Rewriting a recurring nightmare

How to rewrite a recurring nightmare while awake and rehearse the new version.

Name _____ Date _____

Nightmares are common after trauma. They are the mind trying, and failing, to process what happened. A repeated nightmare is also partly a habit, and habits can be changed.

Imagery rehearsal

1. Choose a nightmare. Start with one that is upsetting but not the worst.
2. Write it down briefly, as it usually goes.
3. Change it in any way you like: the ending, the setting, who is there, what you can do. It does not need to be realistic.
4. Write out the new version in detail.
5. Rehearse the new version in your mind for 10 to 15 minutes each day, while awake and relaxed. Do not rehearse the old one.

The nightmare, briefly

My new version. What happens now?

When and where I will rehearse it each day

If you wake from a nightmare

- Turn on a light. Say where you are and what the date is.
- Feel the bed under you. Touch something familiar.
- Get up for a few minutes if you need to. Have a sip of water.
- Remind yourself: "It was a dream. I am awake. I am safe."

Imagery rehearsal was developed by Barry Krakow and colleagues. Many people notice fewer or milder nightmares within a few weeks.

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