

17 Gaining control over flashbacks



If you are working through *The Warrior Within*, this exercise and further useful information to help you in your recovery can be found on pages 70-71. This exercise assumes you have completed exercise sheet 1 **Starting an activity journal**.

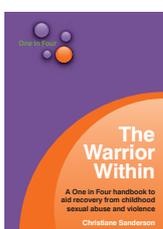
 **If this exercise is too difficult or upsetting, STOP. Take a break from it and make a commitment to return to it at a later point.**

In order to gain control over flashbacks you will need to develop a plan of how to manage them. This can be done prior to an actual flashback, when you are calm and relaxed, which you can then rehearse and practise on a daily basis, so that it becomes automatic.

In your journal try to identify any triggers that have activated flashbacks in the past. Next write down the various ways that you can remind yourself that this is a flashback and keep you grounded in the present. It may be helpful to write down a mantra such as *'This is a memory not a repeat of the trauma. I am remembering, it is not happening now. I am no longer in danger'* or *'This is a flashback and this is a normal reaction to trauma. It happened in the past and the worst is over and it is not happening now.'* Try to keep your statements short to make it easier to remember them. It helps to leave out the details of the trauma as this can intensify the flashback.

Practise to find the right words that work for you. When you have found a statement or mantra that suits you, write it down on a sticky note or piece of card. This can then be displayed as a reminder. Alternatively, you can record it on an MP3 player or as a voicemail message on your mobile phone. You can also share these statements with a trusted friend or partner so they can coach you or guide you through it.

Remember that you are not going mad. Flashbacks are normal and are a signal that you are dealing with overwhelming experiences and trying to make sense of them.



The content of this exercise sheet is based on *The Warrior Within: A One in Four handbook to aid recovery from childhood sexual abuse and violence* by Christiane Sanderson

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