Coping with flashbacks

What to do during a flashback and afterwards.

A flashback is a memory so vivid it feels as if the trauma is happening again. It is frightening, and it is a memory. It cannot hurt you, and it will pass.

During a flashback

1. **Tell yourself what it is.** "This is a flashback. It is a memory. It is not happening now."
2. **Open your eyes and look around.** Name five things you can see. Say the date and where you are.
3. **Feel your feet on the floor.** Press them down. Feel the chair holding you.
4. **Breathe out slowly.** Longer out than in.
5. **Use your senses.** Hold something cold or textured. Smell something strong. Sip water.
6. **Remind yourself it is over.** "That was then. I survived. I am safe now."

Afterwards

- Give yourself time. You may feel shaky or tired.
- Do something comforting and ordinary: a warm drink, a blanket, a walk.
- If you can, tell someone you trust.
- Note what set it off, when you are ready. Triggers get easier to handle once you know them.

A sentence to finish

"Right now I am feeling (frightened) and my body is (shaking), because I am remembering (what happened). At the same time, I am looking around and I can see (the kitchen, my dog). It is (today's date). So I know that (it) is not happening now."

My grounding kit: things to keep nearby that bring me back (something to hold, smell, taste or look at)

Cut along the dashed lines. Keep a card in your wallet or phone case.

This is a flashback. It is a memory. It is not happening now. Look around. Feet on the floor. Breathe out. It is over. I am safe.

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What helps me most to come back

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The sentence to finish is adapted from the flashback halting protocol described by Babette Rothschild.

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