

## TIP SHEET: WORRIED ABOUT YOURSELF

# Safety Planning in the Moment: For Adults Who Feel At-Risk to Harm a Child

When you're reaching out for help to stay safe from engaging in inappropriate or abusive behavior, Stop It Now! understands that you may not always be in a safe place. Sometimes, due to life circumstances, you may already be in a risky situation, but are looking to make the best possible choices right now. Perhaps you're sitting at the computer with your browser open about to click on a site that hosts child sexual abuse material (CSAM), or you've made a commitment to watch a child for an evening.

You're at a crossroads. The choices you make now could set you on very different paths: one of harm and abuse, or one of safety.

## You've reached out because you don't want to harm a child, but what can you do in this very moment?

We have some ideas that might help you in the moment to make the safest decision possible. These are *not* a replacement for professional, specialized support to address your concerns about any sexual interests in children and your ability to manage these concerns safely.

### PLANNING FOR HIGH-RISK SITUATIONS

What if you are asked to supervise a child who you have sexual thoughts and/or feelings about, such as babysitting or tutoring? You don't want to hurt this child, but you want to be able to follow through with what has been asked of you. Or what if you find yourself spending time with an older youth or teenager, and are feeling worried about your feelings for this young person? What can you do?

Ideally, it would seem the safest to not be in this position; to not agree to supervise this child or to hang out with this youth. You can say you're sick or that an emergency has come up. You might even say that you are dealing with some personal things right now and that you don't think you can take on a supervision responsibility or additional activities.

However, if you are going to supervise or spend time with a child or teenager whom you are sexually attracted to, you can take the following protective steps.



Stop It Now! prevents the sexual abuse of children by mobilizing adults, families and communities to take actions that protect children before they are harmed. Learn more or get help at [stopitnow.org](http://stopitnow.org)

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- 1. Go to a public place and be around other people.** Think of any place you can be with the youth that is not isolative and that encourages you and the young person to do something safe without physical contact. For example, visit your local:
  - **Library.** Bring the youth with you and ask the librarian to help you pick out some books according to the young person's interests. Sit at a table with other people, or nearest to the librarian.
  - **Park.** Go to a park with a playground or somewhere that has other children and young people who they may be interested in playing with or meeting so you're not alone with the child or teen. Stay in well-travelled and well-lit areas. Go during the day only, if possible.
  - **Café.** Find a local café that tends to be well-attended, or maybe one that encourages sitting at communal tables. Order a drink and a snack and play table games or word games on a piece of paper. Avoid touching the child or teen even in a joking or playful way.
  
- 2. Ask a responsible friend or relative you trust** to come over, or to meet you somewhere while you're spending time with this youth. Things you can say:
  - I'm not feeling too well, and I'm watching (or hanging out with) [child/youth] today. I'm wondering if you can come over to help. Maybe we can all watch a movie together.
  - I've been having a really rough time lately, and I'm not sure I'm in the best headspace to be caring for a child – but I'm watching [child] today because [parent] had no one else to watch them. Do you think you can come over while [child] is here? Or maybe we can all go out to eat, my treat!
  - [To a friend who is a parent] I'm watching [child] today, and I honestly am not sure what I should be doing. Do you think you can bring [friend's child] over or maybe we can meet somewhere so I feel better?
  
- 3. Do not:**
  - Bathe the child, even if you were supposed to; you can say you forgot or that the child was too sleepy to bathe that night.
  - Change or help the child in the toilet unless absolutely necessary (i.e., if the child needs their diaper changed). You may want to ask yourself if [risky activity] can be put off without endangering the health or wellbeing of the child.
  - Allow or ask the child to sit on your lap. You can say something like, "It makes me uncomfortable when people, even children, want to sit on my lap. Everyone likes to show affection a little differently. How about you give me a high-five instead?"
  - Touch the youth in any unnecessary way. You may need to hold a child's hand to cross the street, but you do not need to continue to hold their hand once you're across safely.
  - Offer to assist with any personal hygiene needs.
  - Offer to help with clothes shopping or similar tasks that would involve comments on appearance, bodies or put you in close quarters with the youth, such as a dressing room.

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- Watch videos or media with the child or teenager that involve mature sexual conversations and/or situations.

**4. As a last resort:** *If you have tried all of the above, and you think you may cross the line with this child or youth, call 911 or drive to the nearest **emergency room**.* Let them know that you feel at risk of possibly causing harm to someone and need help to stay safe.

