

Recognising and dealing with feelings

Objectives

This module aims to help you explore and gain an understanding of the following:

- How your emotions influence your thinking and behaviour
- How you cope with difficult emotions e.g. anger
- How to become more assertive

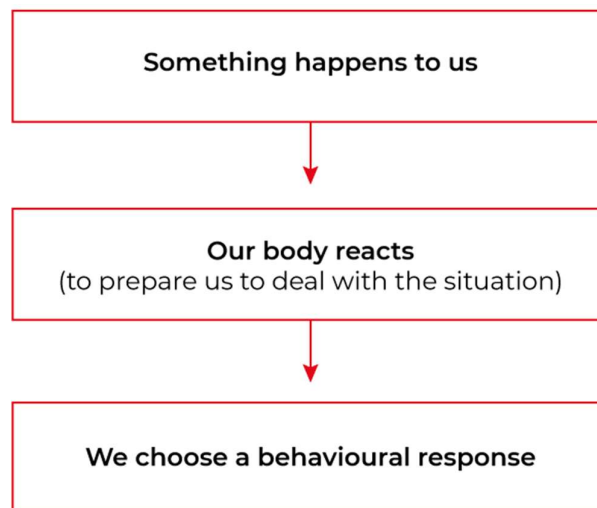
Recognising and dealing with feelings

What are emotions?

Emotions are the sensations in the body as a result of something that happens to us. Feelings are generated from our thoughts about those emotions and we then choose a response. People often find it very hard to recognise their emotions and feelings.

The exercises in this module aim to help you get more in tune with your body so that you notice how it is responding in different situations.

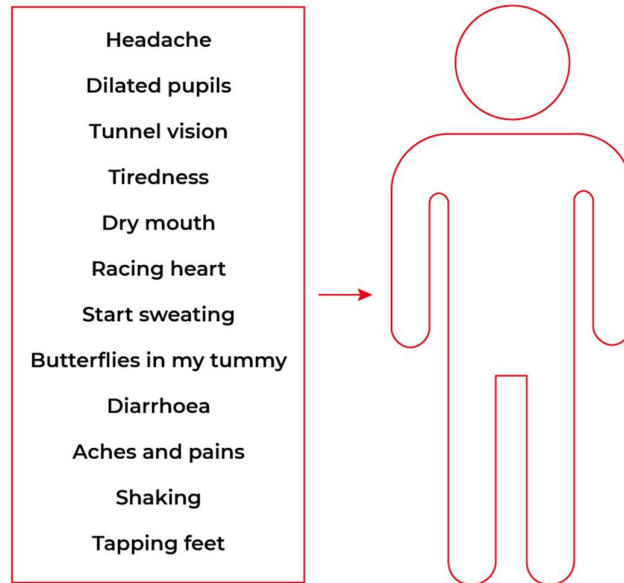
The following diagram helps to explain this:



Use the quiz on the website to identify your current level of confidence.

What happens in my body

Here are some of the physical reactions we have to situations:



These reactions are generally preparing us for a 'fight or flight' response (so we could face a predator or flee to safety) which would have helped ensure our survival. Now these signs can be used to help us identify what we are feeling.

Exercise 1: How in-tune with your feelings are you?

Below is a worksheet which will help you to identify what happens to you physically and how this affects you. By completing this in different situations you should be able to decide what emotion you experience.

Ask others	Ask myself
What expression does my face show?	What does my body feel like?
How do I say I feel?	What am I thinking about?
What do I do?	What do I feel like doing?

[Return to the website to download a printable template.](#)

How does understanding my feelings link to fantasising about or viewing sexual images of children?

Some of the common reasons identified by individuals who have accessed sexual images of children include dealing with unpleasant emotions such as stress, loneliness, frustration, depression and anxiety.

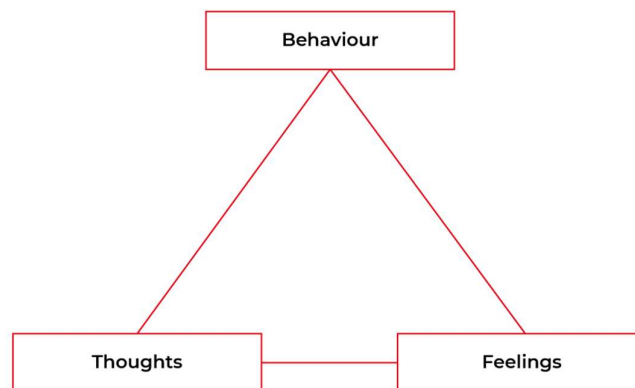
They often describe using sexual fantasy and masturbation or illegal on-line behaviour as a way of coping with unpleasant feelings and situations as a form of self-soothing, escapism and stress relief.

