

# Coping with Trauma Using Image Rescripting

## Objective

To reduce the distressing effects of traumatic memories and nightmares.

## You Should Know

**Image Rescripting** is a therapeutic technique used to help people process and heal from distressing memories, particularly those related to trauma. The technique asks you to imagine the traumatic event and then “rewrite” it as a more positive story. You can’t change the past, but you can change the way you feel about past traumas. Your imagination may prove to be a powerful tool in helping you heal. This technique can also be useful in helping you cope with recurring nightmares.

## How It Works:

### 1. Recall the Distressing Memory

Think about a specific negative or traumatic memory. Try and get a vivid picture of what is happening, but also focus on the emotions, the physical sensations, and the thoughts you are having.

### 2. Identify Negative Core Feelings/Beliefs

Think about negative feelings or beliefs associated with this memory. For example, “He got sick and died because I wasn’t there to help him.”

### 3. Rescript the Memory

This is where the change happens. Try “rewriting” the story you tell yourself about the event.

- **Change the outcome:** Imagine a more positive ending to the event.
- **Introduce a protective figure:** This could be your adult self, a trusted friend, or your therapist. This figure is stepping in to protect, comfort, or support your younger self.
- **Give your younger self what they needed:** This could be safety, validation, love, or the ability to fight back.

### 4. Integrate the New Image

Reflect on how this rescripted version of the trauma feels and how it changes your current beliefs. Create a new image of the trauma, and reflect on how this image

reduces the emotional charge of the original memory and fosters healthier self-perceptions.

**Example:**

Let's say someone was harshly bullied in elementary school and still feels powerless when recalling those memories.

- **Original Memory:**  
They remember being surrounded by bullies, feeling helpless and humiliated and frightened.
- **Rescripting:**  
They imagine their adult self stepping into the scene, standing up to the bullies, protecting the younger self, and offering comforting words like, "You didn't deserve this. You are stronger than any bully."
- **Outcome:**  
Over time, this can reduce the intensity of shame and helplessness, and help the person develop a sense of empowerment.

Now it's your turn to try the Rescripting Technique.

**Step 1: Identify a Distressing Memory**

Think of a memory that still causes you emotional pain or discomfort. This could be from childhood, adolescence, or adulthood.

**1. What memory are you focusing on?**

*(Describe the event briefly, including where you were, who was involved, and what happened.)*

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**2. How does this memory make you feel?**

*(List all the emotions that come up when you think about this event.)*

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**3. What negative thoughts or beliefs are tied to this memory?**

*(Examples: "I am not good enough," "I am powerless," "I am unlovable.")*

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**Step 2: Explore the Impact of the Memory**

**4. How has this memory affected your life today?**

*(Consider your relationships, self-esteem, emotions, or behaviors.)*

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**5. What did you need at that moment that you didn't get?**

*(Examples: safety, love, validation, protection, someone to stand up for you.)*

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**Step 3: Rescript the Memory**

Now, let's rewrite the story.

**6. Who will enter the memory to help?**

*(It could be your adult self, a mentor, a family member, or someone else you trust.)*

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**7. What will they do or say to protect or comfort you?**

*(Describe how they intervene. What actions do they take? What words do they offer?)*

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**8. Imagine giving your younger self what they needed.**

*(Describe how the new version of the memory feels. What has changed?)*

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**Step 4: Reflect on the New Image**

**9. How does this rescripted memory make you feel?**

*(What emotions come up when you imagine the new version?)*

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**10. What new beliefs can you take from this rescripted memory?**

*(Examples: "I am strong," "I am worthy of love," "I can protect myself.")*

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**11. How can you apply these new beliefs to your life today?**

*(Consider how this new perspective can influence your relationships, self-esteem, and daily life.)*

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**Final Thoughts:**

Rescripting a memory may not change the past, but it can change how you carry it into your present and future. It may take time and practice, so be patient with yourself. If strong emotions come up, consider discussing them with your therapist.

**Notes:**

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