

APPENDIX 9: FINKELHOR'S FOUR-STAGE MODEL

Stage one: Thinking Not OK Sexy Thoughts

This stage refers to the use of visual imagery to replay previous offences or situations, and the fantasy of future possible offences and risky situations. The point should be made when explaining this stage that sexual fantasies are common and acceptable, provided they refer to legal sexual activity. Although it is important to be clear that having these fantasies is not illegal, it is also important to be very clear that having fantasies about previous or future possible offences is the "first step" towards sexual offending, and makes future offending more likely rather than less likely. The link between masturbation, sexual arousal and the presence of illegal imagery should also be pointed out, along with the conditioning effect of orgasm and illegal sexual images. We explain to the men that future accidental encounters with potential victims will be more likely to lead to offending if there is a continued association between such images and sexual pleasure, especially orgasm.

Although being clear that legal fantasy is OK, facilitators should initially argue for the development of alternative not-sexual images that are less likely to lead to sexual arousal and thence to illegal images. Facilitators should try to gain an acknowledgement that the men have sexual fantasies and the content of some of these fantasies, although this usually takes quite a number of sessions. This process may proceed along the following lines:

- Clarify the legality and prevalence of sexual thoughts, that is, most adults have sexual fantasies;
- Clarify that it is only sexual fantasies which involve illegal activities (children, force, lack of consent) which we are asking the men to desist from;
- Establish that sexual fantasies are common, and then gradually draw out the acknowledgement that the men each have sexual fantasies; sometimes, men may become confused about "sexual thoughts" and "sexual images or pictures" and it may be helpful to explain this clearly;
- Draw out the acknowledgement that these fantasies often contain illegal elements, and build, over successive disclosures (within a session and between sessions) to admitting masturbating to illegal sexual fantasies on a regular basis.

- The broad details of such fantasies are filled in for each man so that the acknowledgement is sufficiently detailed to prevent later denials, but without sexualising the account.
- As a preparation for the relapse prevention module (module 6), alternative non-sexual positive visualisations are developed for each man which are multi-sensorial (sight, sound, touch, smell), vivid and personally meaningful

Stage two: Making it OK

This stage refers to the extensive web of cognitive distortions which each of the men has usually developed to rationalise or justify their sexually abusive behaviour to themselves. These distortions are very similar to those displayed by mainstream offenders and include such distortions as:

- No-one will ever know
- It won't hurt them
- It's how I look after them
- It never hurt me
- They don't seem to mind.

These distortions are also quite difficult for the men to acknowledge, and it is only when there is a well-established therapeutic climate within the group that the men start offering their particular distortions. We raise these distortions within the four-stage model and teach how the presence of such distortions represent a second step towards future offending as it allows the men to convince themselves that they can do an activity which they know is both illegal and wrong. We characterise the distortions as 'excuses'¹, and develop a specific "truth" to counter each of the distortions, and then encourage the men to tell themselves the "truth" about a particular situation rather than the distortion. Examples are listed in table 7.15.1 below.

Table 7.15.1: Examples of cognitive distortions and "truths"

Distortion ("excuse")	"Truth"
<i>'No-one will ever know'</i>	<i>'People usually find out sooner or later'</i>

¹ In practice, the description 'lies' is sometimes used to describe the cognitive distortion when this is appropriate.

<i>'It won't hurt them'</i>	<i>'Sexual offending hurts people a lot, it hurts their heart and messes up their future'</i>
<i>'Never hurt me'</i>	<i>'It actually hurt me a lot both at the time and for my whole life'</i>
<i>'They don't seem to mind'</i>	<i>'They are probably terrified and worried'</i>

Some cognitive distortions do not appear to be distorted initially, however further examination of the underlying thoughts and assumptions will usually reveal their underlying distortion. This allows for a 'truth', or at least a more positive assumption, to be developed. An example of such a distortion might be "I felt so excited" which seems truthful and undistorted, but the full distorted cognition or self-statement is probably more like:

"I feel so excited that I don't care (it's OK) if I hurt them."

This can then be reconstructed to:

"I can feel excited but this doesn't mean its OK to hurt someone else",

or

"even if I am very excited that doesn't make it OK to hurt someone else."

