

FLASHBACKS

What are they?

Flashbacks are memories of past traumas. They may take the form of pictures, sounds, smells, body sensations, feelings or the lack of them (numbness). Many times there is no actual visual or auditory memory. One may have the sense of panic being trapped, or feeling powerless. These experiences can also happen in dreams. Flashbacks do not represent mental illness. They are not psychotic episodes. Flashbacks are only technically “re-experiences”. These are controlled experiences, events relieved to release, cleanse and heal. They indicate that the survivor is strong enough to face their memories. Flashbacks are an opportunity to learn and to be free.

Flashbacks are often accompanied by nausea (or, more rarely, actual vomiting), specific pains, numbness, or locking in specific parts of the body and deep chills.

Because flashbacks do not always occur in a safe setting the survivor must develop coping skills that can be implemented when she feels unprotected.

What helps?

1. Tell yourself that you are having a flashback.
2. Remind yourself that the worst is over. The feelings and sensations you are experiencing are memories of the past. The actual event took place at another time and now it is time to let out the terror, rage, hurt and or panic. HONOUR YOUR EXPERIENCE.
3. Get grounded. This means stamping your feet on the ground so that you know you have feel and can get away. Remember at that time you could not get away. NOW YOU CAN.
4. BREATHE. When we get scared we stop normal breathing. As a result our body begins to panic from the lack of oxygen. This causes a feeling of panic; pounding head, tightness, sweating, feeling faint, shakiness and dizziness. Breathe deeply. Place your hand on your diaphragm and breathe deeply. You should be able to feel your diaphragm push hard on your hand.
5. Reorient to the present. Begin to use your five *senses in the present.* Look around and see the colors in the room, the shapes of things and the people near by. Listen to the sounds of the room; your breathing, traffic,

- birds, people, cars, etc. feel your body and what is touching it: your clothes, feel your arms and legs, the chair or floor supporting you.
6. Talk out loud to yourself, reassure yourself. Tell yourself you are not in danger, it is okay to feel these things and no one is going to hurt you. No one can hurt you for remembering your feelings.
 7. Get in touch with you need for boundaries. Sometimes when we are having a flashback we lose sense of where we leave off and the world begins. Wrap yourself in a blanket, hold a pillow or stuffed animal, go to bed, and sit in a closet... any way that you can feel truly protected from the outside.
 8. Get support. Depending on your situation you may need to be alone or may want someone near you. Seek out support that will help you to learn about flashbacks/
 9. Take time to recover. *Flashbacks are very powerful.* Give yourself time to make the transition from this experience. If you can take a nap, a warm bath, or some quiet time. Be kind and gentle with yourself. Appreciate how strong you are for getting through the past.
 10. Honor you experience. You survived. Respect your body's need to experience those feelings.
 11. Be patient. It takes time to heal the past. It takes time to learn appropriate ways of taking care of your self and developing effective ways of coping.
 12. **You are not CRAZY.... YOU ARE HEALING. Flashbacks are normal.**