They may be aware that these are not coping strategies but for a variety of reasons struggle to identify other healthier ways of dealing with these feelings. Improving your ability to regulate and manage your emotions and deal with your problems in a healthier way is likely to reduce the probability of engaging in problematic sexual behaviour and harming children.

How thoughts affect feelings

How you feel can influence your thinking and behaviour.

Our thoughts, feelings and behaviour are all linked:



For example, if you are starting a new job, you are likely to get butterflies in your tummy, feel shaky and start sweating. If you struggle with your self-esteem you might think this means that you are feeling nervous because you are not going to do well, and you will have to talk to new people which you find really hard. These thoughts will then heighten those emotions and increase the nerves. However, if you see these nerves as something positive you might think this is due to your excitement at who you might meet and getting to do something new.

We are now going to explore how pleasant and unpleasant thinking can help with managing emotions.

This includes how you feel about yourself (your self-esteem); how you feel about your situation and your feelings towards other people. For example, an individual who feels powerless may lose motivation and believe that there is no point in trying, as he will not succeed. He may withdraw and isolate himself. Similarly, an individual who ruminates on problems and focuses on negatives is unlikely to see the positives in other people or situations and this can increase his feelings of isolation.

The effect of pleasant and unpleasant thinking on emotions.

If you are unsure of pleasant and unpleasant thinking (otherwise known as self-talk) then please work through our [self-talk section](#).

Unpleasant thinking comprises thoughts in which you see the worst in everything. It reduces your expectations by expecting the worst. Unpleasant thinking tends to manifest itself in patterns of behaviour which are characterized by stress, worry, anxiety and frustration. Pleasant thinking encourages healthy behaviour.

Exercise 2: Your unpleasant thoughts

Write down a list of your most common unpleasant thoughts. With each of these, identify the associated feeling. Now list your behaviour that resulted from the thoughts.

Here is an example:

Situation: Saying hello to a work colleague who doesn't respond.

Thought- 'they hate me'

Feeling – rejection

Behaviour – stop talking to them

Start thinking of other reasons:

1. They didn't hear me
2. They were busy and preoccupied
3. They were upset and didn't want to talk to anyone

Start to see if you notice any difference in your feelings once you think of other reasons. You may notice the feelings are more pleasant.

Now think about your illegal online behaviour. Can you identify any feelings and unpleasant thoughts that might contribute to the decision to view sexual images of children.

An example of this might be:

Thought – I am never going to have a sexual relationship.

Feeling – frustration/loneliness

Behaviour – access sexual images of children

Unpleasant thinking is often triggered by thinking errors which fall into three main categories:

- **Catastrophising** – making things seem worse than they really are, taking things out of proportion
- **Generalising** – taking one occurrence and thinking it will always apply e.g. believing you will never pass your driving test because you failed the first time
- **Negative focus** – always focusing on the unpleasant aspects of a situation rather than looking at the positives e.g. instead of being happy about passing an exam, being upset that you did not get a higher grade.

Spend some time reflecting on your thinking errors. If you need additional information on what these are then there is a downloadable sheet which has been created by Psychology Tools (psychologytools.com).

Dealing with worry, anger and stress

How to Manage Unpleasant Feelings

The following will help you deal with some common unpleasant emotions but can also be applied to others.

Worry

Worry tends to involve lots of thoughts that come one after another, which involve events in the future or in the past. Frequently, worry thoughts begin with things like “what if... if only I had”... or “I must remember to...”. Sometimes worrying can help make us do helpful things such as checking that we have turned off the oven but it can become a significant problem.

If you answer “yes” to the following questions, then worrying might be a problem for you.

- Do you spend a lot of your time worrying?
- Does worrying make you feel really upset and anxious?
- Does worrying stop you getting a good sleep at night?
- Does worrying prevent you enjoying yourself and getting on with things during the day, at home or at work?
- Do you feel that your worrying is “out of control” or that once you start you just can’t stop?
- Do you feel worrying has affected your health (e.g., stomach aches, headaches, or diarrhoea)?

Worrying about things can make you anxious. Many people suffer from anxiety without realising what it is. When you are anxious you may notice things like:-

- Faster heart rate, sweaty skin or looking pale
- Feeling upset, irritable, or angry
- Feeling that something terrible is about to happen
- Dry throat or mouth
- Muscular aches and headaches
- Feeling tired, lacking energy
- Poor digestion – stomach aches
- Concentration problems or sleep problems

The more anxious you get, the more you worry and the more you worry, the more anxious you become! It becomes a vicious circle, this is why it is really important to learn how to manage your emotions in a healthy way.

What can you do about it?

