

## Coping with Flashbacks

- ❖ Tell yourself you are having a flashback and that this is okay and very normal in people who have experienced trauma.
- ❖ Remind yourself that the worst is over – it happened in the past, but it is not happening now. “That was then, and this is now”. The ‘child’ or traumatised person inside you is giving you these memories to use in your healing and, however terrible you feel, you survived the awfulness then, which means you can survive and get through what you are remembering now.
- ❖ Call on the ‘adult’ or stronger part of you to tell your child or victim part, that she/he is not alone, not in any danger now, and that you will help her/him to get through this. Let your child or victim self know that it’s okay to remember and to feel what she/he feels and that this will help her/him in their healing from what happened to them. However hard it is for you, she/he is communicating in the only way she/he can.
- ❖ Try some of these ways of ‘grounding’ yourself, and becoming more aware of the present:
  - Stand up, stamp your feet, jump up and down, dance about, clap your hands, remind yourself where you are now.
  - Look around the room, notice the colours, the people, the shapes of things. Make it more real.
  - Listen to and really notice the sounds around you: the traffic, voices, washing machine, music etc.
  - Notice the sensations in your body, the boundary of your skin, your clothes, the chair or floor supporting you.
- Pinch yourself or ping an elastic band on your wrist - that feeling is in the now, the things you are re-experiencing were in the past.



- ❖ Take care of your breathing: breathe deeply down to your diaphragm; put your hand there (just above your navel) and breathe so that your hand gets pushed up and down. Imagine you have a balloon in your tummy, inflating it as you breathe in, and deflating as you breathe out. When we get scared, we breathe too quickly and shallowly and our body begins to panic because we’re not getting enough oxygen. This causes dizziness, shakiness and more panic. Breathing slower and deeper will stop the panic.
- ❖ If you have lost a sense of where you end and the rest of the world begins, rub your arms and legs so you can feel the edges of your body, the boundary of you. Wrap yourself in a blanket, feel it around you.
- ❖ Get support if you would like it. Let people close to you know about flashbacks so they can help if you want them to. That might mean holding you, talking to you, helping you to reconnect with the present, to remember you are safe and cared for now.



- ❖ Flashbacks are powerful experiences which drain your energy. Take time to look after yourself when you have had a flashback. You could have a warm, relaxing bath or a sleep, a warm drink, play some soothing music, or just take some quiet time for yourself. Your ‘child’ or ‘victim’ and you deserve being taken care of, given all you’ve been through.
- ❖ When you feel ready, write down all you can remember about the flashback, and how you got through it. This will help you to remember information for your healing, and to remind you that you did get through it (and can again).
- ❖ Remember you are not crazy – flashbacks are normal and you are healing.

Adapted from Bristol Crisis Service for Women. 1999.