

Sleep Hygiene Planner:

Getting into a routine can help the body regulate itself. By winding down around the time you choose to go to sleep you can help the body get into a more relaxed state.

If it feels useful to you, you can use the planner to map out your sleep hygiene activities. Some things you can include are: when to stop looking at screens, brush teeth, wash face, meditate, journal, stop drinking caffeine, and the time you want to be in bed.

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|----------|--|
| 4:00 PM | |
| 5:00 PM. | |
| 6:00 PM. | |
| 7:00 PM | |
| 8:00 PM | |
| 9:00 PM | |
| 10:00 PM | |
| 11:00 PM | |
| 12:00 AM | |

Support From The Gatehouse:

After your intake appointment the programs available to you are:

- Phase 1 Program
- Weekly Co-ed Drop-in
- Partners Support 1-day workshop (attended with your partner)

If you are not at the point in your journey where you feel ready to go into a group you can request *up to six* one-on-one support sessions.

Please note that the programs offered at The Gatehouse are peer-support based and not counselling. For more information and to register call (416) 255-5900.

Looking for walk-in counselling?

There are various walk in counselling service locations in Toronto. The find the one nearest you visit: <http://www.whatsupwalkin.ca/>

Please note that these times are subject to change without notice.

Emergency / Crisis Resources:

If you are in crisis and need of immediate support call 911. You may also request a Mobile Crisis Intervention Team, in this case a mental health nurse will accompany the officer.

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|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Toronto Distress Centre | (416) 408-4357 |
| Gerstein Crisis Centre | (416) 929-5200 |
| Assaulted Women's Helpline | (416) 863-0511 |
| Spectra Helpline | (416) 920-0497 |
| Spectra (Brampton/Mississauga) | (905) 459-7777 |
| York Region Crisis Line | 1 (855) 310-2673 |



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For Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse: Coping with Nightmares



What are Nightmares?

Nightmares are a common experience for survivors of trauma. They can be understood as a re-experiencing of emotions and sensations that were present during the time of the traumatic event. Nightmares (and vivid dreaming) occurs during rapid eye movement sleep (REM), researchers believe this sleep stage is important for memory and human functioning. (Noll et al., 2005)

Nightmares can impact an individual's health. Since the re-experiencing occurs during sleep it can lead to heightened anxiety around bedtime, physical tension, and an overall lack of sleep. Not getting enough sleep is linked to other health impacts such as impaired cognition, decreased energy levels, and low mood. (Noll et al., 2005)

What Triggers Nightmares?

The experience of nightmares and their triggers will be unique for every survivor. However, some commonalities are...

- **Feelings of Safety:** Sleep occurs in places and at times that feel safe. Feeling a potential threat to safety will impact the quality of sleep or prevent sleep altogether.
- **Increase in the flight-or-flight response before bed:** The fight-or-flight response is the body's way of preparing someone from an impending threat to safety. This increase in vigilance will impact sleep quality or prevent sleep all together.
- **Rumination and worry:** The increase in mental activity when an individual is worrying or ruminating impacts sleep quality.
- **Substance use:** Substances can interfere with sleep quality even if it feels like they help you fall asleep and stay asleep. The actual quality of the sleep can be impacted.

(Noll et al., 2005)

Some methods to cope with nightmares, when they occur...

Grounding Breathing:

Focusing on the breath and counting can distract the mind and help bring the body back down from the state of fear, anxiousness, and helplessness it may be feeling.

Try: sitting up straight, inhaling deeply into the belly for a count of 5, and exhaling through the mouth (pulling in the belly) for a count of 10., until you feel some of the tension melting away.

Increase Feelings of Safety:

When nightmares occur you may feel unsafe going back to sleep. Knowing the environments, people, and things that help you feel safe and trying to implement them can help reduce the anxiety related to going back to sleep.

Some Examples: Turning on a nightlight, getting an extra blanket (turning down the room temperature), hugging a pet or teddy bear.

Changing the Narrative:

Something that is frightening about nightmares is the feeling that you have no control over what is happening. Changing the narrative by writing down the nightmare and altering it in a way that give you back control, may help reduce rumination and allow you the space to process your feelings.

Try: Leaving a pad of paper and a pen on your bedside table, writing down your version of the dream, you may choose to rip it up after as an act of releasing it, and that's totally OK.

Some methods to help reduce & prevent the experience of nightmares

The experience of nightmares can be an extremely torturous effect of trauma. Preventing their re-occurrence, in some cases, is a primary goal. Research has supported the following treatments in reducing the symptoms that follow the experience of a traumatic event.

- **Trauma-specific Counselling:** Receiving support from a social worker, psychologist or other regulated professional who is specialized in providing care for survivors of trauma.
- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT):** CBT is designed to restructure the automatic thoughts, emotions, and actions, that have been learned over an individual's lifetime. Replacing them with restructured thoughts that help the individual better cope with stress, anxiety, and fear.
- **Imagery Rehearsal Therapy:** Involves writing down dreams, altering them, and rehearsing the alteration with their imagination. This may also be used as part of CBT.

(Maher, Rego, & Asnis, 2006)

What are some self-help strategies?

One of the main self-help strategies for reducing the experience of nightmares and improving sleep quality is increasing sleep hygiene and overall health. Below are some suggestions:

- Improving diet and exercise
- Designating the bedroom as only for sleep & intimacy
- Meditation
- Reducing caffeine consumption
- Removing screens around bedtime
- Restricting napping
- Not eating a heavy meal right before bed