Other distortions may be partially true, or use a socially appropriately term or description to hide something else. For example the cognition:

"I really love kids"

is probably a socially acceptable form, or a cognitive distortion, of the unacceptable

"I lust after kids",

and the "truth" or reconstructed cognition to counter this could be something like:

"Loving kids means protecting them, being kind to them, not violating them or having sex with them." or

"touching kids sexually is hateful and hurtful rather than loving."

Facilitators should therefore anticipate these types of distortions and draw out their underlying content so that appropriate cognitive restructuring can occur which will counter the distortion and contribute to the development of a non-offending set of cognitions.

There are a multitude of differing categories or types of distorted cognitions, and many men may have difficulty recognising them consistently. As such, and drawing from another programme, we have often made use of an easier to understand classification system for recognising and categorising cognitive distortions. This is drawn from the Equipping Youth to Help One Another treatment programme, which has been used with offenders with intellectual and other developmental disabilities (Langdon et al, 2013).

Within this programme, distorted cognitions are classified into four types, and these can be used and taught within the SOTSEC-ID programme:

(a) Being Self-Centred - distorted cognitions within this category are those where you place your own needs above the needs of others regardless of the harm inflicted, including harm to yourself. This is a common type of distortion amongst offenders which allows criminal behaviours to be justified, and is therefore considered dangerous, as empathy is quickly neutralised, or not experienced. Men can be taught that this is a dangerous category of distorted cognitions, and often leads to sexual offending, and other offending behaviours.

(b) Blaming Others - this type involves shifting responsibility for your actions onto other people, circumstances, or situations.

(c) Minimising or Mislabelling - this category is relatively self-explanatory and involves minimising the harm caused, or changing the associated labels in order to reduce the perception of harm.

(d) Thinking the Worst - this final type is often associated with low mood, and is a position adopted by offenders where they consider that events, circumstances, or situations never work out for them in a positive manner. Adopting such a position can absolve someone from taking responsibility for their actions, or be used as a justification for not making use of more appropriate coping strategies. For many men with intellectual disabilities, who often have a history of abuse, neglect, and bullying, challenging this set of distortions requires a marked degree of clinical skill.

Stage three: Planning to offend

Most sex offenders, whether with or without intellectual disabilities, usually deny any explicit or implicit planning of their previous offences. As for both of the above stages it is often difficult to coax the acknowledgement and details of this step from the men. After detailed discussion of some of their actual offences and challenging of their alleged reasons (e.g., for being in the particular locale, or for being alone with the victim, etc.), it is usually clear that a considerable degree of planning did occur, although this planning may be unsophisticated in comparison to those without intellectual disabilities. This questioning allows a

detailed picture to develop of the individual features of the pre-offence planning for each member. This can then be used to construct with the individual and the group a plan about how not to offend in the relapse prevention planning phase of treatment. Some planning to offend examples might include:

- Taking sweets, extra money, or cigarettes to the local shop when young girls may be there;
- Following (described as targeting) young girls when out in the community;
- Watching for young boys to go into the toilet whilst in shopping centres;
- Waiting until there are no staff around before approaching a potential victim;
- Brushing up against children when out shopping;
- Going to the local shop through the park in summertime (where children are liable to gather);
- Going to un-staffed areas in day centres (to see who is there).

Stage four: Offending

The final stage in committing a sexual offence is obviously the offence itself. During this stage the offender must ignore any concerns for the well-being of the victim (victim empathy) and focus on short-term sexual and other gains (such as power assertion) to the exclusion of long-term consequences to themselves (such as involvement with the police, court and legal consequences), to say nothing of the long-term consequences for the victim. The strategy adopted to overcome their desire to offend, even in situations where there is an opportunity, is to focus on the devastating consequences for the victim, as well as focusing on the long-term consequences for themselves. As some of the men will have experience of the criminal justice system and the restriction of some of their freedom of movement, this latter strategy seems to have a more immediate effect within the group. By focusing on the strategies necessary to obtain compliance from the victim at this stage of offending, the violation involved can be made more explicit and clearer to the men.