

# LIGHTBULB SESSION 2





## COURSE WORKBOOK








# FLASHBACKS

## RECAP FROM SESSION 1...

-  Some of the common signs and symptoms of trauma.
-  How trauma can affect the way we think, feel and behave: The CBT Vicious Circle.
-  Fight/flight/freeze response: how trauma affects the body.
-  Diaphragmatic breathing: a technique to manage the physical symptoms of trauma. Remember balloon breathing?

## HOMEWORK REVIEW

-  Were you able to recognise your own trauma vicious CBT circle?
-  Were you able to identify your own thoughts, feelings, body symptoms and behaviours?
-  How did you find diaphragmatic breathing as a technique of relaxation?

## TODAY'S PLAN

- ✓ What is a flashback and how does it maintain PTSD?
- ✓ Why do we experience flashbacks?
- ✓ Look at grounding techniques and strategies to manage flashbacks.



## WHAT IS A FLASHBACK?

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.

A flashback can sometimes be like watching a video of what happened or have similar themes to the trauma you experienced.

A flashback can feel very real and can be scary and upsetting.

Flashbacks can last for just a few seconds or continue for several hours or even days.

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, or you might find that flashbacks seem to happen at random.

“A flashback can feel as though you are actually being drawn back into the traumatic experience, like it is still happening or happening all over again.

They can occur uninvited, stirring up images, sensations and emotions of the original event.

A flashback can be so overwhelming to one’s sense of reality, that many who suffer from them believe they are reliving or re-experiencing their trauma.

A flashback is able to mimic the real thing because it provokes a similar level of stress in the body.

The same hormones course through your veins as did at the time of the actual trauma, setting your heart pounding and preparing your muscles and other body systems to react as they did at the time.”

(Rothschild, 2010)



**Our alarm system is on red alert and can be triggered by a vivid memory.**



### **WHY DO WE HAVE FLASHBACKS?**

A flashback is our brain's way of processing the trauma so that the experience is filed away as a past memory (rather than a current threat) – this enables us to heal.

### **MEMORY SYSTEM**

We have 2 memory systems that are connected to each other:

- Verbal accessible memory – ‘the story of what happened’.
- Situational accessible memory – ‘our emotions, physical symptoms and senses’.
- In a trauma, these 2 memory systems don't talk to each other.



Normal memories are ‘time stamped’ (so we know the memory was in the past).

Trauma memories are not ‘time stamped’. This explains why a trauma can still feel very real and if the trauma is happening now. This also keep our alarm system going.



When we are very distressed, it is difficult to think rationally and to decide how to help ourselves.

**think**

**What do you do to stop or reduce flashbacks?**

**How can we manage flashbacks?**

We can cope with flashbacks by getting our heads out of the past (trauma) and into the present (safety), by using grounding techniques.

### **WHAT ARE GROUNDING TECHNIQUES?**

- Grounding techniques can be very useful when we feel really distressed, particularly when the distress makes us feel very unreal or detached, or it feels like we are in a different situation to where we really are.
- Grounding techniques help to bring us back to the here & now.

**Aim:** to turn your focus of attention away from the past or current distress, and into the present moment where you are safe.

**There are 2 types of grounding techniques:**

1. Mental strategy – telling yourself you are safe now.
2. Physical strategy – doing something to help you be in the present moment.





## MENTAL GROUNDING STRATEGY

***Tell yourself you are having a flashback or anxiety attack and that this is ok and normal...***

“The worst is over”

“It happened in the past, but it is not happening now”

“That was then, and this is now”

“You survived the awfulness then, so you can survive and get through what you are remembering now”

“I am safe now”

***Ask yourself questions in order to bring yourself into the present...***

You could write these questions down. For example:

“Where am I right now?”

“What day is it?” & “What year is it?”

“How old am I?”

“Where do I live?”

## POSITIVE COPING STATEMENTS

- ✓ Write yourself a grounding card to keep with you at those distressing times.
- ✓ This includes reassuring words of comfort that you plan to say to yourself when you are experiencing a flashback, to help bring us back to the here and now.
- ✓ You could place this next to your bed, around the house or in your car.





