

Addiction

Objectives

This module will help you explore and understand:

- The difference between addiction and compulsion
- What role addiction played in your on-line behaviour
- How you can start to address your addictions

“This has helped me so much and really opened my eyes to the reasons behind the offending and the understanding of addiction. I feel more prepared to go forward”

Addiction

What do we mean by a compulsive or addictive behaviour?

Compulsive: feeling a need to do something to avoid bad consequences.

Addiction: continue seeking a positive reward, despite substantial negative consequences.

Typically an individual becomes dependent on something to reduce the pain of certain emotions. Usually they get pleasure the first time they try it and then they return to the behaviour to get the same feeling of pleasure.

Continual usage leads to a reliance on the behaviour to feel normal which ultimately leads to psychological dependence.

Consider a behaviour you think is problematic and reflect on the following questions:-

- Do you find yourself doing it more often and for longer periods of time than you originally intended?
- Does doing it make you feel better and more in control when you are doing it? Do you feel worse when you don't do it?
- Do you go to great efforts to do the behaviour including great efforts to hide the behaviour?
- Do you feel anxious or uncomfortable when you can't do it or even when you think about not doing it?
- Has doing it negatively impacted your life and your relationships?
- Do you often tell yourself you'll stop, only to end up continuing the same behavior?

If several of these questions relate to you, then this module may be helpful for you.

Starting Point

Think about your use of adult pornography, online chats and sexual images of children and using the definitions above think about whether they were compulsive or addictive?

Adult pornography	Addictive Compulsive Neither
Sexual images of children	Addictive Compulsive Neither
Chatting online sexually (with children or adults)	Addictive Compulsive Neither

It's an addiction, so it's not my fault – right?

Wrong – it is important to remember that addiction is not an excuse for harmful behaviours. Illegal online sexual behaviour is harmful, and the first time you engaged in this behaviour you made a decision to do so. It may have felt like it was harder to stop over time but each time you engaged in the behaviour you still had a choice. What's important is that you now see this and are doing something about it.

Addiction may be an element that helps you understand your pathway to offending, and what is important to put in place to ensure you do not offend again, but it does not excuse the behaviour. The more you understand about your own behaviour, the more you can put things in place to move forward to living a happy and offence-free life.

So if you have recognised an addictive element to your offending, you need to understand more about it. Why do you think your use of the internet became addictive? What emotions were you avoiding/covering up?

You will need to look at reasons or motivations behind your addiction. You have already started looking at motivations for your offending and triggers to your behaviour. Think about the following questions:

1. Have I ever had other addictions such as alcohol, drugs, gambling?
2. Do I always use quick fixes (sex, drugs, alcohol, gambling) to feel better?
3. If I didn't get a rewarding feeling from my online behaviour why did I repeat it?
4. What was happening in my life at the times my addiction was at its worst? (it can help to look back to your life line from module 1)

HEALTH WARNING:

It is quite common that people replace one addiction with another. Be aware of this and if you have found that you have had other addictions in the past or other current addictions you may need to get specific support to address these. There are a number of organisations that may be helpful for specific addictions, such as [Sex Addicts Anonymous \(SAA\)](#), [Alcoholic Anonymous \(AA\)](#), [Gamblers Anonymous \(GA\)](#) and [Narcotics Anonymous \(NA\)](#).

How to deal with addiction and compulsion

It is really important to look at the motivation for your behaviour and the emotions you are avoiding. If you don't you will only mask the problem.

However, whilst addressing the underlying motivations for your addictions there are also techniques that can be used to manage urges to go on-line and engage in illegal online sexual behaviour, as set out below:

- Challenging your thoughts that make it feel like the behaviour is okay.
- Active distraction – pro-actively distracting self from fantasy, e.g., conversation, new recipe.
- Tell a safe person – someone from your support network, Stop It Now! helpline.
- Thought stopping – physical prompt to stop fantasy e.g. elastic band around your wrist.
- Urge surfing – ride the urge without acting on it, know it will pass.
- Fantasy blocker – think of “worst case” consequence – e.g. prison or being caught in the act by partner.
- Escape route – physically remove self from where you are having the fantasy e.g. turn off the computer, go for a walk.
- Relaxation techniques – use appropriate guided visualisation that works for you – this should be something that has been planned and rehearsed in advance.

A long term technique for managing addiction is self-care – including taking an interest in diet, social life, personal hygiene and exercise. Having an interest in this area can then be drawn on to use in the above techniques e.g. for ‘active distraction’ going to the gym or cooking a meal. Take a look at the [self-care](#) module for more helpful information.

Make a list which of these techniques you will find most useful or will try using.

It is important to review how well you are managing your urges and the techniques which work well for you. Downloading the diary below can be a way of doing this.

Situation (day, time, mood, location)	Strength of urge (1= low, 10 = high)	Technique used	Strength of urge after (1= low, 10 = high)
<i>At home, late at night, bored and lonely</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>Active distraction – doing a Sudoku puzzle</i>	<i>5</i>

This can also be used to help you recognise patterns when your urge to engage in illegal online sexual behaviour is strongest or what moods are linked to the urges. This awareness will help with your relapse prevention and risk management.

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