want to allow time to get to know someone and determine if they're supportive, reliable, and nonjudgmental.

When you decide you're ready to tell someone, try to allow enough time to discuss and explore the topic.

**Where?**

Where should you tell someone about your attraction?

If you tell someone about your attraction online, choose a forum where the members seem respectful and supportive. And be sure that the members support each other in living safely, without harming children.

If you tell in person or on the phone, choose a private setting where you can talk openly.

**What?**

What is the right amount of information to share?

The information you share might be different depending on who you're telling and why you're telling them.

If you're talking to a counselor to get help understanding or managing your thoughts and feelings, it would be appropriate to share more detailed information. If you're telling a family member or friend so they can understand and support you, it might not be necessary to give them a lot of personal details.

In the following activity, choose who you think is the best person to share each type of information with.

### **What to Share?**

For each situation, consider the best option from the list below for sharing information.

#### **Situations**

- You don't want to get together with family and friends because you're feeling depressed and ashamed about your attraction.
- You're wondering how other people manage their attractions, if they tell their parents, and what strategies they use to not offend.
- You're having fantasies that concern you, and you're feeling really anxious. You could really use someone to talk to.

#### **Options for Sharing**

- counselor
- family member or friend
- online forum

#### **Answers**

- You don't want to get together with family and friends because you're feeling depressed and ashamed about your attraction (**family member or friend**).
- You're wondering how other people manage their attractions, if they tell their parents, and what strategies they use to not offend (**online forum**).
- You're having fantasies that concern you, and you're feeling really anxious. You could really use someone to talk to (**counselor**).

### **Having a Difficult Conversation**

It can be hard for people close to you to hear about your attraction to younger children. And you're probably nervous about telling them.

Here are some tips for having conversations about your attraction.

- Think about what you want to say and make a few notes or a "script."
- Say you have something difficult to share that you hope they can help you with.
- Tell them how you hope they can help you (for example, to give you support or to find a counselor).
- Rather than saying "I'm a pedophile," consider starting with "I'm attracted to younger children." Most people assume a pedophile has sexually abused a child.

- Consider talking about your personal commitment not to harm anyone and your desire to have what everybody wants—to live a genuine, authentic, and healthy life surrounded by people who love and accept you.
- Ask if you can share an article or video about attraction to younger people with the person you are telling. People often don't know much about attractions like yours, so giving them information could be helpful. Please see our [Resources page](#) for suggested articles and videos.

Be prepared for people to have different reactions—they might be accepting, upset, supportive, or confused. They might not know what to say when you tell them, or they might need some time to think about what you said.

### **How Did It Go?**

Below are personal experiences from others who decided to tell—or not tell—someone about their attraction to younger children.

#### **Sharing Story One**

"What I did with her was I sat her down and said, "Mom, there's something I would like you to read, and I'd like to talk about it afterward." Then I opened up the [Luke Malone] article with her, then I sat in absolute hell for 10 minutes while she read through it. She got about halfway through, and she turns to me and says, "Is this about you?"

Then I pretty much just broke down. I started to cry, I said, "No, Mom, it's not about me, but it's about people like me." That was pretty much my script, and then things got a little bit crazy after that. She did take it pretty well.

With my sister, I just said that there's something I need to tell you, "That I'm a pedophile." She gave me this really weird look. "Have you ever committed a violent crime?" I'm like, "No, I haven't." She's like, "That's really good. I read this article."

I came to a point, a crisis point, where I thought I can't bottle it up anymore. I have to just be me, and if the world rejects me, then so be it. I told a good friend of mine, and he was extremely accepting and still is. Then I told four more friends, and they've all accepted me. One is a little uncomfortable with it—fair enough. One rejected me outright, which was sad, but then I guess ultimately it's good to know who your real friends are.

For whatever reason, my mom and dad can't talk about emotions, particularly sexual attraction and stuff like that. I would feel deeply uncomfortable talking to them about my attraction to a woman let alone to a girl. It's none of their business in a way and it just wouldn't be the sort of thing we would talk about in our family."

**Sharing Story Two**

"I think I was about 14 when I came out to one of my friends. I emphasized my understanding, my feelings about it, but it was very difficult.

