

Grounding during Flashbacks

Options:

- 1) **Reconnecting to the present (anchoring) and/or**
- 2) **Reconnecting to a past experience of comfort and security**

You are accessing resources the client already has and instructing her in how to consciously utilize them anytime that she needs to establish a greater sense of comfort and relief from her feelings. By having a “symbol for the present” and a “symbol for comfort and security” you can remind the client to access these symbols whenever she is feeling symptoms of stress and needs to relax.

Reconnecting to the Present (Anchoring)

FLASHBACKS

Following a trauma it is not unusual for an individual to have flashbacks and to be overcome by feelings connected to the traumatic event. **A person can be taught to anchor themselves in the present** rather than let their mind toss them about as a ship on a stormy sea. **By maintaining a focus on the present situation a person can establish control over their flashbacks and emotions.**

You can assist this process by making such statements as “you’re safe here. I’m with you. No one will harm you. I’ll remain with you until you feel a little stronger etc.”

A more structured way to teach the client to reconnect with the present is as follows:

- ⇒ **Ask the client to identify something in the room** that can be used to remind her of the here and now. This could be a picture, a ring, and a piece of jewelry or any object in the room. If possible invite the client to hold the object in her hand(s) e.g. picture from a wallet, or key tag etc. and details the object (it smells like, it feels like, it is red..)
- ⇒ Any time that the client needs to establish a greater sense of comfort and relief from her feelings ask her to focus her attention on the “**symbol for the present**” that she has selected and to verbally describe it to you i.e. describe its size, its color, its texture, its meaning to them. Etc.
- ⇒ Remind her to take a nice deep breath, focus on the symbol and describe it whenever she needs to take a break from the emotional stress she is experiencing.
- ⇒ Ask her to keep this focus until she has regained control over her symptoms.

By teaching this technique to the client before she needs it she has a tool available should she later require it, perhaps when discussing the assault with the police or dealing with the medical procedures.

If the client is already in a state of distress before you have had a chance to explain this process you can direct her attention to an object in the room and quickly tell her what you are doing and then ask her to begin describing it to you, in terms of its size, shape, texture, color, use etc...

Reconnecting to a Positive Past Image

FLASHBACKS

This exercise enables a person to **achieve a sense of comfort and security** in a stressful situation by vividly recalling a time of comfort and well-being from one's past. A person can reconnect to inner resources that she requires in the present situation. To teach the client to reconnect with feelings of comfort and security:

- ⇒ Ask the client to **think of a time and an experience when she felt relatively calm and secure**. This might be a place she vacationed in or a positive memory from childhood. It might be a favorite room, a memory of being at a carnival, a graduation, a birthday party, etc.
- ⇒ Ask her to focus her attention on that memory and to **describe all the details** of that experience with reference to sights, sounds, and sensations. Ask her to name three things that she can see there, three things that she can hear there, three things that she can smell there, three things that she can touch there and finally to identify the feelings that she has when reconnecting with this positive memory.
- ⇒ As she connects to this memory **ask her to keep this focus** until she experiences the positive feelings connected to it and regains control of herself.
- ⇒ Ask her to make any adjustments, additions or subtractions of details that would add to the level of comfort and security that she experiences. Ask her to make the experience just right and to enjoy the experience.
- ⇒ **Ask her to select a little symbol that can serve to remind her** of this pleasant experience whenever she needs to again regain a sense of well-being in the future. The symbol may be any sight, sound, or sensation that evokes the experience for a client.
- ⇒ Suggest to the client that she can feel free to use this symbol whenever she needs to reconnect to a state of relative comfort and security.
- ⇒ Remind her of this symbol and invite her to reconnect to this image whenever she appears overly stressed.

To help ground a client to the here and now, work through the following statements with the client:

Right now I am feeling _____ (name the current emotion, often fear) And am sensing in my body _____ (describe current bodily sensation in detail) because I am remembering _____ (name the trauma by title only – NO details) and , at the same time, I am looking around to where I am now in _____ (say the year/date) here _____ (name the location –apartment, house etc) and I can see _____ (describe some of the things that you see right NOW, in *this* place) and so I know _____ (name the trauma again) is not happening NOW/anymore.