

Fantasy

Objectives

This module will help you explore and understand:

- your current sexual and non-sexual fantasies
- the link between your fantasies and your online behaviour

Fantasy

What is a fantasy?

Do you ever think about winning the lottery? How would you spend the money? Where would you go? This is one example of a fantasy. A fantasy is something that is imagined.

Why do people have fantasies

Fantasies can be about a range of different things and everybody will have their own reasons for engaging in a fantasy.

For some people, a fantasy will give them better confidence and a sense of control over a situation by letting them rehearse how they will deal with a situation.

For other people, it might be a way to release stress (escapism) or a way to experience things that they wouldn't in everyday life (that lottery win).

Negative fantasies can be a way that people try to cope and prepare themselves for something they fear will happen, or a way of punishing themselves.

Some people use sexual fantasies as a form of sexual outlet, often if they are not meeting their sexual needs within a relationship.

A fantasy can have:

- positive outcomes: for example imagining achieving an award or winning a competition.
- negative outcomes: for example if a partner does not return home on time, imagining that they have been in a car accident.

Some fantasies are:

- planned, rehearsed and used repeatedly by a person, for example scoring a world cup goal.
- triggered by an emotional response or something that happens, for example replaying a bad day at work.

Sometimes a person's thoughts stray and it takes them a short time to realise they are fantasising and not doing what they are supposed to be doing.

When fantasy becomes a problem

Fantasies are a healthy and normal part of everyday life and everybody fantasises about something at one point or another.

But fantasies can become a problem when:

- you engage in fantasies for a long period of time and increasingly often
- you use fantasy to deal with a situation rather than resolving the problem itself
- you would rather engage in a sexual fantasy than engage in sexual activity with your partner
- your sexual fantasies are illegal, abusive or inappropriate (explored later)

If you can identify with the bullet points above, then your fantasies may begin to affect the things you care about, such as your family, your friends, your job and your intimate and sexual relationships.

My fantasies

A good starting point in considering if your fantasies are problematic is to look at your fantasies in more detail. Exercises 1a and 1b will help you start to do this and will help you to explore your triggers to your fantasies.

Exercise 1 - Part A: Thinking about past fantasies

Think of a fantasy that you have had, either regularly or a one-off fantasy. It can be a non-sexual or sexual fantasy. Now answer the following questions:

1. Where were you when you were having this fantasy?
2. Were there other people around? Were these people you know or strangers?
3. What time of the day was it?
4. What was your mood before you had that fantasy?
5. Had anything happened during that day that led you to be in that particular mood?
6. What was your mood after you had the fantasy?

Now think about other fantasies you have had and answer the same questions. Do you see themes developing? Do you tend to have fantasies when you are in a particular mood or at a certain time of day? You may find that sexual fantasies follow slightly different themes to non-sexual fantasies. Make a note of these differences.

Exercise 1 - Part B: Fantasy diary

Over the next week use the fantasy diary below to keep a record of your fantasies, both sexual and non-sexual.

Using the table below, write down the time of day, your mood before you had a fantasy, the type of fantasy (sexual or non-sexual) and your mood after the fantasy.

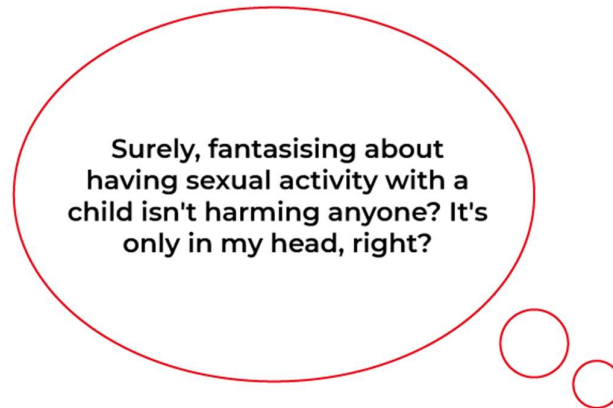
Time of day	Mood before	Type of fantasy	Mood afterwards

Many people who have behaved illegally online feel that as part of addressing their behaviour, they have to stop all sexual fantasies.

