

# Coping with Intrusive Images Using the Imagery Rescripting Technique

## Objective

To reduce the incidence of intrusive images by using the imagery rescripting technique.

## What to Know

If you struggle with intrusive, disturbing thoughts or images, you can change them through imagery rescripting (ImRs). ImRs is a therapeutic technique that can help you change negative or distressing memories by creating new, positive, and empowering images. This technique can help with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), social phobia, health anxiety, childhood trauma, and grief. Some studies indicate that clients who consistently use the ImRs technique achieve clinical goals faster than those who use traditional cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) methods.

ImRs involves recalling a recurring disturbing image in your mind's eye and changing it into something different. The more you practice, the easier it will be to alter the image the next time it pops into your head. You can close your eyes or leave them open if that is more comfortable. When you change simple images (such as an image from a car accident), you can “choose” a different outcome, such as the airbag deploying safely. You can practice regularly on your own or in-session with your therapist.

A more complex version of ImRs can be used with multiple images that tell a story. The “scene” may be a memory, an obsessive recurring worry, a stressful social interaction, or a traumatic childhood memory. Using ImRs, you change the ending of the story. Here is an example:

*Jennifer discusses a traumatic childhood memory during her therapy session. She recalls a time when she was eight years old, when her mother yelled at her in a hurtful and demeaning manner. Jennifer's therapist asks her to close her eyes while imagining the scene. She then changes the ending by confronting her mother (as an adult) and removes herself (as a child) from the scene to offer care and encouragement. This altered ending—untrue and not part of history—still becomes part of Jennifer's brain's “record” of the event.*

Imagination is an important element for success—no matter how unbelievable. If you are rescripting an abusive situation, you can turn the person involved into a character. If you are revisiting a painful childhood memory, you can turn the child into a confident giant that speaks their mind. You can also imagine a bubble of safety around the child.

Research indicates that neural pathways related to fear and the stress response from a traumatic memory can be altered with ImRs. You are not changing the historical events, but you *can* change the meaning of the event.

This worksheet will guide you through the process of rescripting a specific memory that causes you distress.

## What to Do

First, find a quiet and comfortable space where you can focus and use your imagination freely. Take breaks or stop if you feel overwhelmed. Complete the following steps.

### 1. Identify a Distressing Memory

Describe the memory you want to work on. Be specific about the event, people involved, and your emotional response to it.

---

---

---

---

---

---

### 2. Explore the Negative Beliefs

Write down the negative beliefs or self-critical thoughts associated with this memory. For example, "I'm so stupid!" "I'm unlovable," or "I can't trust anyone."

---

---

---

### 3. Create a Safe Space

Close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and imagine a safe and peaceful place where you feel relaxed and secure. Describe this place in detail. What does it look like? How does it feel? Engage your senses and immerse yourself in this safe space. Write down the details below.

---

---

---

---

---

---

#### 4. Rewrite the Memory

Now, imagine yourself back in the distressing memory, but this time you have the power to change what happens. Visualize a positive outcome, a supportive presence, or an empowering action. Rewrite the scene in a way that challenges your negative beliefs and brings you a sense of healing and resolution.

Describe the new scene as vividly as possible.

---

---

---

---

---

---

Who is there with you? What are they saying or doing? How do you respond? How does it feel to experience this new version of the memory? Take your time and let your imagination guide you.

---

---

---

---

---

---

#### 5. Challenge Negative Beliefs

Reflect on the new scene you created and consider how it challenges your negative beliefs. Write down the new positive beliefs or self-affirming thoughts that emerge from this rescripted memory. For example, "I am deserving of love," "I am resilient," or "I can trust myself."

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 6. Rehearse and Reinforce

Imagine yourself revisiting this rescripted memory regularly in your mind. See yourself responding with strength and confidence. Practice embracing the positive beliefs you identified. Visualize these new beliefs becoming a part of your everyday life and shaping your future experiences. What was this like?

---

---

---

## 7. Grounding and Self-Care

Take a moment to ground yourself in the present moment. Wiggle your toes, take a deep breath, and notice the sensations in your body. Engage in self-care activities that nurture, such as going for a walk, talking to a supportive friend, or practicing mindfulness. What will you do?

---

---

---

## Reflections on This Exercise

Did this activity help you reduce the incidence of intrusive images? Why or why not?

---

---

---

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

---

---

---