

Resources for survivors

Dealing with nightmares



It is quite common for people who have been sexually abused when they were children, to have nightmares. Nightmares can come out of nowhere.

Nightmares can:

- Be very real reminders of traumatic events.
- Bring back feelings of loneliness, fear, anxiety.
- Have a physical reaction in you for example give you breathing difficulties and chest tightness.
- Trigger thoughts about the abuse that unsettle you.

These feelings can last all day.

Things you can do to manage nightmares

The most important thing you can do to manage nightmares in the short term, is to set up a good regular sleep routine. This routine will include:

- Starting to wind down an hour or so before going to bed.
- Going to bed and getting up at a similar time each day.
- Exercising even in a small way, each day.
- Avoiding eating, drinking coffee or alcohol in the hours before going to bed.

- Reducing looking at electronic devices.
- Making sure your bedroom is restful.

If you are woken by a distressing dream or nightmare

- Reassure yourself that you are safe.
- This is not happening now.
- Breathe slowly and deeply.
- Bring yourself back to the present, stamp your feet, look in the mirror.
- Check you are physically safe – turn on lights, check the doors are locked.
- Have a drink of water.
- Do something to take your mind off the nightmare, for example read a book or magazine, listen to some quiet music.
- Talk with someone who is supportive for example your partner.

Consider speaking with your doctor if your nightmares persist.

