

SLEEP

AND



NIGHTMARES

SAFELINE

It is common for survivors of sexual abuse to experience problems with sleeping. This may include problems such as getting to sleep, or staying asleep, fear associated with night-time or fear of going to sleep and experiencing nightmares. Thus, this can leave you exhausted and traumatised when you wake up.

Sleep problems, when they are long term, can affect your physical and emotional health. This can also lead to a vicious cycle of anxiety, stress, and sleep problems/nightmares.

If this is happening to you, it is a natural response to your experience of sexual violence/abuse, and it shared by many survivors. There are steps you can take to help you get a good night's sleep.

Only try what you feel comfortable with, and try not to put too much pressure on yourself. If something isn't working for you (or doesn't feel possible just now), you can try something else, or come back to it another time.



ABOUT SAFELINE

Safeline supports people who have been affected by sexual abuse at any time in their lives and works to prevent its occurrence. We provide a range of tailored and inclusive support and prevention services to adults and children regardless of personal characteristics, backgrounds, and beliefs. We also support family and friends who have been affected.

COPING WITH NIGHTMARES

When you wake up from a nightmare, remind yourself that it was not real. Nightmares are very distressing but they are a memory of what happened; they are not happening now. Although distressing, nightmares are actually healthy ways your mind is trying to cope with an process what has happened.

So what can you do when you wake from a nightmare to help ground yourself?

Notice your surroundings - what can you see, hear, touch, smell, and taste? Try the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique in the following space. Write down:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

Some people also find it helpful to practise relaxation techniques such as having a warm drink; listening to music; writing down feelings; reading a book; or having a bath.

WRITING DOWN FEELINGS

Write down your thoughts and feelings here when you struggle with sleep problems and nightmares.

COPING WITH NIGHTMARES

Call a helpline, speak to someone you trust, anything that helps you reduce stress and anxiety. You could potentially contact the following helplines:

- **National Male Survivors Helpline**
 - [0808 800 5005](tel:08088005005)
 - safeline.org.uk
- **24/7 Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Line**
 - [0808 500 2222](tel:08085002222)
 - 247sexualabusesupport.org.uk
- **Victim Support**
 - [0808 168 9111](tel:08081689111)
 - victimsupport.org.uk
- **The National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC)**
 - [0808 801 0331](tel:08088010331)
 - support@napac.org.uk
 - napac.org.uk

Alongside reaching out for help, you can try these coping mechanisms.

Develop a safe place image – a place in your mind which makes you feel safe or comfortable. Practise visiting this safe space when you are feeling good, so when you need it, you can go there

Keep a diary or speak to someone to identify any patterns, or help take the image or event out of your head. This may help you feel more in control.

IMPROVING SLEEP HABITS

Establish a routine:

Try and keep regular times for going to bed and getting up. This way your body will associate these times with sleeping.

Go to Bed when you are tired:

Go to bed when you are tired and get up at your regular time. It can help to avoid taking naps during the day. Regular exercise, even mild activity can help, but not within 4 hours of going to bed.

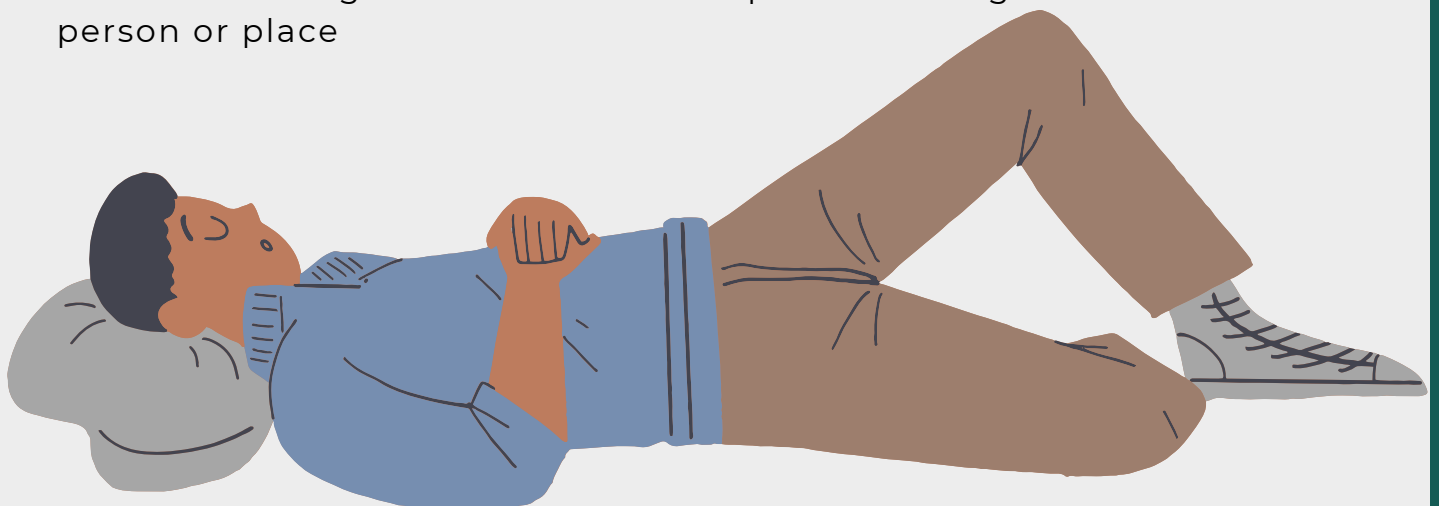
Think about your sleeping environment:

Think about the room temperature (ideally the room should be cool), light and noise levels (quiet, dark room). Keep your bedroom for sleeping. Avoid watching TV, or using electrical devices before you go to sleep as these activities could stimulate your mind and make it harder to sleep. See your bedroom as a place of rest and relaxation.

Learn to destress and relax before sleeping:

Have a warm bath, practice relaxation techniques such as breathing techniques or mindfulness. Try out complementary remedies. Yoga, meditation, homeopathy or herbal remedies, such as lavender or valerian, may help.

Trying to get rid of difficult thoughts by writing them down or drawing images which play on your mind. Trying to interrupt unwanted thoughts with activities or positive thoughts about a person or place



IMPROVING SLEEP HABITS

Try not to force sleep:

Don't try to force sleep. It will only make you feel more anxious. Try keeping your eyes open instead and, as they start to close, tell yourself to resist. The more you try to stay awake, the sleepier you'll become » Do not stay in bed. If you cannot sleep, get up after 20 minutes and go through your relaxation routine again.

Consider what you eat and drink before sleeping:

Try not to eat a large meal before going to bed, and if possible eat your last meal a few hours before going to bed. Avoid rich, spicy or sugar-rich foods, red meat and cheese. Drinks containing caffeine should also be avoided as they can act as stimulants and may keep you awake. Alcohol may make you feel sleepy. However, even moderate alcohol or smoking can affect your quality of sleep.

Use the following space to write down your current bed time routine. Consider how you can improve it to better support your wellbeing.





WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Head to our website to access more resources that can support you on your recovery journey. Or contact us today for support.



National Male Survivor Helpline:

0808 800 5005

Safeline Office Number:

01926 402 498

**National Telephone & Online
Counselling Service for survivors aged
16+ of child sexual abuse:**

01926 402 498

WWW.SAFELINE.ORG.UK

