



New CBT based online self-help program for people who have sexual interest in children

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INTRODUCTION

Child sexual abuse is widely acknowledged as a global public health problem causing serious human suffering for children. Child sexual abuse is rarely a sudden, spontaneous act, but rather an outcome of a long process consisting of different phases. The research data indicates that the first thoughts of sexual interest in children are often recognized in adolescence. This is why it is important to reach people, who have sexual interest in children but have not acted upon them.

Save the Children, Finland has in cooperation with the Finnish Criminal Sanctions Agency and the Hospital District of Helsinki and Uusimaa (HUS) created a CBT based online self-help program for people who are worried about their sexual interest in children. The program can be used anonymously and free of charge.

OBJECTIVE

The aim of the online self-help program is to engage people who are worried about their sexual interest, thoughts, feelings or actions towards children and/or use of online child sexual abuse images (child pornography). The program offers CBT based exercises and tools for controlling harmful behaviour and it provides information on where to seek more support and help if needed.

The self-help program is based on cognitive behavioral theory and evidence based medicine practices used in treatment with sexual offenders. It focuses on misbeliefs and thoughts as well as behavior and emotions.

The self-help program consists of three parts:



What does it mean to have sexual interest in children?



How can I control my behaviour if I have sexual interest in children?



The way forward: How to maintain adapted behavioural and cognitive changes and where to find more help.

RESULTS: Breaking the taboo and preventing child sexual abuse

The primary intervention of the self-help program is to stop child sexual abuse from happening in the first place. The program enables people who are worried about their sexual interest towards children and/or use of online child sexual images to increase their self-awareness and control of their problematic and harmful behavior.

The self-help program offers information, psychoeducation and exercises to control and change behavior, thoughts and emotions as well as how to seek support and help. The program can be used also among professionals and psychotherapist working with sexual offenders to prevent recidivism.

The program is an innovative way to reach out to those who might harbour sexual thoughts about children. The innovation to deliver the program to the Dark Web, has been ground-breaking:

Between 1st Dec 2018 and 19th June 2019 over 120 000 people have visited the program. All the people who have searched for illegal child sexual abuse material in Dark Web/Tor with Ahmia search engine have been informed about the self-help program. Time spent on the website ca 30-33 sec. Immediate leave from the program ca 8 %.

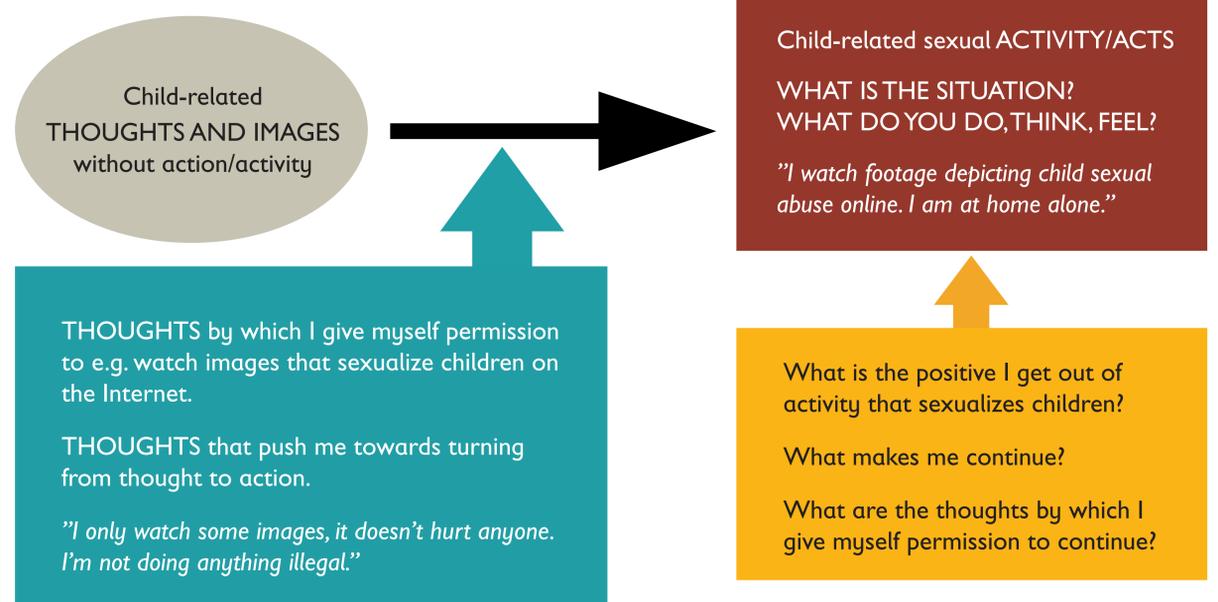


FIGURE 1. The following exercises allow you to reflect on what has led you to proceed from thoughts that sexualize a child to activity that sexualizes a child.