



## **Ideas for Coping with** **Flashbacks**

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Bristol Crisis Service for Women

1. 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).
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. Try some of these ways of '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, the people, the 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
  - 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
5. 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.

6. 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 round you.

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. 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).

10. Remember you are not crazy - flashbacks are normal and you are healing.

### **About Bristol Crisis Service for Women**

**[www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk](http://www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk)**

Bristol Crisis Service for Women (BCSW) has been supporting girls and women in emotional distress for 25 years. We particularly help women who harm themselves, often called self-injury.

We offer a national text and email support service called TESS, Monday to Friday 7-9pm, for girls and young women up to age 25yrs who are affected by self-harm. (Until 2011 we also ran a helpline offering support to older women; we would like to be able to offer this again and are trying to get funding for it.)

We also offer training nationally to workers, to enable them to understand more about self-injury and how to respond helpfully.

We have lots on our website, such as an interactive resource with ideas and inspirations to support yourself to express different feelings, called '*Dealing with Feelings*'. Our paper '*Rainbow Journal*' is useful if you like to express yourself through writing or drawing. There are also Information Sheets on our website – these are in the 'TESS' section of the website as they were written for TESS, but people of all ages might find them helpful.