It actually went okay because there was a lot of preparation. There was a lot of buildup in the conversation before I actually came out with it. I really emphasized that I don't want to cause any harm to anybody, and I don't choose to be like this. They weren't massively shocked because of the way I explained it.

It's still difficult, as it's always going to be, in the sense that it's a very, very risky thing to disclose to somebody, even if you knew them your whole entire life. It has gotten a little easier because in recent years I received therapeutic work for these attractions. There are a lot of people who I've had to explain it to, so it's become a lot easier."

**Sharing Story Three**

"I don't think I'll tell my family. I've got one person who knows about it, and I've got a mental health therapist who knows about my issue. I think that is the best way because if I lose a friend, yeah, it'll be sad but not forever. Whereas if I lose family, I lose that support."

**Sharing Story Four**

"There is a little bit of a fear that people wouldn't like me if this came out. I don't want this to be just kind of general public knowledge, because even if you've never done anything, people can have a little bit of a mob mentality when it comes to pedophilia. I have considered telling my friends on an individual basis, but it's just kind of like this would be possibly a long conversation, and this is just not something they need to know. They don't need to know what I'm attracted to. This is not a major part of my life. There's no point in telling them, and it would be hard to tell them, so yeah, why would I?"

**Conclusion**

It's a big deal to tell someone about your attraction. We hope this information helps you with this important decision.

If you decide to tell someone, think about the appropriate information to share, choose the best time and place to talk, and prepare yourself for the conversation.

And if you decide that you're not ready to tell anyone about your attraction, that's okay too.

The [Resources](#) section of this site contains information you can share to help people learn more about young people attracted to younger children and how they can lead happy, full, and safe lives.

**END**

### Session 3: Coping with Your Sexual Attraction

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#### **Introduction**

In this session, we'll talk about coping with your attraction to younger children.

We'll cover:

- Coping with your sexual thoughts and feelings about children in the moment
- Developing strategies for building your resilience and coping with your attraction for the long term
- Many of the strategies we discuss are also included on our [Resources page](#).

#### **Why It's Important to Cope with Sexual Thoughts and Urges About Younger Children**

Effective coping strategies can help you manage thoughts and urges about children both in the moment and long term. Using the right strategies, you can strengthen your overall well-being to help you lead a healthy, happy, non-offending life.

Coping strategies are most effective when you make a real effort to practice and use them. Not every coping strategy works for every person; if a strategy doesn't work for you, try a different one.

#### **Right-Now Coping Strategies**

Right-now coping strategies are focused on redirecting your thoughts and actions. You could use right-now strategies when you're at risk of harming a child, at risk of or viewing child pornography, or upset by the intensity of your sexual thoughts about a child.

Having a plan for what to do when you have strong sexual thoughts and urges about children makes it more likely you'll be able to avoid acting on those thoughts and urges when they happen.

You don't have to act on your thoughts and feelings. If you need a right-now coping strategy, here are some things you can try.

#### **Don't Be Alone with Children**

If you have any doubt about your ability to stop yourself from sexually abusing a child, don't be alone with children.

Make an excuse if you have to. For example, "I'm not feeling well, so I really can't babysit," or "I just remembered an assignment that's due tomorrow."

### **Change It Up**

To distract yourself from sexual thoughts and urges about young children, try to change what you're thinking and doing. You could make a mental list of something—things you need to do today or your favorite songs.

### **Use Positive Self-Talk**

To encourage yourself to stay strong, use positive self-talk, such as "I've been here before and gotten through this; these feelings will go away," or "I'm not going to touch a kid. I'm better than that." Or simply "I've got this."

### **Exercise**

Exercise can be a terrific way to deal with difficult emotions. Go for a brisk walk or a run, do some jumping jacks, or engage in your favorite type of exercise for at least 15–20 minutes.

### **Take Some Deep Breaths**

Breathe in slowly and deeply through your mouth or nose so that you fill your lungs with air. Slowly exhale, letting the air out, and then do it all over again. Repeat these breaths a few times, until you start to feel a little more relaxed and in control.

### **Ask Someone for Support**

Another important right-now strategy is to ask someone for support. You don't have to tell the person why you need them. You can just ask them to be there with you—in person, on the phone, or online. You could say, "I'm feeling upset about some things right now, but I don't want to talk about it. I just need you to hang out with me for a while."