### Some examples...

- ✓ "I am a good person going through a rough time"
- ✓ "I can handle this and get better"
- ✓ "This feeling will pass"
- ✓ "It is 2021 and I am safe. My trauma happened a long time ago and survived."
- ✓ "My trauma happened in the past and I am only remembering it now."
- ✓ "The memories upset me, but they are just memories, they cannot hurt me."
- ✓ "I am safe in the present moment. I know I have survived because I am
- ✓ bigger and older than in my trauma memory. I have my own family now,
- ✓ and I am loved."
- ✓ "I am Sam. I am safe right now. This is just a memory – that was then
- ✓ and this is now. I am in my kitchen at home and it is 2021."
- ✓ "This flashback will pass".

What are your own calming statements?





**What are your own reassuring words that you plan to say to yourself when you are experiencing a flashback?**

### **PHYSICAL GROUNDING STRATEGY**

Use your senses to help you be in the present moment...

**Open your eyes** – put a light on if its a dark room

**Look around** – notice the colours, the people, the shapes of things.

**Listen** – notice the sounds around you: the traffic, voices, washing machine, music etc.

**Notice your body** – how your clothes feel on your skin, movement of your hair, feel the chair or the floor supporting you – how that feels in your feet, your legs, your body.

**Smell** – notice the smells around you.

**Taste** – notice any tastes







## TOUCH

Some people like a grounding object e.g., a small stone which they can hold on to as required.

An object that reminds you that they are in the 'here & now', to bring you back to the present moment if you get caught up in an unwanted memory

Describe what you can feel – e.g. “I am sitting on a chair” “I am holding onto a scarf”.

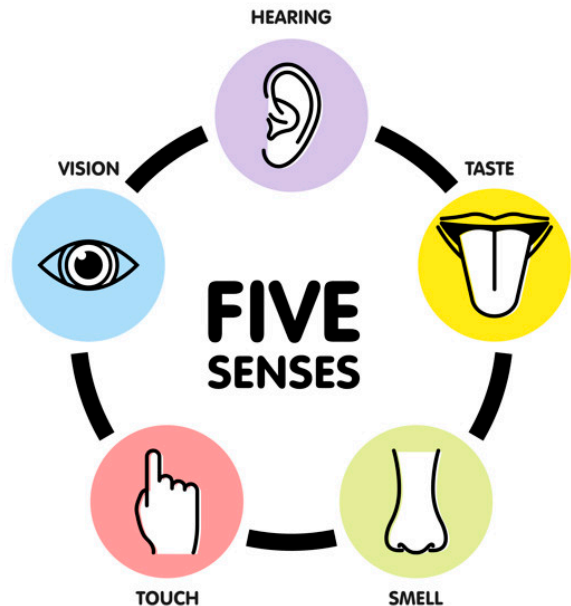
## SMELL

Smells are an incredibly powerful way of coming to our senses. If you deliberately pay attention to a smell, you are truly in the present moment.

Try to find a smell that has a positive association for you – a smell that reminds you of happy times, or a smell you enjoy.

Carry it with you and use it to bring yourself back to the present moment if you get caught up in an unwanted memory.

- ✓ E.g., small bottle of essential oil – mint, lavender, lemon
- ✓ E.g., perfume-soaked tissue
- ✓ E.g., spices from the kitchen
- ✓ E.g., small dried flowers such as lavender.



## EMERGENCY BAG OR BOX

Collect together items that are meaningful, or that you know will be helpful.

**Aim:** help soothe all your senses.

It can be useful to keep an 'emergency' or 'soothe' bag or box, in a prominent and handy place, so that when you feel overwhelming distressed, you can go to your bag/box and find something that will help you to cope and feel better.

### Ideas...

Vision – photo, DVD, book, picture of a beautiful safe place.

Hearing – music, recording of a friend's voice, audiobook.

Smell or taste – oils, sweets, favourite perfume, coffee sachet.

Touch – soft blanket, teddy bear, hand lotion, nail varnish.

Activities that help with outer focus – puzzle books, arts and craft, prompt for physical exercise, notebook and pen.

Activities that help with your thinking and feeling – therapy worksheets, positive coping statements card.