## **If you're worried about what you're looking at and doing online.**

If you're worried about your online behavior, you can:

- Disconnect the wifi.
- Shut off your phone/computer.
- Go for a walk around the block.
- Call a safe and trusted friend, relative, or significant other.
- Contact your individual and/or group therapist (if applicable).

### **TRY A MINDFULNESS EXERCISE**

Step outside your door, away from your devices. Then practice these exercises.

1. Clench your fists for 10 seconds, then unclench for 10 seconds. Repeat 3 times.
2. Take deep breaths in and out for one minute.
3. Name 5 things you can hear or smell, then 5 things of a certain color you can see.
4. Remind yourself of the risk involved in watching child sexual abuse material: you're abusing children, and you're putting yourself at risk of arrest.

## **Safety planning is an important, long-term strategy to staying safe.**

Safety planning means preparing so that at-risk situations happen rarely. When you can think about resources and your limits before being in a concerning situation, then you are already courageously taking steps to keep children and yourself safe.

Practice what you will say when setting limits with others (including children and teenagers). Be clear on what is non-negotiable for you (lap-sitting, front hugs, kisses, any touch, helping youth in the bathroom or bedroom, etc.) Then have ways to communicate these boundaries.

- "I love that you want to sit on my lap, but that's not something I'm comfortable with. How about you sit next to me on the couch, and give me a high-five instead."
- "Let's have you sit next to me ok? I prefer that."
- "I'm glad you are asking questions about healthy sexuality, but I'd feel more comfortable if you talked to your mom or dad about this."

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Think about what (coping strategies, support people, activities) have been beneficial and helpful, and what hasn't. Use your knowledge of previous experiences to make a more concrete plan for future situations that may be risky. Write this plan down and keep it somewhere you can reach it in a moment of stress (like on the computer monitor, in your mobile phone, or in your wallet).

Keep a journal about your emotions and activities. This way, when there is a triggering or risky event, you can see what you were feeling and thinking directly before it happened, and you can connect it to the decisions you made. Finding a pattern can help you feel more in control of your actions and make safer decisions.

## **THERAPY**

Many people have found it meaningful to work with a specialized therapist as they work towards a safe and fulfilling life. Adults struggling with unwanted sexual interest in children have found that counseling can help them design safety plans, develop insight into their behaviors and also feel optimistic that they can live a life that is harm-free and fulfilling. To locate resources for professional support, see this guide for [People Concerned about Their Thoughts and Behaviors](#).

## **BUILD COMMUNITY**

Identify personal support people that you trust. Even if you don't feel comfortable telling a close friend or family member about what is exactly going on for you, you can still let people close to you that you are going through a difficult time. Ask them if you may call upon them to help you if you are having troubling thoughts. They can assist you in "distracting" as well as be a positive support for you.

There are online communities for people who identify as "minor-attracted" and who are committed to children's safety. Reach out to [Stop It Now!'s Helpline](#), or visit the resource guide for [People Concerned About Their Thoughts and Behaviors](#) to learn about some of these options.

[Learn more on our website.](#)

**About this Tip Sheet:** Authored by Micah Waxman, MS. Reviewed by Candice Christiansen, M.Ed., LCMHC, CSAT-S and David Prescott, LCSW, LICSW.  
Generously funded by Elaine Spangler. Last revised February 24, 2021.

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**SAFETY PLAN EXERCISE**

Thanks to David Prescott, this following worksheet is available to help you keep your safety planning on track. *Please note that this assessment is not intended to replace professional support.*

**How will you know that your safety plan is effective and that it's working?**

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**How will others who understand and support you know that it is working?**

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**On the other hand, if it were to stop working, what would be the first thing you would notice? What would be the very first warning signs?**

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**And if it were to stop working, what would be the first thing that others who understand and support you would notice? What would be the very first warning signs?**

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**If your safety plan wasn't working as you had hoped, what other kinds of things would you and others who are close to you notice?**

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**Thinking about those people who understand and support you, what changes would they see in you? What should they look out for?**

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**If you find that your safety plan isn't working, what can you do immediately that will help you get back on track?**

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**If others who understand and support you see that your safety plan is not working, what can they do immediately to help you get back on track?**

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**And when things are going well for you, and your safety plan is working, how can you and others acknowledge this and even celebrate it?**

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