We don't recommend telling someone about your attraction to younger children while you're experiencing sexual thoughts or urges. Save that conversation for another time.

In the following activity, you can choose some strategies to use in the moment to cope with sexual thoughts and urges about younger children.

### **Choose Your Right-Now Coping Strategies**

Choose at least two right-now coping strategies from the list below. You can also try your own strategies.

- Don't be alone with children
- Distract yourself by making a mental list
- Use positive self-talk
- Exercise
- Ask someone for support
- Use deep breathing
- Other

Choosing a few right-now coping strategies before you need them gives you options when you're facing strong sexual thoughts and urges about younger children. Practice strategies so they feel familiar and effective when you really need them. For example, practice the phrases you'll use for positive self-talk, or practice deep breathing until you're comfortable with it.

### **Long-Term Coping Strategies**

Respecting yourself and taking care of yourself physically, mentally, and emotionally helps you build a strong foundation for your life. It takes hard work, but respecting and caring for yourself will give you strength to get through challenges that come up as part of life. That includes managing your attraction to younger children and sticking to your commitment to not offend.

Finding and using long-term coping strategies that work for you will support you in all areas of your life. In the following sections, we'll go over these strategies:

- Making healthy choices
- Building your support network
- Practicing relaxation skills
- Identifying what's risky for you

### **Making Healthy Choices**

There are choices we each make every day that can help or hurt our body and mind. When you can, make the better choice:

Eat well; exercise; try out and become involved in at least one healthy activity or hobby that makes you feel good about yourself. For example, learn a new skill, become an expert on a topic that interests you, or learn how to play a musical instrument. Get enough sleep; and don't abuse tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs.

Even small changes can make a big difference in how you feel.

### **Building Your Support Network**

Sometimes people who are attracted to younger children keep to themselves socially and emotionally, which is the opposite of what they need to do to build a strong and healthy life.

Everybody needs support sometimes. In the following section, we'll cover strategies you can use to build different parts of your support network.

### **Building Your Support Network**

The following items are helpful in building and maintaining a support network.

#### **Relationship Support**

Having good friends and caring family members in your life builds your resilience. Close relationships can help you stay away from risky behaviors, such as obsessing about a child or spending too much time alone. As a person with an unwanted sexual attraction, it's especially important for you to have and maintain healthy age-appropriate relationships to feel connected.

#### **Group Support**

There are online self-help groups available for people with attractions like yours. The members of these groups are committed to never acting on that attraction and to supporting one another.

Be aware of groups that promote the sexual abuse of children and the inaccurate belief that children can consent to sex and are not harmed by sex. Avoid these groups—they will not help you live a non-offending life.

#### **Emotional and Mental Health Support**

It's important to get professional help to address ongoing depression and anxiety or any other serious emotional or mental health problems, including problems with substance use or compulsive behaviors.

A professional can also help you with skills to improve your quality of life. For example, you might want to improve your social skills to make it easier for you to develop age-appropriate relationships or to reduce social anxiety.

#### **Medication Support**

For some people, sexual urges can feel too strong to manage or might not respond to the strategies we've covered in this session. If that's true for you, consider making an appointment with a doctor. They might prescribe a medication that can help you or refer you to a specialist.

### **Practicing Relaxation Skills**

There are several kinds of relaxation skills that help you calm your mind and your body. With practice, they can be extremely effective in helping you manage stress, anxiety, and overwhelming feelings.

You might have heard of or tried meditation, mindfulness, yoga, muscle relaxation, visualization, or other relaxation skills.

In the following section, you can try a few relaxation skills to see if they work for you.

### **Relaxation Skills**

Review each of the below relaxation skills. You might need to try a skill a few times to know if it works for you.

- Muscle Relaxation
- Visualization
- Mindful Breathing

### **Identifying What's Risky for You**

Taking responsibility for your physical, mental, and emotional well-being includes learning to recognize situations that are personally risky for you. Those are situations that increase your chance of experiencing strong sexual thoughts or urges for children.

If you can recognize situations or behaviors that are risky, you can plan ahead to avoid them or make them less risky. For example, if you're attracted to a particular child, making sure you're never alone with or in charge of that child can keep you from acting on those attractions.

