

Identifying Distorted Thoughts That Lead to Sex Offenses

(Thanks to program member DL for his contributions to this section)

Most people have used distorted thoughts to justify their offending. Many people in sex-offending treatment don't even recognize or question them. Look through the following list and check off the statements you have said to yourself. Put an extra check next to the ones you still believe. Be honest.

Thoughts About Sexual Contact with Minors:

- My victim did not experience any major problems because of the abuse.
- I believe that sex with my victim made him/her feel close to me.
- Sometimes children don't say no because they enjoy sex.
- My victims didn't tell because they liked it and weren't bothered by it.
- Having sexual thoughts and fantasies about a child isn't all that bad because at least it is not really hurting them.
- If a person does not use force to have sex with a child, it will not harm the child as much.
- Some people are not "true" sex offenders: I just made a mistake.
- Fondling a child is not as bad as penetrating a child and probably will not affect the child as much.
- My relationship with my victim was a lot like an adult relationship.
- Sexual activity with children can help the child learn about sex.
- Some people who commit sex crimes get longer sentences than they really should.
- Kids who get molested by more than one person are probably doing something to attract adults to them.
- People made a much bigger deal out of my offense than it really was.
- I suffered and lost more than the child(ren).

- I did not manipulate my victim.
- Some minors want to have sex with adults or older people.
- Most minors who have been sexually involved with an adult will eventually get over it and go on with their lives.
- Some children act very seductively.
- Staying away from minors is enough to prevent me from molesting again.
- My sexual abuse was not planned, it just happened.
- If I tell myself I won't offend again, I probably won't.
- Sometimes children initiate sex.
- Mothers should know better than to dress children in revealing clothing.
- I think I turned to sex with a child because I was deprived of sex from adults.
- My victim was much more adult-like than other minors.
- Children give adults more love and acceptance than other adults.
- The main thing wrong with sex with minors is that it is against the law.
- If I hadn't been molested as a child, I would never have offended.
- If I hadn't been drinking or using drugs, I would not have offended.

Thoughts about sexual assault of adults:

- People who commit sexual assault probably do it because they are under stress.
- People who get raped sometimes brought it on themselves.
- If a person does not strongly resist my sexual advances, then they are probably willing to have sex.
- Women often falsely accuse men of rape.
- My victim had sex with a lot of other people and was promiscuous.
- If a person gets drunk at a party, it is really their own fault if someone takes advantage of them.
- When women wear tight clothes, short skirts, and no bra or underwear, it looks like they want sex.
- A lot of people claim they were raped because they changed their mind afterward.
- My victim was somewhat to blame for what happened.
- If two people had sex in the past, then it is assumed it's consensual in the future.
- Fantasizing about forcing someone to have sex isn't all that bad since no one is really getting hurt.
- A lot of times when people say no they are just playing hard to get, but they really mean yes.
- Often a woman reports sexual assault after the fact because she gets mad at the man and is trying to get back at him.

- As long as a man does not hurt a woman in the process, forcing her to have sex is not so bad.
- People who experience unwanted touching will eventually forget about it and get on with their lives.
- Sometimes one person "teases" another and makes it seem like they want sex.
- Men cannot be sexually assaulted by other men.
- If someone lets another person kiss and touch them sexually, they should be willing to go all the way.
- When a woman acts like she is too good for a man, most men think about raping her to put her in her place.
- Society and courts are too tough on people who committed sex crimes.
- My victim was a slut and got what they wanted.
- Before police investigate a claim of rape, they should find out what the victim was wearing, if she had been drinking, and what kind of person she is.
- Rape is not planned, it just happens.
- If I tell myself I won't offend again, I probably won't.
- Women say "no" to sex because they don't want to seem too easy.
- If a person goes home with someone or invites them to their own house, it's usually because they want to have sex.
- Many people have a secret desire to be forced into having sex.
- People who rape have stronger sexual urges than other people.
- People can prevent themselves from being raped if they really want to.

Distorted Thoughts About Illegal Pornography or Interacting with Minors Online
(note: CSAM = child sex abuse material, otherwise known as child pornography)

- Finding CSAM is not planned, it just happens.
- Society and courts are too tough on CSAM offenders.
- I just looked at the stuff, I didn't take the pictures.
- The kids in the videos seemed like they were enjoying it.
- I would never really hurt anyone; I just had a few pictures on my computer.
- You can't victimize someone by just looking.
- At least I don't have any real victims.
- Role-playing in a chatroom is not illegal.
- The cops lied and pretended to be someone else. They set me up!
- Shouldn't the cops be out looking for real criminals?
- I never touched anyone.
- I wasn't even really chatting with anyone underage; it was a sting!
- I didn't travel to meet a minor, it was a cop!
- I wouldn't have gotten out of the car, I just wanted to see what he looked like.

- Since when are thoughts or fantasies illegal?
- Trading images allowed me to have a community – a community I didn't have in the “real world.”
- I went online to escape the stress of my daily life, not because I was looking for kids.
- When I searched for “teens” I meant 18 or older.
- I never planned to look at sexual images of children – I just clicked on the pop ups.
- It was not really about the minors in the pictures, I love being able to collect and organize things.
- I never looked at the pictures, I just wanted a large collection.

Common Cognitive Distortions Often Fall into the Following themes:

- Victim Blaming: “You could tell by the way she was dressed that she wanted it.”
- Minimization of harm: “We were just playing around; I didn't hurt them.”
- Victim's Intentions: “Did you see how they were looking at me? They wanted it.”
- Plausible Deniability “There's no proof of what I've done, it's their word against mine.”
- Offender as Victim: “Maybe they didn't like what I did to them, but what happened to me after the arrest was a lot worse.”
- Offender's Rationalization: “I was teaching them how to be good in bed.”
- Offender's Need for Control: “I can make her do anything I want. She's my girl.”
- Victim harm: “Secretly spying on them getting dressed doesn't hurt them if they don't know I'm doing it”
- Deflecting responsibility: “It's not my fault, it was the drugs. When I get high, I get super horny.”
- Offender Fantasy: “I would never do what I did online in real life.”
- Offender Fetish/Paraphilia: “Their feet looked so sexy, I had to touch them; I couldn't control myself.”
- Obsession: “Since I first saw them, I felt like I couldn't live without them. They're all I thought about.”
- Acceptable Manipulation: “I told them I would give them drugs and they totally went along with it.”
- Male privilege: “I took her out to dinner at that expensive place; she owed me.”
- Entitlement: “She asked me for a ride home. What did she expect? I'm her boss.”
- Perceived Needs: “All I wanted to do was love them. I really cared about them. They needed real love so badly.”
- Gender Roles: “In my culture, women must do what men tell them to do.”
- Lack of Empathy: “She drank too much and passed out. She didn't care because she didn't even know.”



Exercise 7.6: Identifying Your Cognitive Distortions

1. Pick out at least 5 statements from the lists above that seem to apply to you.
2. Give examples of other statements about sex or sexual assault that apply to you.

What other distorted thoughts about offending did you use?
