

## COPING WITH FLASHBACKS

(For Survivors)

1. It is very distressing when you have a flashback because you feel that the trauma is happening all over again and you feel as paralysed with fear as you did when this event first happened. This is very normal for someone who has been through a severely traumatic experience such as rape or childhood sexual abuse. The first thing to do is to recognise that this is a Flashback and is a memory of the event **AND NOT** the event itself
2. Try to remind yourself that the worst is over - it happened in the past, but is not happening now. However terrible you feel, you survived the awfulness then, which means you can survive and get through what you are remembering now.
3. The first most important thing to do is **KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN** and try some of these ways of 'grounding' yourself and becoming more aware of the present:
  - Take your shoes off and stamp your feet, grind them around on the floor to remind yourself where you are now, feel the ground beneath you
  - look around the room, noticing the colours, the people, the shapes of things, try to remind yourself where you are here and now
  - listen to the sounds around you: the traffic, voices, the washing machine. The clock.
  - feel your body, the boundary of your skin, your clothes, the chair or floor supporting you
  - have an elastic band to hand (or on your wrist) - you can 'ping' it against your wrist and feel it on your skin - that feeling is in the **now**, the things you are re-experiencing were in the past.
4. Take care of your breathing: breathe deeply in through your nose down to your diaphragm; put your hand there (just above your navel) and breathe so that your hand gets pushed up and down. You can also count to 5 as you breathe out through your mouth, causing a noise. 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 slowly and deeply will stop the panic.
5. If you have lost a sense of where you end and the rest of the world begins, rub your body so you can feel its edges, the boundary of you. Wrap yourself in a blanket, feel it around you.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. 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 triggers that cause your flashback and to remind you that you did get through it (and can again).
9. Remember you are not crazy - flashbacks are frightening but normal and will lessen as you deal with the trauma through counselling.