

Flashbacks

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What are flashbacks?

A flashback is a vivid experience in which you relive some aspects of a traumatic event or feel as if it is happening right now. This can sometimes be like watching a video of what happened, but flashbacks do not necessarily involve seeing images, or reliving events from start to finish.

You might experience any of the following:

- seeing full or partial images of what happened
- noticing sounds, smells or tastes connected to the trauma
- feeling physical sensations, such as pain or pressure
- experiencing emotions that you felt during the trauma.

You might notice that particular places, people or situations can trigger a flashback for you, which could be due to them reminding you of the trauma in some way. Or you might find that flashbacks seem to happen at random. Flashbacks can last for just a few seconds, or continue for several hours or even days.

A flashback may be temporary and you may maintain some connection with the present moment or you may lose all awareness of what's going on around you, being taken completely back to your traumatic event.

Flashbacks are used to move back in time and show an event relevant to the current moment in time. The difference between a flashback and a simple memory is, the flashback is presented as action—as a live scene. A memory is a recollection portrayed that way

PTSD

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health problem you may develop after experiencing traumatic events. The condition was first recognised in war veterans. It has had different names in the past, such as 'shell shock', but it's not only diagnosed in soldiers. A wide range of traumatic experiences can be causes of PTSD.



When you go through something you find traumatic it's understandable to experience some symptoms of PTSD afterwards, such as feeling numb or having trouble sleeping. This is sometimes described as an 'acute stress reaction'.

Many people find that these symptoms disappear within a few weeks, but if your symptoms last for longer than a month, you might be given a diagnosis of PTSD. Your GP might refer you to a specialist before this if your symptoms are particularly severe.

[See symptoms of PTSD here.](#)

Managing flashbacks

Flashbacks can be very distressing, but there are things you can do that might help. You could:

- **Focus on your breathing.** When you are frightened, you might stop breathing normally. This increases feelings of fear and panic, so it can help to concentrate on breathing slowly in and out while counting to five.
- **Carry an object that reminds you of the present.** Some people find it helpful to touch or look at a particular object during a flashback. This might be something you decide to carry in your pocket or bag, or something that you have with you anyway, such as a keyring or a piece of jewellery.
- **Tell yourself that you are safe.** It may help to tell yourself that the trauma is over and you are safe now. It can be hard to think in this way during a flashback, so it could help to write down or record some useful phrases at a time when you're feeling better.
- **Comfort yourself.** For example, you could curl up in a blanket, cuddle a pet, listen to soothing music or watch a favourite film.
- **Keep a diary.** Making a note of what happens when you have a flashback could help you spot patterns in what triggers these experiences for you. You might also learn to notice early signs that they are beginning to happen.
- **Try grounding techniques.** Grounding techniques can keep you connected to the present and help you cope with flashbacks or intrusive thoughts. For example, you could describe your surroundings out loud or count objects of a particular type or colour.

Where can I get support?

It can be scary to reach out for support, but you deserve to be listened to and given the right support when and if you need it. Below is a list of services that may be of help to you.



Say it Loud: At Say it Loud, we are used as the first point of contact if you are unsure what has happened to you and you don't know who to talk to or sometimes we are used as just a safe space to vent if needed. We provide emotional support via our chat line used on Instagram by trained volunteers. We also provide a free platform in which we educate the general public as well as supporting loved ones of survivors. Our chat-line runs from 5pm - 8pm Monday to Friday. You can contact us on instagram @sayitloudteam, via our website www.sayitloudspace.com or by our email contact@sayitloudspace.com

Rape Crisis England & Wales is the charity working to end sexual violence and abuse.



They are the membership organisation for Rape Crisis Centres who deliver specialist services to those affected by sexual violence in England & Wales. Together with their member Rape Crisis centres, they aim to educate, influence and make change. They provide specialist information and support to all those affected by sexual violence in England & Wales. You can call their helpline on: 0808 802 9999 or visit their website at: <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/>



Survivors UK provides an online helpline and other services for adult men (aged 18+) who want to talk about rape or sexual abuse.



Childline offers free, confidential advice and support for children and young people.

You can have a 1-2-1 counsellor chat online, or call them free on 0800 1111.

