Online World

Objectives

This module will help you explore and understand:
- The relationship between your online and offline social lives
- How the internet can be used as a social outlet in your life
- Problematic online relationships

Online world

Sexual offending happens in the offline and online world. But some people we work with often tell us they would not have offended without the internet, apps or smartphones.

A huge majority of people have access to the internet but not everyone offends online.

This means that the internet doesn't cause offending; people who have offended online made a choice to do so. But it is important to consider how the internet might make offending easier for some people.

Sex and the internet

For some people the internet can feel like an good place to engage in sexual behaviour. But why is that? Some people think the 'Triple A Engine' helps answer this question.
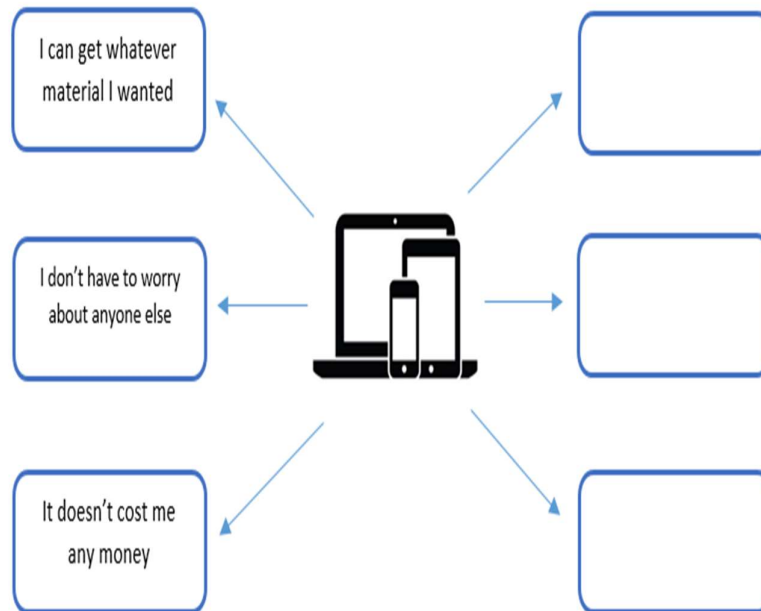
'Triple A Engine' (Cooper, 1998)
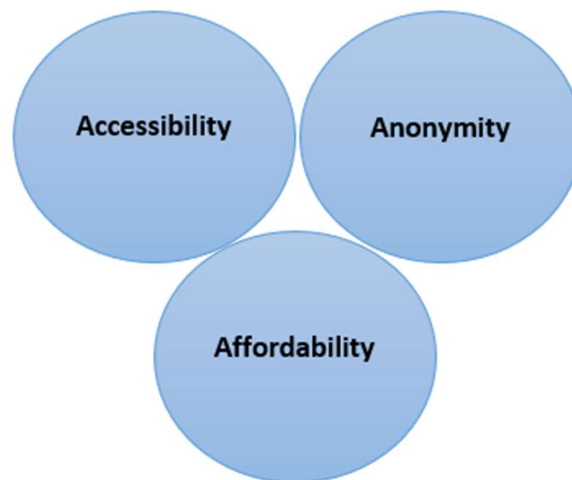
- Accessibility: pornography and sexual experiences are easily accessible online, anytime, day or night.
- Anonymity: people might feel that they are anonymous and unknown online. This might result in a person detaching their online behaviour from their offline life and identity.
- Affordability: pornography and sexual experiences online may come at a low cost or free.
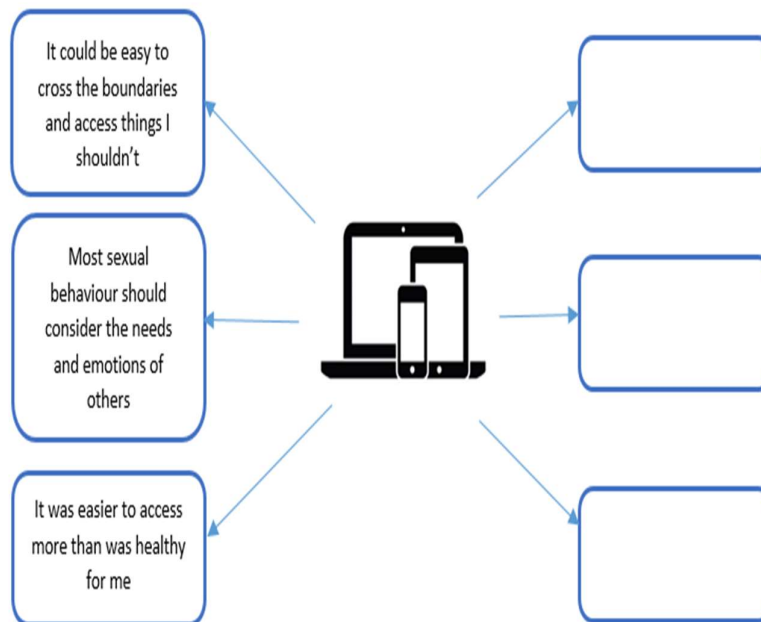
Exercise 1: Sex and the internet

