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Opening Times:
Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm

Further information & advice:

Rape Crisis Helpline:
Freephone 08088 01 03 02
6pm-midnight daily
www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk

Samaritans: 0845 90 90 90
www.samaritans.org

Young Minds: 020 7336 8445
www.youngminds.org.uk

Childline: 0800 1111
www.childline.org.uk



**Fife Rape & Sexual
Assault Centre
(FRASAC)**

**YOUNG
PERSONS'
PROJECT**



**COPING
WITH
FLASHBACKS**

WHAT ARE FLASHBACKS?

Flashbacks are memories of past traumas; a memory of a frightening or painful experience which occurred either in childhood or adult life. Many people who have experienced sexual abuse, rape or any other traumatic event can go on to experience flashbacks. It tends not to be like an ordinary memory, but more a sudden and unexpected intrusion.

A flashback can feel almost as real as when it originally happened and can also be as frightening. You may have the sense of panic, being trapped, feeling powerless, with no memory stimulating it. The feelings are so frightening because the feelings/sensations are not related to the reality of the present. You may begin to feel that you are crazy and are afraid of telling anyone what you are experiencing.

These experiences can also happen in dreams, often called 'night terrors'. If this happens try to write it down, then go and have something warm to drink, watch some TV, listen to music or do something else that you find relaxing. It's often best not to try and sleep until you have been able to relax for a while.

Not everyone's flashbacks are visual. Some take the form of words and phrases or sounds that were heard in the past. They can be accompanied by intense feelings, e.g. shame, sadness, anger, or physical sensations known as 'body memories', which may have been felt at the time of the original abuse or traumatic event.

Flashbacks can happen at any time, anywhere and often occur without warning. They can be triggered by the time of year or day, TV programmes, films, smells, words, phrases, songs, places, someone who reminds you in some way of your abuser, pictures, tastes, a particular feeling such as fear or anxiety, having sex or being intimate with your partner. These can occur instantly or sometime later. Sometimes a flashback can occur in response to hearing voices that tell you to do things, e.g. harm yourself or someone else. Hearing voices can be very frightening.

IDEAS ON HOW TO COPE WITH FLASHBACKS

- ◆ Tell yourself that what you are experiencing is a flashback and that this is a normal reaction to the abuse or traumatic event you experienced. It may be useful to look around you and take note of what is happening in the here and now, to bring yourself back to the present.
- ◆ You may find it reassuring or grounding to carry a stone or something familiar and comforting in your pocket that you can stroke, hold or rub when a flashback occurs. Some women keep an elastic band around their wrist and 'ping it' to try and bring them back to the here and now.
- ◆ Breathe! When we get scared we stop breathing and our body begins to panic from the lack of oxygen. Try to breathe from your diaphragm. Put your hand just above your navel and breathe so your hand is pushed in and out. This can help prevent a panic attack.
- ◆ If the flashback occurs whilst you are out and about, try to get yourself to somewhere that you feel safe and secure.
- ◆ It may be useful to write the flashback down or tell it to someone you trust - although it can be very painful to speak about it, talking it over with someone can help your healing.
- ◆ If you self-harm in response to a flashback, try to take some precautions to minimise the longer term harm that you might do to yourself (see our Self-Harm leaflet).
- ◆ You could try and identify if there is anything in particular that triggers your flashbacks. It may be useful in the short-term to avoid your triggers, although you can't always control when they occur.
- ◆ If you start experiencing a flashback while having sex with your partner, you can stop and take time to relax. It's OK to take time out from the sexual side of your relationship to work through these memories if you need to.
- ◆ Take time to recover after a flashback. Do something that helps you relax, e.g. have a bath, listen to your favourite music.
- ◆ Know that you are **not** crazy.....you are healing. **Be patient.**

REMEMBER FLASHBACKS ARE A NORMAL RESPONSE TO WHAT YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED