



Flashbacks and ways of coping with them

What is a flashback?

A flashback is a re-living of a traumatic experience that happened earlier in your life. Something in the present reminds your mind or your body of the trauma and the old experience starts to get replayed. It is a way of a person's mind and body processing and making sense of experiences that were too emotionally overwhelming at the time that they happened. Flashbacks can feel extremely frightening and disorientating. Here are some ideas of things you can try during and after a flashback.

Self talk to the part of you that is scared.

- Tell yourself you are having a flashback and that this is okay and very normal in people who were traumatised as children (or as adults).
- Remind yourself that the worst is over – it happened in the past, but it is not happening now. The 'child' inside you who was abused 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' part of yourself to tell your 'child' that she is not alone, not in any danger now and that you will help her to get through this. Let your child self know it's okay to remember and to feel what she feels and that this will help her in healing from what has happened to her. However hard it is for you, she is communicating in the only way she can.

Grounding yourself and becoming more aware of the present:

- stamp your feet, grind them around on the floor to remind yourself where you are now

- look around the room, noticing the colours, people, shapes of things
- listen to the sounds around you: the traffic, voices, the washing machine, etc.
- feel your body, the boundary of your skin, your clothes, the chair or floor supporting you. Wrap a blanket around you.
- have an elastic band to hand – you can 'ping' it against your wrist and feel it on your skin
- tell yourself that feeling is in the now, the things you are re-experiencing were in the past

Become aware of your breathing

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. Count slowly to five as you breathe. When we get scared we breathe too quickly and shallowly and our body panics. This causes dizziness, shakiness and more panic. Breathing slowly and deeply will stop the panic.

Getting support

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.

After a flashback

- 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' and you deserve being taken care of, given all you went through in the past.
- 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.