Pay attention to when you struggle the most with feelings of attraction to younger children. For example, are you more likely to look at child pornography if you're overtired or stressed out? Do your fantasies about children get stronger when you spend a lot of time alone?

In the following activity, you'll explore what's risky for *you*.

### **What's Risky for You?**

Complete this exercise to identify situations that are risky for you or that make you more vulnerable to acting on your attractions, and then brainstorm how to lower your risks.

You can do this exercise yourself or work through it with a counselor or someone you trust.

Think about a recent time when you experienced strong sexual thoughts or urges about a younger child and felt concerned about controlling your own behavior. Describe what was going on with you. Answering the following questions can help you identify what made the situation risky for you.

- What were you thinking about or feeling before you had strong sexual thoughts or urges?
- Where were you?
- Who were you with?
- What were you doing?

In the situation you described above, what could you have done to avoid the risk or situation?

Now think about a time when you felt attracted to a younger child and felt confident about controlling your own behavior. What did you do instead? What helped?

Knowing what situations and behaviors are risky for you and the steps you can take to make them less risky will help you make the best choices to support your commitment to not offending.

Here are some strategies people use to cope with situations that are risky for them.

**Strategies in Action—One**

I'm not around kids when I've been drinking, because I know my inhibitions are lowered. I definitely would not do something when I was sober, but maybe if I was blackout drunk I could possibly do something that I'd regret, so I don't get into that situation.

**Strategies in Action—Two**

I volunteer at the food bank a lot. When I'm not dealing well, I get myself out of my current situation and just go do something that can help people. As a teenager, I would let myself fester and sit in unhealthy situations. Now I just get up and do something totally unrelated that's positive.

**Strategies in Action—Three**

If I'm in a restaurant and there are children around, the process I use is I acknowledge them. I can see that they're attractive, there we are, carry on with my food now. I kind of put it to the corner of my mind. Rather than obsessing and trying to not think about it, I just let it take its toll, and then that's it—it's done.

### **Choose Long-Term Coping Strategies**

We've covered a variety of long-term strategies you can practice to support yourself physically, mentally, and emotionally.

In the following activity, you can choose some long-term strategies to try to see if they work for you.

### **Deciding on Your Long-Term Coping Strategies**

Choose at least three long-term coping strategies to try.

- Mindfulness
- Deep breathing
- Muscle relaxation
- Online self-help groups
- Depression support
- Anxiety support
- Mental health support
- Social skills support
- Medication support
- Build strong relationships
- Listen to music that helps you feel calmer
- Join a team
- Explore a hobby
- Exercise
- Other

Practicing long-term coping strategies improves your overall physical, mental, and emotional health, giving you a better quality of life and strength and motivation to live a non-offending life.

### **Conclusion**

Effectively coping with sexual thoughts and urges about younger children is important for your own health and happiness and will strengthen your commitment to not sexually abuse children.

Choosing and practicing strategies you can use right now and long term takes work, but it will pay off. Be sure to visit our [Resources](#) for more information about coping strategies.

Remember that you are not alone. There are people like you who are managing strong thoughts and urges and live happy and healthy lives. You deserve that too.

**END**

## Session 4: Building a Positive Self-Image

**NOTE:** This Help Wanted session may be useful to people of any age. However, it was originally designed with adolescents and young people in mind. When we refer to sexual interest in "younger children" we mean younger than you if you are under the age of 18. If you are 18 or older, please interpret "younger children" as referring to anyone under the age of 18.

### Introduction

In this session, we'll talk about what self-image is and why it's important to build a positive self-image. You'll also hear from people who are sexually attracted to children *and* living happy, healthy, non-offending lives.

In addition, we'll discuss:

- Tools to construct a positive personal identity
- Positive messages about people with an attraction to children
- Stories of positive role models

### Self-Image

Self-image is the way we each think about ourselves: who we are, what we do, and how we interact with the world. We each have many characteristics that make up who we are as a whole person.

For example, self-image might include:

- Personal characteristics
- Relationships
- Sexual attractions
- Interests
- Occupations

It's normal for our self-image to change over time as we grow and have different experiences. We might act differently in different situations. We might even feel different from one day to the next. It's also normal for us to be proud of some characteristics and wish others were different.

None of us is defined by only one part of ourselves. You might be sexually attracted to children, but that attraction doesn't define your total self.

