

Problem of immediate gratification

Objectives

This module will help you explore and understand:

- Why immediate gratification is so powerful
- Ways to work against the power of immediate gratification

Immediate gratification

Is your online sexual behaviour risky or illegal? You might have wondered why you choose behaviours with such short-term gain when they have such long-term negative consequences.

Here are some possible explanations:

- Long-term consequences can be less certain, for example you might get arrested
- Long-term consequences can seem less intense compared to instant sexual relief
- You can think that you care less about the long-term impact at the time and especially if feeling upset or low
- You might go through ‘moral disengagement’. This can happen in different ways but often involves:
 - passing responsibility onto others, for example “I wouldn’t look if the images weren’t there”
 - minimising the harm caused, for example “it’s only chatting”
 - dehumanising the victim, for example “it’s only an image”
 - collective action, for example “other people are doing it”
- Moral disengagement allows people to enjoy a behaviour that is unacceptable when you know that children are being sexually harmed.

This may start to help you understand why you chose to behave illegally online, and prioritise your short-term needs despite the consequences, but it does not excuse the behaviour.

It is important that you start to think about how you can reduce the power of instant gratification if this has been a particular problem for you.

What can you do?

One way to work against the power of instant gratification is to think about:

- how you will feel in an hour, a week or a month if you do the illegal behaviour, for example if you go online, look at illegal images and then feel guilty or ashamed
- how you will feel in an hour, a week or a month if you don’t do the illegal behaviour, for example if you read a book or go for a walk and then feel proud, happy or relieved.

Another way to work against the power of instant gratification is to use the template below to write a list of the costs and gains of the behaviour, which can be split into long-term and short-term. See downloadable template on the website.

Costs		Gains	
Short-term	Long-term	Short-term	Long-term
<i>Shame</i>	<i>Lose relationship</i>	<i>Sexual relief</i>	
<i>Guilt</i>	<i>Lose job</i>		
<i>Fear</i>	<i>Depression</i>		

Can you identify any more short-term gains or any long-term gains?

Very few people can identify long term gains from their behaviour – this shows how powerful the urge for sexual relief can be in the moment but also why they want to stop their negative behaviour.

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