

WHEN THE PAST FEELS PRESENT

MEMORY, REMINDER, OR DANGER?

Trauma reminders can make the body react as if an earlier danger is happening again. Sometimes there is also real present danger. The goal is to tell the difference as accurately as possible.

1. NOTICE THE CUE

- What happened just before the reaction?
- Was it a person, place, date, smell, sound, phrase, body sensation, social-media post, conflict, news event, or something less obvious?
- What did my body do?

2. NAME WHAT IT REMINDS YOU OF

- What past experience does this resemble?
- What feels the same?
- What emotion, belief, image, or memory came forward?
- You do not have to describe the entire trauma to orient yourself.

3. CHECK THE PRESENT

- Where am I right now? What is today's date?
- What is different from the earlier event?
- What observable evidence suggests safety?
- What observable evidence suggests a current threat?

4. IF DANGER IS CURRENT

- Do not use grounding to talk yourself out of a credible threat.
- Use the safety response that fits: leave, call for help, contact an advocate, document, block when safe, seek medical care, or use another protection strategy.
- Trust concrete evidence over pressure to minimize harm.

5. IF THIS IS A REMINDER

- Orient to current sights, sounds, textures, people, and choices.
- Try: 'My body remembers danger. I am noticing what is different right now.'
- Choose a present-focused action that supports regulation and your values.

6. LEARN THE PATTERN

- What cues tend to activate me?
- Which grounding or support actually helps?
- What makes the reaction worse?
- Would trauma-focused treatment, cultural/spiritual support, disability accommodation, or another resource help me respond with more choice?

Honor the alarm, then investigate it: What is memory, what is present, and what action fits the evidence now?