

## Problematic collecting

### Objectives

This module will help you explore and understand:

- Why you collect
- How it links to your offending
- The relationship between collecting and some of the unsatisfactory aspects of your life

### Collecting

For some people, collecting – and cataloguing, organising and all the other stuff that goes with it – can seem a big part of their offending.

**If this is true for you, then keep reading this module!**

### Why do people collect?

There are lots of reasons why people collect things:

- They might like the sense of order and control
- They might like the ‘hunting’ part; tracking down something rare or ‘special’
- They might be proud of their collection and pleased that it’s ‘better’ than other people’s
- They might be reliving childhood experiences through collecting
- They might feel that this activity fills a part of them that they feel is otherwise missing
- They might feel that arranging and organising provides a safety zone; a place of refuge where fears are calmed and insecurity is managed
- They might like the social camaraderie when sharing their collection with other collectors

Ok, but what about you? Some of the above reasons may ring true, but there may be other reasons too, especially if you are collecting sexual images of children. Use exercise 1 to help work out why you collect.

### Exercise 1: My collecting

*Do you collect other things, as well as child sexual abuse material, for example stamps, coins or model cars? If you do, then it might be better to complete this exercise using one of those non-offending examples first. Then complete it a second time concentrating on the child sexual abuse material. It might be that you can compare the two and identify themes between them. This will help you later on when you are looking at what the purpose collecting is for.*

From the examples below, make a note of the **three** reasons that you most identify with.

1. I get pleasure from a sense of completion and order
2. I find great value in the rarities and hard to come by items of my collection
3. I take pride in my collection
4. I like to compare my collection with other collectors
5. I have memories of sentimental attachments to my collection
6. Any other reasons

Write a few sentences explaining why you have ticked your top three reasons.

In what way are they more important to you than the others?

## **When collecting is a problem**

If you are collecting images of child sexual abuse, then this is always a problem because it is **harmful** to both **you** and the **children** in the images.

Collecting can also become a problem when it starts to negatively impact on the other things in your life, such as:

- You are not giving enough time to friends and family and prefer to spend your time collecting or feel distracted even when you're with them
- You are unable to build new or sustain existing relationships
- You are unable to concentrate on your job or you are unable to hold down a job
- All of your available money is going on your collecting or you are unable to pay your bills or have debts because of it
- Although you may enjoy collecting, it also makes you feel stressed or worried about it

Let's take a look at what effect collecting is having on your life, using Exercise 2.

### **Exercise 2: The impact of collecting on my life**

Answer the following questions.

#### **When do I do most of my collecting?**

1. What time of the day?
2. Is it when other people are around or when I am on my own, or both?
3. Do I create opportunities to be away from people so that I can concentrate on my collecting?
4. How much time do I spend per week on my collection?
5. How much time do I spend searching for material for my collection? How much time do I spend gathering the material? How much time do I spend organising my collection?

#### **Am I missing out on anything?**

6. Do I ever turn people down or say no to a social gathering so that I can spend time collecting?
7. Do I ever avoid picking up the phone or answering my emails so that I don't have to speak to someone and can concentrate on my collecting?
8. Have I ever forgotten someone's birthday or another special occasion because my mind was on collecting?
9. Am I avoiding developing a new relationship by collecting?
10. Is it easier to just concentrate on collecting?
11. Are my loved ones beginning to get agitated or annoyed with me?

#### **Am I impacting on my life financially?**

12. Am I finding it difficult to commit to my job or other responsibilities because of my collecting?
13. Am I struggling to pay my bills because I have lost a job due to collecting?
14. Do I have debts due to money spent on my collection?

Not everybody seen as a 'problematic collector' will find that their behaviour negatively affects all areas of their life. It might just be that it affects one area. By understanding why you collect and how it impacts on your life, you will recognise if it is something that you need to address.

## Why collect sexual Images of Children?

Of all the things you could collect, why collect child sexual abuse material (CSAM)?

Some people who collect sexual images of children say that it's the collecting, which is really important for them, that it's not really a sexual thing at all.

If that's true of you, ask yourself the question: 'why am I collecting sexual images and not stamps, for example?'

We do everything for a reason. The reason that we do each thing is to serve some sort of function.

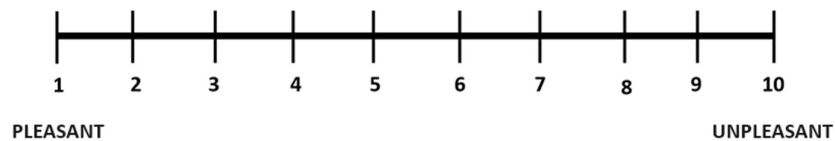
- You eat because you are hungry and it keeps you alive.
- You find a job, so that you can earn money to buy something.
- You join a club, because you want to make friends and build new relationships.
- You decide to walk home instead of drive, to get some exercise as you have been sitting at a desk all day.

Every choice you make serves a function.

So what function does collecting sexual images of children serve for you? Use Exercises below to help you explore this.