But sexual fantasies themselves are not necessarily a bad thing – it's what happens in that fantasy or who is in that fantasy that might need to be addressed.

Hopefully you should now be getting a picture of when and why you use fantasy.

Appropriate versus inappropriate fantasy



Well actually, you are harming yourself because you are reinforcing your attraction to things that are illegal and abusive.

As explored earlier, we can get pleasure from our fantasies. If the subjects of our fantasies are inappropriate, we then associate feelings of pleasure with something that is illegal and abusive. This is particularly true if you masturbate to these fantasies, especially to the point of ejaculation, as the next time you think of the fantasy you will remember the pleasure and arousal.

This is not helpful if you want to control a sexual attraction to children or an illegal behaviour such as looking at sexual images of children.

So what are appropriate and inappropriate fantasies? We have split inappropriate fantasies into three sections:

Illegal fantasies

These are fantasies that would be illegal if they were carried out or acted on in real life, such as having any sexual activity with a child.

Problematic fantasies

So, imagine you are a 48 year old man and you are having a sexual fantasy about a 17 year old. Is this illegal? No. But is this appropriate? We think not, because there is likely to be a difference in power, whether that be related to age, money, or life experience. When there is power imbalance between individuals, it can influence someone's behaviour, such as their ability to consent and their decision making.

Not OK for me

This could be a legal and healthy fantasy for some people, but not for you. For example an adult dressed as a school child. This may be ok for some people but for those who have offended online or who have a sexual interest in children, it may take them a step closer to a fantasy about a child.

Fantasy Knowledge

Whether a particular fantasy is considered inappropriate can vary from person to person; for example it is more appropriate for a 20 year old person to have sexual fantasies about a 18 year old, than a 60 year old person.

Now let's see how much you understand fantasy.

Exercise 2: Fantasy knowledge

Read each example of a fantasy below and consider whether you think each one is an appropriate or inappropriate fantasy before reading the answer.

1. A fantasy about a past sexual partner that you loved and cared for.

Answer: This would be an appropriate fantasy and it is ok to have this fantasy as it is depicting a scenario which is non-abusive. However, if this fantasy is about a sexual relationship you had when you were under 16, this would be inappropriate. Also, if you now have a new partner you need to consider how healthy this is for you and whether it will affect your new sexual relationship.

2. A fantasy about your employer making you angry, so you slam their office door and force them to engage in sexual activity.

Answer: This is an inappropriate fantasy. Forcing someone to do something sexual against their will is illegal.

3. A fantasy about an adult engaging in sexual activity with another adult wearing school uniform.

Answer: If the fantasy depicts two consenting adults who want to dress up in school uniform then this could be an appropriate fantasy. However, if you have been accessing child sexual abuse material (CSAM), it would be inappropriate because you could be reinforcing your inappropriate thoughts about children.

4. A fantasy about sexual activity with a 15 year old who said they want to have sex.

Answer: This is an inappropriate fantasy. A child needs to be 16 or 17 years old (depending on your state/territory in Australia) to consent to sexual activity and any sexualised content featuring someone who is under 18 years old is illegal. Regardless of how old you are, sexual activity with a child is illegal.

5. A fantasy about sexual activity with an attractive adult stranger you saw walking down the road that day.

Answer: If you fantasise about meeting each other and consenting to this activity, then it would be appropriate.

Inappropriate fantasy

Adult pornography

The internet has a vast range of adult pornographic material on offer and it gives you the chance to explore what you like, what you don't like and the type of person you want to see engaging in sexual activity.

Over time, what you view will start to create and develop your sexual preferences and sexual fantasies.

Fantasies do not automatically lead to behaviours, but they do increase your likeliness of wanting to 'play out' particular fantasies.

