

Session 3: Coping with Your Sexual Attraction

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 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.

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