In the next activity, you'll list some qualities that are part of your self-image.

### Qualities That Describe You

List four to six qualities that describe you. If you need help thinking of qualities, answer these questions:

- What do you like to do?
- What are you good at?
- How would your friends describe you?
- What is really important to you?

Take a look at your list of qualities. Are they mostly positive or mostly negative? We all have qualities we like and dislike about ourselves, but it's important to focus on the positive ones to build a healthy self-image.

We believe everyone has positive qualities! If you can't think of any right now, talk to someone who knows you well and ask them to list some of your positive qualities.

Write at least two positive qualities on a piece of paper and keep it with you to remind you of your strengths.

### **Media Messages**

A lot of media coverage about people attracted to children is negative and focused on incidents of child sexual abuse or fears of child sexual abuse. The media messages might hurt your feelings, scare you, or make you angry, especially if you feel you can't speak up and defend yourself. Remember that media messages don't define who you are—you do.

We've spoken with many young people who have a sexual attraction to children and have never acted on that attraction. They've told us what they would like others to know about them. Here are a few of the things they said:

- "I'm a normal person, and I have other interests. I enjoy computer games, hiking, and playing poker. I have a lot of other things that make up my life, and this is one small part of it."
- "We are genuinely committed to living a life where we don't hurt people. The fact that we are pedophiles doesn't make us psychopaths, deranged sex monsters, or anything like that."
- "I didn't choose to be like this. I would rather not, but it's just one of those things. I'm not a bad person, or I try not to be."

You might have had thoughts like these yourself. Is there something *you* would want people to know about you?

### **What Would You Say?**

If there's something you want to tell people about having a sexual interest in children, write it down.

You might not feel you can share your opinions publicly right now, but over time and through educating people, we hope to have more open conversations in society, both about preventing child sexual abuse and also about supporting people who are attracted to children and making safe and healthy choices.

### **Maintaining a Positive Self-Image**

A big part of successfully living a non-offending life is paying attention to those parts of your life that build your positive self-image.

It's not unusual for people who are sexually attracted to children to have negative thoughts about themselves because of their attraction. Focusing on your talents, accomplishments, and close relationships can give you strength when you're facing all kinds of challenges in life.

Here are a few other strategies you can use to support a positive self-image:

#### **Be Kind to Yourself**

Have compassion for yourself, the same way you do for others when they are struggling in some way.

#### **Accept Being Human**

We all have strengths and weaknesses. The important thing is to accept yourself and try to do your best.

#### **Use Positive Self-Talk**

Saying positive "I" statements such as "I am confident," or "I make good choices" can help you avoid negative thinking.

In the following activity, you can practice positive self-talk.

#### **Practice Positive Self-Talk**

Write a few positive "I" statements to practice positive self-talk. For example, "I'm doing my best," "I'm creating a good life for myself," "I believe in myself," or "I can handle this."

Positive self-talk might feel awkward at first, but it's a really helpful way to break a habit of negative thoughts and support a positive self-image. Try putting positive self-talk statements where you can see them often.

### **It's Okay to Ask for Help**

Sometimes it isn't enough to "look on the bright side" or try to be more positive. If you suffer from depression or anxiety, you might need counseling or treatment to help you manage negative feelings.

If you think you might be depressed or anxious, use an online screener or talk to a doctor or counselor to find out if you could benefit from talking to someone about depression, anxiety, or both—people often experience them together. We all need help sometimes. By getting support for your emotional and mental well-being, you'll feel better overall, and it will be easier for you to build and maintain a positive self-image.

Online screeners and additional resources can be found on our [Resources page](#).

If you are in crisis, please seek help immediately.

- Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) to reach a 24-hour crisis center,
- Text MHA to 741741, or
- Go to the nearest emergency room

### **Living a Happy, Healthy, and Fulfilling Life**

You probably won't hear much about them, but every day there are people with an attraction to children who are leading happy, healthy, non-offending lives. Next, you'll hear from a few of them.

#### **Success Story One**

"I think I'm on a good track now. I just finished an undergrad degree a few months ago. What I do a lot for fun is, I'm an improv actor. That's become a very big thing for me, and I'd say it's helped me manage everything else because it's really given me something to focus on. It's given me a big support group. They don't know about that side of me, but they know pretty much everything else. And I've made a lot of friends online over the years. Some of them I'm still very close to.

