



FLASHBACKS

A flashback is a memory that often comes as a sudden and unexpected intrusion. A flashback can feel as real as when the event originally happened and can be just as frightening. Not all flashbacks are visual and sometimes they can be like an 'instant replay' of an event, sometimes like a snapshot or recurring image. Flashbacks can also include sounds, smells, words or a phrase. They usually go together with intense feelings and can be triggered by the time, year, season, smells, a film, a song, words, an event, a movie, pictures, tastes, touch or a sound. Sometimes sex can trigger flashbacks.

Things you might find helpful:

- Tell yourself it's a flashback, a normal response to the abuse you experienced.
- If possible, look around you and remind yourself that you are in the here and now, not the past- this is called 'grounding'
- Ground yourself by looking at your hands and reminding yourself of who you are now (hands tend to change as we grow older and can help you come back into the adult part of yourself).
- Try to breathe from your diaphragm, focus on your breathing. This means breathing through your nose and can sometimes help stop a panic attack.
- Carry something in your pocket or around your neck. Hold onto this and tell yourself you are safe in the now. It might be a crystal, a stone or a small familiar item that makes you feel comfortable, happy or safe.
- If a flashback happens at night, try to write it down, get up, have a drink or read or listen to music until you feel safe enough to go back to bed.
- If a flashback happens during sex, it is ok to ask your partner to stop and to take some time out before resuming sex.
- Do something that helps you relax after you have a flashback.
- Try to talk to someone - a counsellor or trusted friend or member of your support group after you have had a flashback.

Remember, flashbacks are a normal response to what you have experienced and as you work through your abuse, they will become less intrusive. Sometimes flashbacks can increase when you start to talk about your abuse in counselling or in a group. This does not mean you are 'getting worse'. It usually means that memories and feelings are surfacing for you and can now be dealt with.

Thanks to the Silent No More Project for this information