Illegal online sexual behaviour

Accessing child sexual abuse material (CSAM), or sexually communicating about or with children, can also shape your sexual fantasies.

If you masturbate to these fantasies, especially to the point of ejaculation, this positively reinforces the sexual attraction.

Masturbation to the point of ejaculation is extremely pleasurable, so over time, the things that we think about during masturbation are likely to be associated with feelings of arousal and sexual gratification.

This means that masturbating to pictures of children or whilst engaged in sexual communication with or about a child increases the possibility of becoming aroused at the sight or thought of a child.

Will this make me commit a contact offence?

We are not saying that everyone who has accessed child sexual abuse material (CSAM), or who has sexually communicated with or about a child, or has masturbated to the thought of a child will go on to commit a contact offence.

But, if you are masturbating to a fantasy or an image of a child, then this is going to develop your sexual preferences, just as adult pornography would, but in a very unhealthy and illegal way. Although you may not believe this to be an option, under new and unknown circumstances, you don't know how you might act on that arousal.

People also rehearse things they want to do and build confidence through their fantasies. You might not be thinking about enacting your fantasies now, but over time, your confidence and urge to act on them may increase, especially if you find that you are not getting the same level of pleasure from the fantasy; you may find you want to do something to increase the "buzz". Now, using Exercise 3, let's take a look at one of your inappropriate fantasies.

Exercise 3: Inappropriate fantasy

Have you recently had a fantasy about a child? If you have, then without thinking about it in too much detail, work through these questions one at a time and see if these help you think about your fantasies differently.

1. Where is this fantasy situated?
2. What are you doing there?
3. Who else is there? What are they doing there?

What this fantasy says about you

4. What role does this fantasy place you in?
5. How does this fantasy compare to the type of person you are generally?
6. How does this fantasy compare to the type of person you want to be?
7. How does the fantasy of the content compare to real life?

What this fantasy says about how you view others

8. How do you treat the people in the fantasy?
9. How do they treat you?
10. What if the roles were switched?

What this fantasy says about your view of the world

11. What sort of world would it be if you or other people were able to act on this fantasy?
12. Is this really the type of world you'd like to live in?
13. What is the likelihood of your fantasy 'expectations' being met and would you want them to be met?
14. What would your close friends and family feel about this fantasy? What would they think?
15. How would you feel if your son or your daughter acted out this fantasy with another adult?

Fantasy management

So you have identified which of your sexual fantasies are inappropriate. But how do you manage them?

For some people this will be easy, but for others it will take time, hard work, willpower and self-control. You are not alone if you feel it is too hard to control these fantasies, but you are in control of your thoughts and feelings and you can make a choice as to how much attention you choose to give to them.

Many individuals use fantasy management techniques to help manage having these harmful sexual fantasies.

Exercise 4: Use a fantasy management technique

Have a read through the techniques below. Next time you have a harmful sexual fantasy, you need to try and use one of these to help you stop. The more you use these, the more you will learn what works more effectively for you. It may be that you need to rehearse them or use a combination of these to get it just right.

1. Challenging your thoughts

'Why am I having this fantasy; what good is it actually going to do me?' These are examples of questions you can ask and challenge yourself with. Be firm with yourself.

You could also ask about the consequences to implant fear. 'What would happen if someone walked in and could see what I was fantasising about?' 'I know if I keep having this fantasy, I am more likely to look at child sexual abuse material (CSAM); what are the consequences if I was caught?'

2. Fantasy replacement

Change the ending or the subject of your fantasy. For example, if you are beginning to indulge in fantasy about a child you have seen in an illegal image or communicated with online, change the child to an adult. In contrast, try a different fantasy all together which is new and exciting.... and legal!

3. Fantasy blocker

Imagine someone walking in to your fantasy and catching you. This person has to be someone who you would never want to find out, like a close friend or family member. Or maybe the police.

