**COPING WITH FLASHBACKS & NIGHTMARES**

*Handout 1*

**Grounding Exercises**

Grounding exercises help to bring your focus back into the present.

- Focus on your breathing. Breathe slowly in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Become aware of what is under your feet and your hands, e.g., the carpet under your feet, the wood of the chair arms under your hands.
- Make physical contact with an object associated with the present time. If the images are associated with something that happened when you were a child, choose an object that can act as a reminder that you are now an adult. A ring, a bracelet, car keys or any object that will be easily accessible to you at all times is best.
- Hearing someone else’s voice can help you to keep a link with the present time. If there is anyone with you who will be supportive, ask them to keep talking to you ~ it doesn’t matter what they say, although reminding you where you are can be an added help.
- Follow the advice on reality orientation below.

**Exercise 1 ~ Reality Orientation**

Reality orientation is about reminding yourself of your present situation. To help you bring yourself back to present reality when you are about to have a flashback, or you are in a flashback.

Get a small piece of card the size of a postcard and copy out sentences 1-6 below, filling in the blanks. Miss out any sentences that remind you of your flashbacks. Keep this card with you at all times, and if you are about to go into a flashback get it out and read it. Write down the answers again if you can.

1. My name is ________________________________
2. I am ____________ years old.
3. I live at (write your address) ____________________________
4. I live with ________________________________________
5. I work as _________________________________________
6. I have _______ children. They are called __________________

Copy sentences 7-10 below and keep a copy with you at all times. Every time you are about to go into a flashback get this paper out and answer the following questions. Write the answers down if you can. Write down where you are and what you can see, hear and touch in reality. Don’t write down the flashback.

7. I am in/at (where you are) ____________________________
8. I can see _________________________________________
9. I can hear _________________________________________
10. I can touch ________________________________________

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Handout 2

Dealing with Flashbacks

Below are ten steps to help you deal with flashbacks. Photocopy this page or copy the steps out on to a piece of card and keep it with you at all times. When you feel a flashback coming on read the steps below and act on them. If there is someone you trust who would be willing to help you, prepare them in advance for what might happen by explaining to them about flashbacks. Ask them to help you work through these steps when you are having a flashback.

During the Flashback

1  Recognise and name what is happening.
   'I'm having a flashback'.
2  Tell someone else what is happening.
   Even if you are not with people who know how to help you, it is worth telling them that you need time and space to deal with what is happening to you.
3  Remind yourself that the worst is over.
   E.g., 'This isn't happening now even if it feels as if it is. I'm remembering something that happened years ago. It's over'.
4  Breathe slowly, focus on your breathing and ground yourself.
5  Re-orientate yourself to the present.
   Use exercise 1 above.
6  Remind yourself that you are an adult.
   Remind yourself that you are an adult now and try to calm and reassure the part of you that is frightened and feels as if you are a child.

After the Flashback

7  Take time to recover.
   Flashbacks can be emotionally and physically exhausting. Take time to recover ~ rest and be kind to yourself.
8  Write down what happened in the flashback.
   The content of your flashback might provide useful information about what is still bothering you and what you are still having difficulty coming to terms with.
9  Identify what triggered the flashback and write it down.
   Look back at previous exercise.
10 Learn from it.
   Although having a flashback can be very frightening, it is not a sign of failure but an experience you can learn from and use. Could you have done anything differently?