

Coping with Flashbacks and Dissociation during Covid-19

Flashbacks are upsetting memories that come back to you unexpectedly in vivid images, sounds, smells... They can make you feel as if you are re-living the trauma. You may feel the same or similar emotions (e.g fear, helplessness) or body sensations (e.g rapid heart rate, pain) that you felt then. **Dissociation** can happen when you feel so overwhelmed by a traumatic experience that you may lose touch with where you are or may feel unreal.

Refocus your attention.

Concentrate on something in your environment: the colours, shapes, textures of objects around you; the feeling of the arms of a chair, the titles of books on a shelf or pictures on a wall. Describe these yourself in detail in your head.



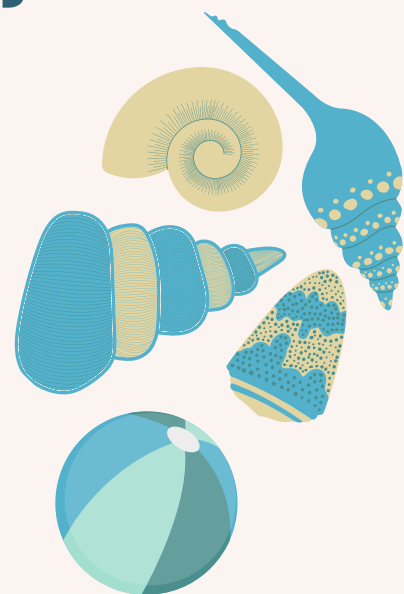
Visualise a "grounding" image.

Rehearse a soothing image using your 'mind's eye' or imagination, which helps you to feel in control and safe – a place you've been to or a place you can imagine, like a beach or a landscape.



Find a "grounding" object.

This is a comforting, tangible object you can keep on you, look at or squeeze when you start to dissociate to bring you back into the present. You could use a stress ball, pebbles from a beach, or a photograph of a loved one.



Develop a "grounding" phrase.

A few words or a tune which is a reminder that you are surviving in the present. Phrases can range from a brief "I am OK" to lengthy statements like:



"I am surviving", "I am strong",
"My skills are important and helpful",
"I am doing my best under the circumstances".

Smell.

Smell can be very powerful in bringing your awareness back to the present. Try to find a strong but pleasant smell that you can carry around with you. Make sure it is a smell that does not remind you of the past. For example, you could choose a strong-smelling aftershave or perfume or an aromatherapy oil.



Tell someone close to you.

Tell them how they might recognise that you are dissociating or having a flashback. Tell them a word or gesture which they could use to interrupt the experience, e.g. saying your name or touching your arm.

