

## Imagery

Imagery is using your imagination. You can use your imagination to soothe yourself, solve a problem, or visualize a goal. However, your imagination can also frighten and confuse you. PTSD and Dissociation often come up through imagery that is unconsciously driven. In other words, you may not have control over it... yet. Frequently, we scare ourselves by imagining threats, negative outcomes, or other frightening things. When your imagination scares you, you may think that someone dangerous (from the past) is around. You may even "see" that person. Your imagination can act as a kind of movie projector making you see things that aren't real in the present. Because of PTSD your memory can call to mind frightening thoughts, pictures, sounds tastes, smells and/or physical experiences from the past. These flashbacks are coming from your mind, so you can use your mind - your imagination - to fight them and get them under control. Here are some important helpful images:

GAUGE	REGULATOR	CONTAINER
Something that lets you know how intense things are inside (i.e. a thermometer, speedometer, numbers 1----10, colors)	Something that helps you control the intensity of things inside (i.e. thermostat, accelerator, brake, or volume dial).	Something suitable for storing images, thoughts, feelings, or impulses (i.e. safe, photo album, book, or vacuum).

First you need to think of at least three images for each category. Don't forget to include at least one that will work for younger parts of yourself if you have DID. Choose images that describe your internal states. Do your thoughts race? Are your feelings like waves or colors? Write or draw the images in your art book or journal. Next, practice checking in with yourself using these images. How high is the thermometer? How fast are things going? Practice regulating the intensity by turning things up or down. Notice the differences. Practice with pleasant or small feelings so you don't overwhelm yourself. When you practice putting things in containers, don't put all of the feeling away. Try to keep a whatever you can stand in your present awareness, and write about how that is for you in your journal. Put the part of the feeling that is overwhelming or from the past into a container to be gotten later in therapy.

You can also use imagery to develop internal safe places. At its core, safety is an internal issue, and the need to feel safe or be able to truthfully check on safety is basic. With or without DID, we all need to be able to create space within ourselves where we can "take a break" from life's struggles. This can be done with imagery. "Whyelse would we hang pretty pictures and

keep calendars of beaches by our desks. They bring to mind pleasant imagery in the middle of a hard day and allow us to imagine, to picture how we would feel if we were at the beach instead of knee deep in paper work. This can provide very real relief. This kind of imagery can reduce stress and tension.

Work to create safe places for all parts if you have them. Be specific. Would there be plants or animals? Inside or outside? Real or imaginary? Warm or cool? What would you have there? Toys, food? Draw or make a collage (pictures cut from magazines and glued onto a larger paper) of your safe places. Invite all parts of your mind to participate. Remember that some places are unsafe and are not valid safe places such as: bars or other scary, potentially abusive environments.

Exercise: 1. Use imagery to develop safe places for you and all parts if you have DID.

- A. Draw or make collages of these places
- B. Practice using these places to soothe and calm yourself
- C. Run internal safe places drills

2. Check your internal gauge three times today

- A. Note the intensity of things and write it in your journal
- B. Use your regulators and containers to turn things up or down as needed
- C. Document the experience in your journal

When are you most likely to think about scary images?

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List five images that are calming for you:

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. \_\_\_\_\_

Are there any small objects you can carry with you to remind you of these calming images? If so, list them:

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. \_\_\_\_\_

Trauma disorders are disorders of avoidance that seriously interfere with your ability to keep track of what's going on inside. While this was helpful in the past, you probably had fewer resources and very little support. In the present it is disabling. Internal awareness provides access to hidden resources and hidden pain. You must decide for yourself the costs and benefits of continuing this way.

PTSD symptoms that reduce internal awareness include: numbing, avoidance, constricted range of feelings. Dissociative symptoms reducing internal awareness include: trancing, switching, amnesia, depersonalization (out of body experiences), and derealization (feeling in a dream like state). Below is a table comparing dissociating/avoidance and internal awareness.

<u>Dissociation / Avoidance</u>	<u>Internal Awareness</u>
Unaware of what's inside	Aware of what's going on inside
Feel safe but aren't safe	Increases safety through awareness of resources
Makes problem solving hard	Increases awareness of choices
Reduces self control	Increases self control
Limits access to feelings	Provides access to feelings

Add other differences you identify. Dissociation and avoidance tell you that if you aren't aware of something it does not affect you. The question is when you dissociate are you truly shutting out threatening experiences or are you just postponing the experience? We know from flashbacks that you are only postponing the experience to have it replay intrusively when you least expect it.

Dissociation interferes with problem solving because it leaves you out of the loop. If you are not in touch with the present reality and don't have access to all of your internal resources your problem solving skills are reduced.

Mind flight, or phobic responses to your thoughts and feelings, leaves you in a panic, helpless to escape your internal process and feeling powerless to cope with outside events or inside reactions.