What other aspects of the internet might make it feel like an attractive place to engage in sexual activity? Use the template to think about why the internet became a place for sexual behaviour for you.

Think about the examples below:

```
┌──────────────────────┐                    ┌──────────────────────┐
│ I can get whatever   │                    │                      │
│ material I wanted    │                    │                      │
└──────────────────────┘                    └──────────────────────┘

┌──────────────────────┐      [devices]     ┌──────────────────────┐
│ I don't have to worry│                    │                      │
│ about anyone else    │                    │                      │
└──────────────────────┘                    └──────────────────────┘

┌──────────────────────┐                    ┌──────────────────────┐
│ It doesn't cost me   │                    │                      │
│ any money            │                    │                      │
└──────────────────────┘                    └──────────────────────┘
```

Now that you have identified why you used the internet as a place for sexual behaviour, it is important to think about why that might be a problem in some circumstances.

Think about the ideas you had above, but now think about what the difficulties with these ideas might be. For example:

```
┌──────────────────────┐                    ┌──────────────────────┐
│ It could be easy to  │                    │                      │
│ cross the boundaries │                    │                      │
│ and access things I  │                    │                      │
│ shouldn't            │                    │                      │
└──────────────────────┘                    └──────────────────────┘

┌──────────────────────┐      [devices]     ┌──────────────────────┐
│ Most sexual          │                    │                      │
│ behaviour should     │                    │                      │
│ consider the needs   │                    │                      │
│ and emotions of      │                    │                      │
│ others               │                    │                      │
└──────────────────────┘                    └──────────────────────┘

┌──────────────────────┐                    ┌──────────────────────┐
│ It was easier to     │                    │                      │
│ access more than was │                    │                      │
│ healthy for me       │                    │                      │
└──────────────────────┘                    └──────────────────────┘
```

Online behaviour

Some people we work with say they behaved in a way online that they wouldn't have done in the offline world.

The panopticon

The panopticon is a design of building meaning that one person can see all those in the building.
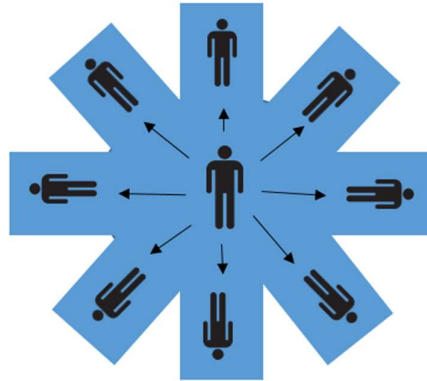
It is important to think about how we behave when we feel we might be being observed, compared to how we behave when we think no one is watching.

This is the same with online behaviour and how people can feel like they are anonymous and not being watched by others when they are online. This can result in people feeling detached from their online behaviour, as if it is not part of their true self.

How does this relate to you? How was your online behaviour different from your offline behaviour? Think about how you behave on social media, what you might look at online, who you might talk to, and how you might talk to them.

There will also be ways you behave online that are the same as offline, and it is important to think about these too. This shows that the online and offline world are not completely separate.

For example, did you look for sexual material online but not offline? Did you communicate with people online that you did not or would not offline? Did you communicate in the same way with others online and offline, for example in your use of language and your level of politeness?

