

## What We Can Do About It

While this response is normal and your brain is doing what it is supposed to do, there are things you can do to 'ground' yourself in the present. This gives your brain a helping hand to know that the moment you are remembering happened in the past and give it that 'timestamp'. The psychology service can provide some strategies you can use if you find yourself losing connection with the present moment. These techniques will seem simple! This is on purpose so that you can more easily use them when needed, which may be when you are in great pain or feeling extreme emotions. Although they are simple, these strategies have been shown to work!

## Other Strategies Which Can Help You

An important part of processing memories - including difficult ones - is to create a 'safe story' about what happened. We can help our brain to do this by talking to people we trust about what happened as well as our thoughts and feelings. Another strategy is to schedule a variety of meaningful activities into your day. Days on the ward can be long - having a routine and things to look forward to is good for the mind and body.

## Accessing Further Psychological Support

Your physical and emotional recovery may take some time and it is normal to feel strong emotions or to feel 'up and down'. You are still able to access psychology as an outpatient once you have left hospital. If you feel that you require further support, you can ask someone in your medical team to make a referral to the **Clinical Psychology Service**.

**Clinical Psychology Department**  
Orange Zone, St Helens Hospital  
Marshall Cross Road,  
St Helens, Merseyside, WA9 3DA  
Telephone: 01744 646864

 /sthknhs  @sthk.nhs

[www.sthk.nhs.uk](http://www.sthk.nhs.uk)

## Psychological support for people who have experienced a traumatic event

This leaflet can be made available  
in alternative languages / formats on request.

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Na żądanie ta ulotka może zostać udostępniona  
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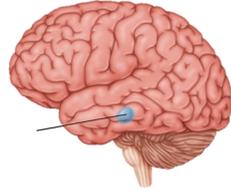
**Author:** Consultant Clinical Psychologist  
**Department:** Clinical psychology  
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## How Our Brains Respond to Threat

### The Amygdala

In each of our brains are 2 clusters of cells called the 'amygdala'. The amygdala is the 'smoke detector' of the brain. Basically, its job is to judge whether our survival is in danger and raise the alarm.

If the amygdala senses a threat, it sends messages to the body to release stress hormones to give the body energy to protect itself. This results in our 'fight or flight' response. The body may also respond with a 'freeze' response and 'shut down' instead. Again, this is a way our body tries to protect us when our survival is threatened.



The amygdala does this quickly and the body reacts before we are consciously aware of what the threat may be. Because it is so important to our survival to be aware of danger, this part of the brain is very sensitive and sometimes reacts when a situation is not threatening (a false alarm).

### The Neocortex

We also have an area called the neocortex (literally meaning 'new brain'). It works slower than the amygdala and can stop the stress response if there is a false alarm.

It evaluates all our memories and attaches meaning to them, which allows us to learn from our experiences (for example, remembering that a certain food makes us sick so we can avoid it).

This part of the brain also puts a 'timestamp' on our memories so that we can store these away in our mind as past experiences and not something happening in the present.



## How We Process Memories

We process memories by thinking, dreaming, and talking about them. For example, on a normal day, we might have an argument or make an embarrassing mistake. At first, we may feel angry or embarrassed and can picture the experience very clearly (including images, sounds, emotions, and physical sensations).

During the day, we are likely to think about and talk to others about the situation as well as our thoughts and feelings about what happened. After a while, we can remember what happened, however we know that it happened in the past and it no longer feels as intense.

Often the memory turns from a vivid picture into a story, and we add 'meaning' to it (for example, "I made the mistake because I was tired"). In normal circumstances, our brains do this automatically.



After a traumatic experience, the brain must work very hard to process the memories of the event. This is incredibly difficult especially if there is any threat to our survival. In order to do this, the mind replays the event in the days to weeks following.

Flashbacks (i.e. re-experiencing a memory as if it is currently happening) are therefore a normal response to trauma. Although they are horrible to experience, they mean that your brain is working hard to process the memory.

The brain does most of this processing at rest, meaning you are likely to think more about this at night and have dreams about the incident. These flashbacks can also be triggered by internal/external reminders of the event such as pain or certain smells/sounds/sights.

