

The brain doesn't know the difference between what's real and what's imagined. People who witness trauma often experience exactly the same symptoms as those experiencing it. I don't know about you, but I'd take a bullet for my children before I'd ever WATCH anything bad ever happen to them.

The good news for coping is that you can use this to your advantage. Imagining yourself in a safe place, looking at pictures of yourself where you look strong and confident, this can all help your brain to process trauma.

Ever heard the phrase "you'll believe it when you see it?". Using your visual sense is a powerful tool.

Sight

Grounding image

Use a grounding image on the lock screen of your phone. Something that really lights up the pleasure centre of your brain.

Animal videos

There is real research behind the benefits of watching funny animal videos, so go and watch Sophie the bulldog roll down a hill – that's one of my faves.

Write on yourself

Use temporary tattoos with positive affirmations, or write on yourself with a good old-fashioned marker. Ignite your inner teenage rebel who used to get into trouble for writing on their skin. We know that writing on yourself with biro will not, in fact, cause blood poisoning (did anyone else's mum say that or just mine?!)

Write on your mirror, put up stickers and bunting

I have some stickers that say "you are enough". I put them above my light switches so I'll pair the message with the action of turning on or off the light.

In case no one else tells you and you need reminding:

You are not alone in this

You are doing the best you can

This experience doesn't define who you are

Make a vision board

Either an old fashioned vision board with cut out pictures or use Pinterest. Pictures that make you feel calm and happy and quotes you like. Doesn't need to be complicated.

Plan a dream holiday

Having something to look forward to and dreaming is an important part of overall wellness. Remind yourself that the days and night at the moment might be long, but you won't be in this place, in this phase of life forever.

Visualisation

It might be practising closing your eyes and seeing a snapshot image in your mind. You in your happy place - on holiday or maybe a totally made up place.

Guided meditation

Find a quick guided meditation on YouTube, or use an app.

Look outside at the natural world around you

What's three things you can see? Notice the texture – smooth, shiny or rough? And the colours? See if you can describe the exact 'green' – emerald, Kelly green? Can you count the petals on a flower? This is a basic mindfulness exercise that activates different parts of your brain, allowing the emotional part to settle.

Stay future focussed by setting alerts on your phone

Note the day and time. Put an alert in your phone for 6 months or 12 months from now with the event "what was I worried about this day this time in (the current year)" Don't actually write what it is, but challenge yourself to the idea that life is not static. It's not linear. Things can change, you can change and just maybe you won't have a clue what you were worried about in 6 -12 months time?

Describe the back of your hand (B)

Or a small square of carpet, or another area you can see. All you're going to do is just describe it to yourself – aloud or just mentally

Safe-place visualisation

Imagine a peaceful, safe place where you can relax. Your brain doesn't know the difference between what's really happening to you and what you're just imagining. So if you create a peaceful, relaxing scene in your thoughts, your body will often respond to those soothing ideas.

Maybe it's a place from childhood, a holiday, or a completely made up place.

Choose your own adventure fantasy