4. Escape route

Sometimes we need to remove ourselves from the situation in which we are fantasising. Get up, get out of that room, leave the house if you have to. Go anywhere that stops you from having that sexual fantasy. Put yourself around people so that you can't masturbate.

5. Active distraction

Do something that prevents you from thinking about a fantasy. This could be reading, watching TV, going for a walk. It could be ringing a friend and going out for coffee, or doing a fun activity. Anything that takes your thoughts away from that fantasy.

6. Urge surfing

Imagine your fantasy as being like a giant wave. It will build and build to a peak and then suddenly go the other way and decline in intensity. If you do not masturbate, eventually the urge to do so will go away. This happens with all urges, not just sexual urges; for example if you are craving chocolate, eventually this craving will go away. Urges never stay.

7. Sensory Blocker

This is where you use a strong smell or bad taste when you're struggling with a sexual fantasy or the urge to masturbate. After exposing yourself to the unpleasant smell or tastes, it's likely your arousal will drop and the sexual urge will stop or become more manageable. Do not eat anything that isn't intended for human consumption or is harmful, instead use particular tastes that you dislike or find unpleasant (i.e. liquorice, durian candies, eucalyptus etc.). We recommend you talk this through with one of our Helpline practitioners, or another qualified professional.

8. Self-care

Eating well, exercising, sleeping and relaxation; all of these contribute to a happier, healthier you. If you ensure all these are in check, you will find managing sexual fantasies much easier. You might find it helpful to visit our [self-care](#) module and create a self-care plan.

9. Praise your success

The most important thing is to praise yourself for your success. If you are able to stop a particular fantasy, congratulate yourself. Treat yourself to something nice to eat or do something you enjoy. Stopping fantasies can be difficult, especially if you are used to having them, so you need to give yourself credit for that.

What do I do if my sexual preference is children?

We understand that some people have no sexual interest in adults. They often report an exclusive and life-long sexual interest in pre-pubescent or pubescent children. If this is true of you, then we understand that asking you to replace a child in a fantasy with an adult may not work for you.

Rather than try and change your sexual interest, your task is to learn how best to manage your sexual thoughts, feelings and fantasies. Of course there are no easy answers but the aim is to try and reduce both the frequency of your sexual fantasies and their intensity. We hope the suggestions and advice below are helpful:

- **Try to avoid sexual fantasies about children** when masturbating. Of course this can be difficult, especially if you are not attracted to adults. To help, try focusing your attention exclusively on the physical sensations you experience while masturbating. Experiment with different sensations e.g. use of lubricants.
- **Reduce the amount of time** spent thinking or fantasising about children in a sexual way. The more time you spend having sexual fantasies about children, the more these thoughts will govern your mental and sexual life. So, the less time you spend thinking about children in a sexual way, the better.
- **Develop a busy day-to-day lifestyle** with a range of activities and interests that hold your attention. The more our minds are focused on things that we find engaging and rewarding, the less time we spend thinking about sexual things. This helps people feel more in control of their sexual thinking. And, of course, it helps people feel better about their lives more generally.
- Try and **spend time with others**. People tend not to day-dream, or have sexual fantasies, when they are interacting with others, for example, at work or when socialising. Their minds are otherwise occupied.
- If you are aware that you use sexual fantasies as a way of coping with other things in your life e.g. an escape from things that are worrying you or as a way to relax, **find other ways of coping** with these things. This will help you reduce the frequency of your sexual fantasies.
- **Self-care** is important too. If you feel OK about yourself, you are less likely to use sexual fantasies as a prop for your emotional health. Mindfulness is a technique that has been shown to improve people's mental health and resilience.
- **Don't beat yourself up**. For many people, it simply does not feel realistic to never have sexual fantasies about children or to never masturbate. Mindfulness can help people come to terms with their feelings about this. Compassion and self-acceptance is a better mindset than one of despair and resignation.

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