

Task 4

Sexual interest in children - self-help programme

Changing the activity that sexualizes a child

This task allows you to examine all the excuses and justifications that you have used to give yourself permission to act. You might find the issues you covered in the previous task (My child-related sexual activity) useful here.

To start, make a list (and write it down on a sheet of paper) all the **THOUGHTS** you use to give yourself permission to engage in child-related sexual activity. For instance, how do you justify watching so-called "child pornography", which is footage that demonstrates child sexual abuse? Make a list of at least three main ideas you most often use to give yourself permission for such activity.

For instance:

- *"I can watch 'child pornography' because it is not me who is molesting the child. I only watch some images, I can't be that dangerous."*
- *"Under 16-year-olds are fully ready and willing to engage in sexual interaction."*
- *"If a child approaches me online to chat and wants to talk about, say, sex, it is not my responsibility. Parents should keep a closer eye on what their children are doing and where."*

a) Examine the list you have made and go through it, point by point, and ponder on the following questions on each of your justifications for searching or watching:

- Where is this thought coming from? What makes me think like this?
- How do I know, what I'm thinking is true?
- How do my sexual thoughts of children (searching and watching child-related or illegal footage) support the rights and well-being of children?

b) Reflect on your justifications. Write down on a sheet of paper each excuse you use for justifying sexual activity directed at a child (e.g. searching and watching images that sexualize a child or illegal images). After each justification, write down **ALTERNATIVE THOUGHTS**, that is, thoughts that might make you behave in a more responsible way and respect children's rights. List and note down all the alternative thoughts you can possibly think of. You might want to make use of the chart below.

The way I think	What supports the way I think?	What does not support the way I think?
<i>"Under 16-year-olds are fully ready and willing to engage in sexual interaction."</i>	<i>"Under 16-year-olds post suggestive selfies on the Internet."</i>	<i>"The age of consent for sexual interaction with a child in Finland is 16. Sexual interaction with a child under the age of 16 may fulfil the characteristics of a crime."</i>

c) Practise making use of the alternative thoughts the next time you feel tempted to engage in child-related sexual activity, such as watching on the Internet illegal footage, or footage that sexualizes a child. After the exercise, note down how you succeeded and what felt challenging.

Remember, sexual interest in children never automatically leads to harmful activity. Each and everyone can control one's sexual impulses and activity, particularly with sufficient guidance, support and help. This is not an automatic process: gaining control over self-regulation requires practice.