When I met others online who shared similar attractions, that made me immediately feel less alone. There were others—50 or 60 year olds—who just lived normal lives, and it was just part of them. And to see that that was something people could do...It hadn't even occurred to me before that, oh someone could live a normal life like this.

The truth is—and not wanting to sound melodramatic or anything—I don't think I'm the happiest person, but I'm incredibly better than I was a few years ago. I was very isolated and didn't really have many friends, but just gaining a support network over the years, that's really helped a lot because I know there are people I can talk to and people who will come to my rescue if I need to be rescued. The biggest thing to remember is that the

attraction is only one part of who anyone is. There's so many other things that define any person."

### **Success Story Two**

"I am a man in my early 40s, married to an adult woman, with children. I have a successful career as an engineer in the IT industry. I have many friends and hobbies, including watching movies and TV shows, reading books, playing sports, and photography.

When I was about 14 I started to realize that the boys I was attracted to weren't quite growing up with me. I struggled with this idea, mostly being terrified that anyone would find out and also that I would never find someone that I could love and share my life with.

I chugged along in my life, went to college, and met a woman that eventually became my wife. I never told her about my feelings for young boys until many years later. While she was shocked and hurt that I kept such a big secret from her, she understood why I had been so afraid. She also forgave me and accepted me.

To adolescents who are going through this process, you should know you are not alone in this. There are support communities out there where you can talk about your situation with people like you that won't judge or vilify you, where you can learn from others' experiences in order to develop coping mechanisms to deal with your sexuality. You are not monsters or bad people simply for having feelings that you didn't choose.

If you ever feel like you need professional help, there are professionals out there who are compassionate and nonjudgmental that can help you cope and fully accept yourself and your situation. You deserve to be loved and treated with dignity, to live a happy and fulfilling life as much as anyone else, and it is possible to live such a life while being a pedophile."

### **Conclusion**

Each of us is made up of many qualities. Your self-image is how you feel about all the qualities that make you uniquely you.

Maintaining a positive self-image is an important part of supporting your emotional and mental health and can give you strength in managing your attraction to children and your feelings about how society judges you.

At times you might feel alone because of your attraction, but you aren't alone. There are people who are sexually attracted to children who are living happy, healthy, non-offending lives. You deserve that too.

Please visit the [Resources](#) section of the site for more information.

**END**

## Session 5: Building a Healthy Sexuality

**NOTE:** This Help Wanted session may be useful to people of any age. However, it was originally designed with adolescents and young people in mind. When we refer to sexual interest in "younger children" we mean younger than you if you are under the age of 18. If you are 18 or older, please interpret "younger children" as referring to anyone under the age of 18.

### **Introduction**

Sexuality is an important part of life, and building a healthy sexuality can help you have good relationships with age-appropriate partners and a safe and fulfilling sex life.

In this session, we're going to talk about what sexuality is, how it develops, and how you can build a healthy sexuality.

You'll also hear from people who are attracted to children *and* building a healthy sexuality.

### **Sexuality**

Sexuality is more than physical sexual activities. It includes your sex, gender, orientation, the characteristics you're attracted to, and the kind of relationships you want to have.

### **How Sexuality Develops**

Sexuality begins developing even before you're born, and it continues developing and changing throughout your life. Each person's sexuality is unique, but we're all influenced by these factors:

- **Biological factors:** These are the genetic traits you were born with. They determine your sex and contribute to your gender identity.
- **Psychological factors:** These are the characteristics that shape your personality and play a role in what you're interested in sexually.
- **Social and environmental factors:** Things like culture, religion, parental upbringing, friends, and media send messages about how you should think and feel about sex and what are appropriate ways of expressing love and intimacy.

Though we know different factors influence sexuality, and sexual attraction can vary greatly, we don't really know all the reasons behind anyone's specific attractions.

Most people become aware of their sexuality and sexual attractions around puberty, when your body begins to mature physically and you experience emotional changes. Puberty typically happens between the ages of 8 and 15.

It can be surprising and scary to realize you're sexually attracted to children. In the following section, you'll hear people talk about realizing they are attracted to children.

### **What's Important to You?**

An attraction to children doesn't define your entire sexuality, just as it doesn't define you as a person. You can be attracted to younger children, live a non-offending life, and have a healthy sexuality.