## OTHER PRACTICAL GROUNDING TECHNIQUES

- ✓ Rub your arms and legs – that feeling is in the now.
- ✓ Stand up – put your feet firmly on the ground.
- ✓ Move about – stretch, stamp your feet, jump up 7 down, clap your hands.
- ✓ Breath mindfully – breathe deeply down to your stomach.
- ✓ Describe out loud what you are doing right now, in great detail.
- ✓ Mental games – e.g., count backward from 100 in 7s, think of 10 different animals, 10 blue things, say the alphabet backwards etc.

**Which of these grounding techniques would be helpful for you and what ones will you practice as homework?**



## PEACEFUL PLACE VISUALISATION EXERCISE

**(explore the Wellbeing website for relaxation exercises)**

The purpose of this peaceful place relaxation script is to relax your mind and guide you to imagine your own peaceful, safe place. This place will be an imaginary area that you can visualize to help calm and relax your mind when you are feeling stressed.

Begin by setting aside a few minutes so that you can relax without having anything else you need to focus on. Find a comfortable position.



For the next few moments, focus on calming your mind by focusing on your breathing. Allow your breathing to centre and relax you. Breathe in.... and out.

In..... out....

In.... out....

Continue to breathe slowly and peacefully as you allow the tension to start to leave your body.

Release the areas of tension, feeling your muscles relax and become more comfortable with each breath.

Continue to let your breathing relax you....

Breathe in...2...3...4.... hold...2...3..... out...2...3...4..... 5

again...2...3.... 4....hold...2...3.... out...2...3...4.... 5

Continue to breathe slowly, gently, comfortably....

Let the rate of your breathing become gradually slower as your body relaxes.

Now begin to create a picture in your mind of a place where you can completely relax. Imagine what this place needs to be like in order for you to feel calm and relaxed.

Start with the physical layout of the place you are imagining.... where is this peaceful place? You might envision somewhere outdoors.... or indoors.... it may be a small place or large one.... create an image of this place.

(pause)

Now picture some more details about your peaceful place. Who is in this place? Are you alone? Or perhaps you are with someone else? Are there other people present? Animals? Birds? Imagine who is at your place, whether it is you only, or if you have company.

(pause)

Imagine even more detail about your surroundings. Focus now on the relaxing sounds around you in your peaceful place.

Now imagine any tastes and smells your place has to offer.

Imagine the sensations of touch... including the temperature, any breeze that may be present, the surface you are on.... imagine the details of this calming place in your mind.



Focus now on the sights of your place - colours, shapes.... objects.... plants.... water.... all of the beautiful things that make your place enjoyable.

To add further detail to this relaxing scene, imagine yourself there. What would you be doing in this calming place? Perhaps you are just sitting, enjoying this place, relaxing. Maybe you imagine walking around.... or doing any other variety of activities.

Picture yourself in this peaceful place. Imagine a feeling of calm.... of peace.... a place where you have no worries, cares, or concerns.... a place where you can simply rejuvenate, relax, and enjoy just being.

(pause)

Enjoy your peaceful place for a few moments more. Memorize the sights, sounds, and sensations around you. Know that you can return to this place in your mind whenever you need a break. You can take a mental vacation to allow yourself to relax and regroup before returning to your regular roles.

In these last few moments of relaxation, create a picture in your mind that you will return to the next time you need a quick relaxation break. Picture yourself in your peaceful place. This moment you are imagining now, you can picture again the next time you need to relax.

When you are ready to return to your day, file away the imaginary place in your mind, waiting for you the next time you need it.

Turn your attention back to the present. Notice your surroundings as your body and mind return to their usual level of alertness and wakefulness.

Keep with you the feeling of calm from your peaceful place as you return to your everyday life.



**What have you learned today? Note down 3 key points.**



## HOMWORK

- ✓ Practice some of the grounding techniques discussed.
- ✓ Mental strategies: telling yourself you are safe.
- ✓ Positive coping statement card.
- ✓ Physical grounding strategies: use your senses to bring your mind to the present moment including smell and touch objects.
- ✓ Emergency bag or box.
- ✓ Practice Peaceful Place relaxation exercise over the next week.  
Exercises are available on Wellbeing website under “self-help” and then “relaxation tab”.



## MY NOTES

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for writing notes.