Exercise 2: My online and offline behaviour
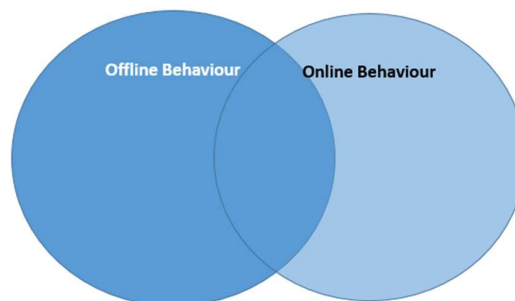
Think about:
- Why did you behave differently online than you did offline?
- Did your online behaviour have an impact on your offline behaviour? How?
- What would be the negative impacts if your behaviour online was to also happen offline?
- What parts of your online behaviour would you like to change so they are more aligned with your offline behaviour? Why?
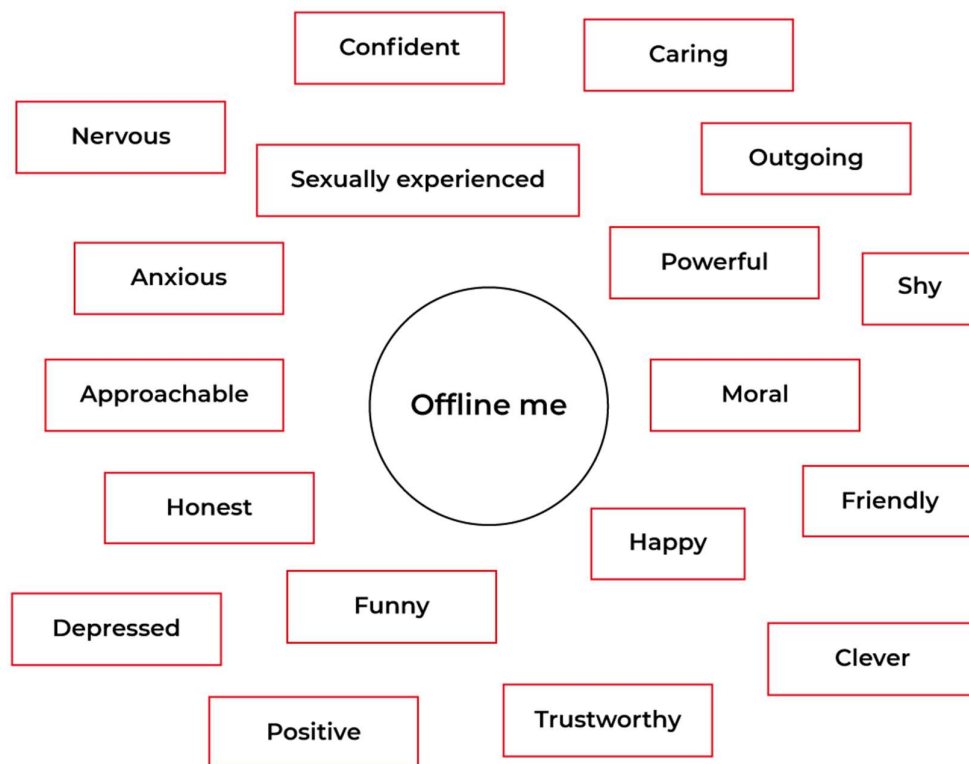- How does considering this help you manage your future online behaviour?

Online relationships

We all have an idea of how we come across to other people. How we act can be affected by the situation we are in and the people we are with.

Think about how you might present yourself differently at work compared to when you're with friends and how this might be different again when with family.
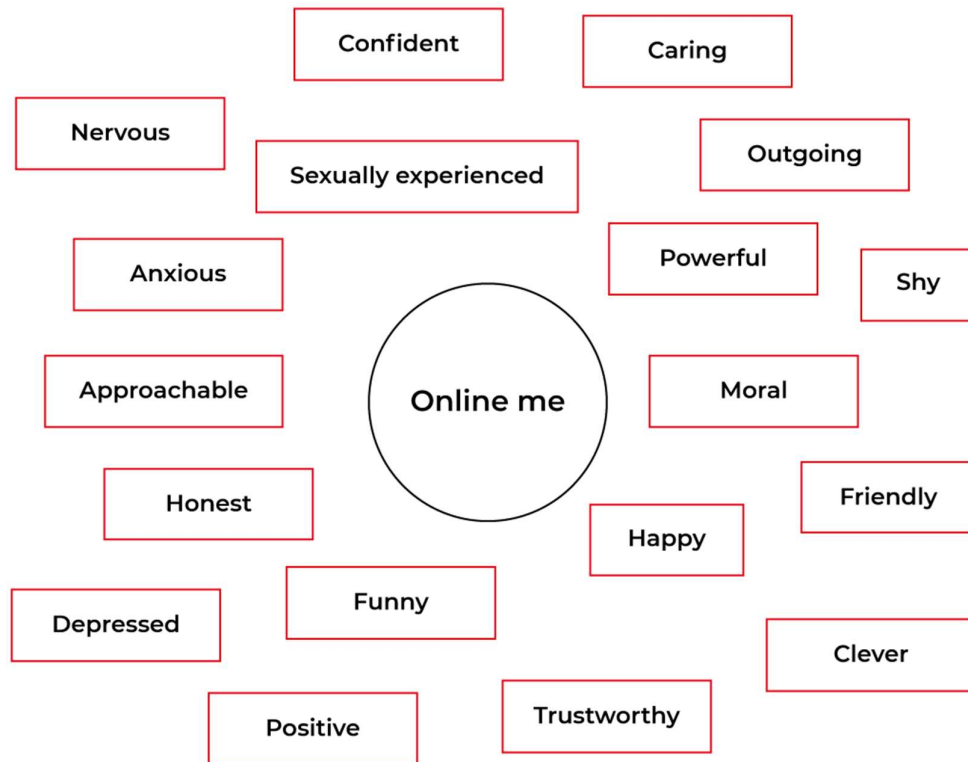
Some people feel that they can be very different online compared to how they are offline.