There are lots of characteristics you can be drawn to—personality, shared interests, a sense of humor, intelligence, loving behavior, and more!

Take a few minutes to think about your own sexuality, including your attractions and the kinds of sexual or romantic relationships you'd like to have.

### **What Is Important to Your Sexuality?**

Answer the following questions to start thinking about what's important to you in building a healthy sexuality for yourself and your partners.

What are some characteristics of your sexuality? For example, what gender or genders are you attracted to, what physical traits are you drawn to, and what personality traits do you find attractive?

What kind of sexual relationships do you want to have and what's important to you in a relationship? For example, are you interested in casual or serious relationships? Is it important to you to have a partner who's caring or affectionate?

Taking time to think about what you're attracted to in others and what's important to you in relationships is a big part of developing a healthy and confident sexuality.

### **Healthy Sexuality**

Building a healthy sexuality is a journey. Everyone has to learn about sex—what they like, how their bodies work, and how to talk to other people about sex. Sex can be awkward or funny sometimes, and that's OK!

Healthy sexuality makes you feel good about yourself, not guilty or regretful. Over your lifetime, you'll continue to learn about your sexuality, including what's important to you physically and emotionally, and how to be a respectful and caring partner.

In the following sections, we'll talk about specific ways you can build a healthy sexuality.

### **Building a Healthy Sexuality**

The following sections discuss strategies for building a healthy sexuality.

- Accepting Your Sexuality and Attraction
- Masturbation
- Getting and Giving Consent
- Practicing Safe Sex
- Loving Yourself

### **Accepting Your Sexuality and Attraction**

As we mentioned, an attraction to children doesn't define your entire sexuality. Accept your attraction for what it is and think about other aspects of your sexuality you can build on.

If you have any attraction to peers or adults, you can explore your sexuality with people your own age or older.

If you are attracted only to children at this time, it might be possible to identify elements of your attraction in age-appropriate partners. For example, you could look for a physical aspect such as small limbs or a personality aspect such as being curious about the world.

Your attraction to younger children might change over time—and it might not. Whether or not it changes, making the most of healthy relationships with peers can help meet the need for intimacy we all have.

### **Fact or Fiction?**

People who are attracted to children can't have age-appropriate sexual relationships.

#### **Answer**

Fiction

People who are attracted to children may also experience attraction to peers or adults or be able to identify attractive aspects in age-appropriate partners and build healthy relationships. This can take effort and discipline and may not work for everyone.

**Masturbation**

Masturbation is completely normal and can be a way to release sexual feelings. It can help you become more comfortable with how your body works and what feels good to you. It's healthy to know what gives you pleasure, with or without a partner.

Some people use pornography when they masturbate. Viewing pornography that includes people who are or appear to be under the age of 18 is illegal and can have long lasting legal consequences. The making of child pornography harms children.

If you use legal pornography, look for content that shows realistic sexual relationships and experiences.

**Fact or Fiction?**

Masturbating can damage your genitals.

**Answer**

Fiction

It is extremely unlikely that you will damage your genitals by masturbating. You might feel sore if you masturbate often or for an extended time; lubricant can help.

**Getting and Giving Consent**

When you engage in sexual activity with people your age or older, you should talk specifically about what you and the other person are comfortable with and what you aren't comfortable with. This is true of all kinds of sexual activity—even kissing and making out—not just intercourse.

Here are some important things to keep in mind about consent:

- You or your partner can change consent at any time, even during sexual activity. If either of you become uncomfortable or unsure, stop and talk about it. Pay attention to physical cues that someone is uncomfortable, even if they said yes.
- Being under the influence of drugs and alcohol can make someone incapable of giving consent.
- Children are never able to give consent. Engaging a child in sex of any kind is harmful and illegal.

**Fact or Fiction?**

A partner has the right to say no even if they've had sex with you before.

**Answer**

Fact

Every person has the right to say no to sex, no matter what. Even if you've hooked up before, or even if you're in a relationship, both partners can say no or change their mind at any time.

