



Dealing with flashbacks

Flashbacks are sudden intrusive memories of past trauma like sexual abuse or assault. They can often include visual images, sounds or bodily sensations experienced at the time of the assault. It is not uncommon for sexual abuse survivors to experience flashbacks as scary and overwhelming and it can be difficult to tell the difference between the memory and the present. It can feel like you are reliving the abuse. Flashbacks appear to occur 'out the blue' but are usually triggered by things that remind you of what happened in the past.

Some strategies for dealing with flashbacks

- **Remind yourself that the abuse is not happening now.** You are remembering the abuse and that can be very painful. But, no matter how painful, it is still just a memory. Tell yourself that this feeling will pass and that you will be alright.
- **Focus on your breathing.** Wherever you are try to concentrate on breathing deeply and slowly. Count your in and out breaths.
- **Get yourself a glass of water.**
- **Touch something.** Hold onto a something like a chair or table to help ground you in the present. Breathe.
- **Become aware of your feet on the ground.** Wriggle your toes, shake your body, stretch your arms. Breathe.
- **Become aware of your surroundings.** Look around you. Notice your environment, take in your where you are and what is around you. Become aware of the here and now.
- **Try to get to a place where you feel safe.** That may be somewhere in your house or yard, or it could be somewhere at school or work. Try to concentrate on breathing deeply and slowly while you are getting there.
- **Seek out a support person, someone you feel safe with.** Share your experience with that person. It can make it less powerful because you are not dealing with it on your own.
- **Remember positive encouragements given by your support people.** Imagine the person is there with you, encouraging you. Think of what he/she would say to you to help you feel stronger.
- **Hold on to a cuddly toy or an object that helps you feel safe.**