Step 1 - Notice it

Notice when you are worrying or feeling anxious. If you recognise the signs of anxiety mentioned above, or you notice you are thinking thoughts like those outlined, take notice of them- don’t ignore them.

Step 2 - "Stop"!

When you notice you are worrying, say “STOP!” to yourself, and concentrate on a different thought and/or do something else to distract yourself. Try to think/do something that is pleasant, relaxing and/or enjoyable e.g. reading, watching TV, cooking, calling a friend, doing a hobby, or playing a sport.

Step 3 - Worry Time

Think about identifying a certain time in your day when it would be okay to worry -but limit the amount of time you spend worrying – no more than ten to fifteen minutes is needed. This is your “worry time” when you can focus on what it is that is causing you to worry and try to generate some solutions. If you find yourself worrying at a time when you have other things to do (such as when you are at work or at bedtime, or while you are trying to concentrate on something else), tell yourself to stop and put off the worries until later. This is not about avoiding problems but is about putting what is worrying you into perspective and dealing with it when you are not distracted by other things.

Step 4 - Self-talk

If you find yourself worrying about the same thing over and over (for example, “I’ll start my new job and no one will like me”) then write down the opposite, “pleasant” thought (for example, “People will like me- I’m a nice person”). Every time you notice yourself worrying about this thought challenge your thinking. Use the ‘questioning yourself’ strategy identified earlier in the module and counter your worry with the pleasant thought. You could even write the pleasant thought or statement down on a small card and carry it with you to remind yourself of it.

Step 5 Problem Solving

This is something you can try by yourself, or with another person. A problem shared is a problem halved! If you can tell someone you trust what your problem is, they can often help you with solving or coping with it. See the **problem solving** for more information.

Anger

People express anger in different ways; it can take many forms. Below are some of the ways that anger can be experienced.

Head in the Sand

Some people find anger scary and frightening. They shy away from admitting they are angry and avoid expressing angry feelings. They try to convince themselves that they are not angry. This can be problematic as consequently they do not let go of and express their feelings which can result in a build-up of pressure, frustration and unhappiness.

Retreating to the Cave

Some people find anger too hard to deal with, and they do everything they can to avoid it. The escape into their ‘cave’ when they feel angry or when other people around them become angry. Consequently they do not learn to manage their own or other people’s anger.

Bottlers

Other people find it difficult and scary to express their angry feelings so they stuff them down deep inside. This might be because they worry about getting into trouble or saying or doing the wrong thing. Whatever the reason, bottling up angry feelings can feel like a pressure cooker or a champagne bottle in which the pressure is building. Over time, if the angry feelings are not released they can result in an explosion.

Exploders

Some people shout and scream and blow off steam when they feel angry. They lash out physically and/or verbally. In the short term this can produce an immediate release but such outbursts of anger can have negative long term consequences for themselves and their relationships with other people.

Which category do you identify with?

If you are not sure then use the table from exercise 1 to help you tune into your feelings. The worksheet in Exercise 3 will also help you to identify things that you can do, and things that other people can help you with, that will assist you to get back to feeling calm and in control. Recognising the warning signs that you are getting angry early on can help you to avoid expressing your anger in unhealthy and destructive ways.

Exercise 3 - How to get back to feeling ok and in control

Things another person can help me with	Things I can do on my own

Return to the website to download a printable template.

Stress

When our body prepares us for the ‘fight or flight’ response it releases hormones such as adrenalin and cortisol to help us have the energy and focus to respond to the threat. Our bodies are designed to deal with short periods of threat. However in the modern day we are exposed to longer term threats or stressors which results in our body releasing these hormones for longer periods of time. This can be really harmful and effect our sleep, concentration, memory and drive us to look for short term ‘fixes’ such as caffeine, sugar, alcohol, drugs and sex.

How to deal with stress

1. **Reduce the amount of stress in your life**, for example if your job is highly stressful then consider if there are alternatives.
2. **Change how you manage stress**, for example can you delegate some tasks or learn that good enough is ok rather than striving for perfection.
3. **Look after your physical health**, for example eating healthily and doing exercise even if you don’t feel like it.
4. **Learn to relax**, for example making sure you have time to yourself to do healthy things you enjoy, this can be as simple as listening to music or reading a book.
5. **Be sociable**, even if you feel like everything is getting too stressful and too much for you, one of the best things you can do is to meet up with your family and friends – for example, meeting up for a coffee or going for a walk. Friends and family will be able to provide you a distraction from your stress and they can help you to see the situation from a different point of view.

See managing **difficult thoughts, feelings, and behaviours** module for more information.

*Please return to the **Reflection** tab within this module to reflect on your progress after completing it.*