**Practicing Safe Sex**

Healthy sexuality includes protecting yourself and your partners from unplanned pregnancy or parenthood and from sexually transmitted diseases. You and your partner should discuss protection before you start any sexual activity, but you are responsible for protecting yourself. Always insist on a condom, even if your partner says they don't like condoms or assures you that they are taking birth control pills or don't have any sexually transmitted diseases.

**Fact or Fiction?**

Sex doesn't feel as good when you wear a condom.

**Answer**

Fiction

Studies show that women *and* men enjoy sex just as much with condoms as without them, so don't go along with that argument.

**Loving Yourself**

Healthy sexuality includes having a positive self-image and a positive body image.

You are unique and valuable. Give yourself credit for your strengths and talents. Accept your body as it is and appreciate the pleasure it gives you. And if a partner is not kind or loving to you, find someone else.

**Fact or Fiction?**

I am unique and valuable, and the right person for me will appreciate my good qualities.

**Answer**

Fact

You should value yourself, and you deserve to be with someone who values you. If a sexual experience or relationship doesn't make you feel good about yourself, talk to a friend or a counselor about getting help or getting out.

### **Your Sexuality Over Time**

Sexuality is personal and fluid. The same way your taste in music or food might change over time, your sexuality might change. For example, you might want to pursue deeper relationships, or you could realize a good sense of humor is sexy to you.

Your attraction to children might change—or it might not. Whether or not your attraction to younger children changes, you can build a healthy sexuality. In the following section, you'll hear from people who are doing just that.

### **This Is How It's Done**

The following sections are three accounts of people building a healthy sexuality.

#### **Building a Healthy Sexuality—One**

When I first realized that I was attracted to children, I was around 14 years old. I hadn't had any kind of relationship before, and my sexuality was expressed solely through masturbation and fantasies about the girls I knew in my real life. In many ways I was no 'worse off' than any lonely child my age, just with a different object of focus for my sexual drive, which I hadn't yet realized the full extent of.

At college, I began to realize how isolated I felt. Although I struggled with greater questions of morality and fears of inadequacy, I continued my fantasies, often using stories from books or movies to give me scenes and stories that went beyond simple gratification to meaningful relationships. This was a great relief, and gave me an outlet that was healthy, fulfilling, and harm-free, while I began to accept my attraction.

While this outlet works very well for me, I have begun building a relationship with another adult. I do not have the same sexual desires for adults as I have for children, but I look at sex with my adult partner as a way of showing the emotional love I feel for them and my gratitude to them for their companionship. Though not every relationship with an adult I have attempted has worked, I do know that whatever happens I can build a healthy sexuality that satisfies my needs as a person alone or with another person.

#### **Building a Healthy Sexuality—Two**

Many pedophiles are attracted to adults as well as children, though the attraction to children is typically stronger. I am lucky enough to fit into this category. I was married for many years. For much of my married life, I had a healthy sex life. I enjoyed sex with my wife very much. I still had fantasies about children, but not while engaged in sexual activity with my wife. I never thought my sex life was as robust as the typical non-pedophile, but it was enough for me.

### **Building a Healthy Sexuality—Three**

Everyone's sexuality is complex and multifaceted. It's very unusual to find someone who has no way at all of expressing affection, love, or sexuality, even if the sexual part remains a solo or mostly-solo act. And even if that's the case, you can still interact with other people emotionally and physically. A lot of us have relationships with adults that fulfill our needs and the needs of our partners to love someone and be loved back and to have physical care and attention.

My attraction to children is non-exclusive. This means that I have been able to pursue romantic and sexual fulfillment with adults even though I am more attracted to young boys. I've had a long-term relationship with an adult that's been pretty much successful.

To build a healthy sexuality, you can try to either refocus your fantasies to be just about adults (which is possible if you're non-exclusive) or, if you're exclusively attracted to children, refocus your sexuality/masturbation on just getting pleasure from your own body. The advantage of the latter is that it's free and you can do it any time and there are lots of safe ways to do it.

### **Conclusion**

The more you learn about your own sexuality and communicating effectively with others about sex and relationships, the better your sex life and relationships will be, and the better you'll be able to avoid harmful sexual behavior.

It's important to never engage a child in sexual behaviors of any kind. Making the decision to never harm a child is an important step towards building a healthy sexuality.

Building a healthy sexuality is worth the effort, and there are lots of resources to help you. Please visit our [Resources page](#) for additional information.

**END**