### Exercise 3: Part A

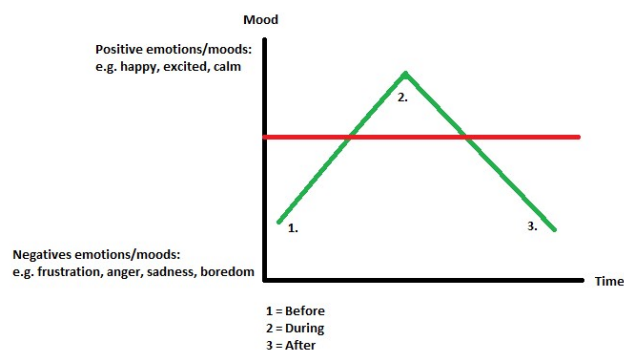
Answer questions 1-4 by rating how pleasant or unpleasant you feel on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being very unpleasant and 10 being very pleasant, in each situation.



1. How do I feel before I start working on my collection?
2. How do I feel while I am working on my collection?
3. How do I feel when I have finished my collecting?
4. How do I feel if I haven't collected that day?

Describe these emotions. *Clue: if they are pleasant, examples include happy, excited or calm; if they are unpleasant, examples include frustrated, angry, sad or bored*

You might find it easier to look at your answers on a graph so that you can see the change in your feelings. Take a look at the example below and then see if you can plot your own.



*So, for this person it is clear to see that they feel in a low mood prior to working on their collection. During the collecting, their mood increases. Afterwards, their mood drops again; this may be due to the guilt of what they have been accessing online, but it also may be due to the fact they are simply not collecting at that time.*

*The red line represents how they tend to feel on a day they are not collecting. So this graph may suggest that this person works on their collection when they feel low and uses it to perk themselves back up; and on the days they feel OK, they tend not to collect.*

*But why are they feeling low? Only they will know the answer to this but the module [Recognising and dealing with feelings](#) may help explore this.*

### Exercise 3: Part B

1. How important is it for me to be collecting child sexual abuse material? Why?
2. Why do I keep certain material? Why would I not put certain material in my collection?
3. How many hours are spent trying to add to my collection?
4. What needs are being met by having these sexual images in my collection? Make a note of the options below that apply to you.
  - My collecting makes me feel creative. It gives me a sense of achievement and helps me to feel good about myself. (Creativity)
  - My collecting helps me to excel in my job/at work as I feel like I have mastered and perfected the activity. (Excellence at work)
  - My collecting feels worthwhile. It's fun, exciting and can feel like a challenge. (Excellence in play)
  - My collecting makes me feel like my life has a purpose. (Spirituality)
  - My collecting makes me feel peace and at ease. It makes me feel comfortable. It helps me to escape from difficult feelings. (Inner peace)
  - My collecting helps me to look after myself, both physically and emotionally. (Life)
  - My collecting has a positive effect on my romantic and familial relationships; both sexually and emotionally. (Relatedness)
  - My collecting gives me control in my life. It makes me feel like I can make decisions and I have a say in what I do. (Excellence in Agency)
  - My collecting gives me knowledge. It makes me feel like I'm intelligent and that I know things. (Knowledge)
  - My collecting makes me feel like I belong to something. I feel like I'm a part of a club or a group. (Community)
  - My collecting makes me feel good. I get pleasure from collecting. (Pleasure)

You have just identified what needs the collecting is meeting for you.

Now you need to decide what you can do in order to meet these needs in a healthier, safer and legal way. We will help you to do just that in the [building a good life section](#), so ensure you make a note of these needs so you can refer to them later.

### Justifications

A lot of people will have known that their collecting was wrong, but still continued to do it anyway. Sometimes, we tell ourselves something is okay when we know it isn't, so that we continue to engage in that behaviour, even when it is harmful. These 'making it okay' statements we tell ourselves are called justifications.

## Exercise 4: Challenge yourself

Use the first column in the table below to list your justifications.

**Tip:** Be honest with yourself. You will never fully be able to understand your collecting if you aren't acknowledging your true justifications.

Then attempt to assume the role of someone who does not collect such images and consider whether or not they would accept your reasons for collecting. In the second column, write the response that you think the other person would give (you may want to try writing it out as a conversation between the two of you).

Your justification	The other person's response
Example justification:  <i>Nobody will ever know that I have the collection.</i>	Example response:  <i>I know about it. And I could go to the police. Even if I didn't, the police can see what you have accessed and they can track you down through your IP address. You can get in so much trouble and you might go to prison.</i>
<i>They are only pictures and I am not even looking at them.</i>	<i>The children in the images are real children who are being sexually abused. By collecting child sexual abuse images I am aiding to the demand of this material being made, which means I am allowing the sexual abuse of children to continue. There are lots of other things I could collect that are not harmful.</i>

Next time you consider collecting child sexual abuse material (CSAM), look back over this table and use the responses to challenge your behaviour. This can be a useful and effective short term deterrent.

If you haven't looked at the [justifications module](#) you might find it helpful to read through this now before moving on to help you understand more about justifications and how you can challenge them.

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