

How to Get Through A Flashback

A flashback is a temporary state of remembering a painful or traumatic experience. It may feel like aspects of the trauma are actually happening to you. Flashbacks may last for differing amounts of time, and may occur at unpredictable and unexpected times. Flashbacks may be “triggered” by events, feelings, or other things that remind you of aspects of the trauma.

Breathe

- Take slow, deep breaths in and exhale slowly. Put your hand on your stomach and take deep enough breaths that your hand moves out with the inhalation, and in with the exhale. Increasing your oxygen intake may help you decrease the anxiety you may feel during a flashback.

Remind yourself it is just a memory

- Remind yourself that the actual event is over, and you survived. You are on the road to recovery. Reassure yourself that you are not being hurt right now and that you are safe. Remind yourself that what you are feeling will pass in due time.

Make yourself feel safe

- If you can, go to a place you know is safe, whether it be your room, your friend's house, or sit in a favorite comfortable chair. Going to a place that you know is safe may help you feel more secure.

Ground yourself in the present

- Remind yourself of the day, date, time, your current location, your immediate surroundings, how old you are, where you live. Engage your senses in the present: look at your surroundings, smell a perfume or focus on the scents in your present location, listen to music or focus on the noise around you, taste a fruit or candy and focus on the flavor and sensations in your mouth, or engage your sense of touch by holding an item, like a scarf, pen, or other nearby object and describing its texture and how it feels. Focusing on the here and now may help you avoid feeling like you are reliving the trauma.

Give yourself time to recover

- You may feel vulnerable and exhausted after a flashback. It may take a while to feel okay again. Give yourself permission to rest, sleep, cry, be angry, or however you feel. Take time to take care of yourself and do something that makes you feel good: drink hot chocolate or tea, go for a walk, take a bubble bath, watch a good movie, meet with a good friend, listen to your favorite music, treat yourself to your favorite food or dessert.

Other resources:

www.survivormanual.com

http://www.recoveryourlife.com/plugins/p2065_news/printarticle.php?p2065_articleid=5

<http://www.kemh.health.wa.gov.au/services/sarc/documents/flashback.pdf>

<http://www.aftersilence.org/flashbacks.php>

<http://rainn.org/effects-of-sexual-assault/flashbacks>

http://academicdepartments.musc.edu/ncvc/resources_public/victim_reactions_SA.pdf