Offline versus online

How would you describe yourself offline? Make a note of all the words below and any others that describe you.

Confident   Caring

Nervous

Sexually experienced   Outgoing

Anxious   Powerful   Shy

Approachable   **Offline me**   Moral

Honest   Friendly

Happy

Depressed   Funny   Clever

Positive   Trustworthy

How would you describe yourself online? Make a note of all the words below and any others that describe you.

Confident   Caring

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What differences are there between your online and offline selves? Are there qualities about your online self that you like and wish you could transfer into the real world? Make a note of them and they can be a starting point for goals you set in planning for a good life.

Why are we different online?

It is often easier to relate to others online. They might share our interests, accept us more easily and make us feel important or powerful. Unless we choose to let others online see us as we really are, we can pretend to be whoever we want to be. Online relationships in some ways make fewer demands.

Online and Offline Relationships

So what is the problem with online relationships?

When we engage with people online and form friendships, it is usually around something specific, for example the sexual images of children. It means that a lot of time is then spent focusing on that particular topic, or things related to it, for example other software or security. While the friendships that we form online are very real, they have aspects to them that are very different to those offline.

For some people their online relationships act as a substitute for real world social interaction. The ease, emotional safety and superficial nature of some people's online relationships, both

sexual and non-sexual, are often not as fulfilling as the more rounded experience offered by people's offline relationships. Their online relationships are often shorter and less 'real'.

This can be especially true of people's online sexual relationships. Here the focus can easily become just about sexual things. For some people the desire for short-term sexual pleasure means that they allow themselves to develop patterns of online sexual behaviour that are damaging to both themselves and others. Many of these activities are legal but others are not.

Think about your online relationships and answer the following questions:

Exercise 3: Online and offline relationships

	Online relationships	Offline relationships
Write down how many significant people you have in your online and offline world.		
What good things do I get out of these?		
What gaps are they filling in my life?		
What do these relationships mean to me?		
What do I enjoy about chatting to these people?		

1. What do you notice about the online and offline relationships?
2. Are there some things that you would only discuss or do online? Why is this?
3. How does this make you feel? Do you see your online relationships differently now?

Some of the dangers of online relationships

- You don't get challenged – talking to like-minded people means that you are unlikely to be challenged in what you say.
- Talking to other people can help you to justify what you're doing, for example "they're doing it, so why shouldn't I?".
- It might give you the opportunity to do things that in the offline world would make you feel very uncomfortable.

Valuing offline relationships

Exercise 4: What do I look for in offline relationships?

Using the table below, write down the things you value about offline relationships and then what you could do to achieve these.

Value	Action
Intimacy	Express how I feel more
Time together	Join a weekly salsa class together

Some people don't have as many offline relationships as they would like. If this applies to you then this will be covered in more detail in the **building a good life module**.

If you feel lonely then the following exercise can be helpful to start thinking about how you have been coping with those feelings and how you can cope more positively in the future.

Exercise 5: How do I cope with isolation or loneliness?

Situation or event	Negative Strategy or behaviour Including thoughts and feelings	Positive Strategy or behaviour Including thoughts and feelings
Living alone. Feeling isolated.	*Going online into chat rooms, engaging in sexual chat. Felt excited at first but afterwards guilty and ashamed.*	*Take Spanish lessons. Feel scared at first session but afterwards happy.*

Please return to the website and complete the
Reflection *questions at the end of this module.*