

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for **Nightmares**

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SESSION 3: TARGETING NIGHTMARES, PART 1

Today, we'll review your Sleep Diary and Nightmare Log and change your sleep routine if needed. We will discuss ways to address your nightmares.

FACING THE NIGHTMARE

Because nightmares are stressful, many people try not to talk or think about them. Trying to avoid nightmares is very common. This may seem like it is helpful because it gets rid of stress, but it can make problems worse in the long run.

- Dealing with fears by facing them is one of the very oldest types of therapy.
 - What do most people say you should do if you fall off a bike?
 - How might a child feel after they fall off a bike and then get back on?
 - What do most parents tell their children to do? Why?

How have you overcome a fear in the past?

What we are going to do today is very similar. Today, you will take a big step toward facing the nightmares by writing out your nightmare. This will take back power from the nightmare.

- You will do this in session, so I will be here to support you.
- First, we will review guidelines for writing the nightmare and some examples.

WRITE THE NIGHTMARE OUT

There are a few guidelines to keep in mind:

- It is important to think about your most upsetting nightmare.
 - Does that nightmare come to mind?
 - It is not always clear which nightmare is the most upsetting. Consider which nightmare you have the most often, or a recent nightmare that was upsetting, that you can clearly remember, or that leads to the most sleep loss or distress the next day.
- Write in present tense (e.g., "It is dark" or "We are bumping along").
- Write in first person (e.g., "I am going" or "I see the blood").
- Use sensory details. What are you seeing? Smelling? Tasting? Temperature? Lights? Sounds? The more details, the more vivid it will be. Try to make the image as clear as possible.
- Try to write down as much of the nightmare as you can. Be sure to include the beginning, middle, and end.

Nightmare Example 1. Sexual Assault Survivor:

"I walk into the room. It is very loud and there are people everywhere. The decorations are all green and everyone is dressed in green and gold. I am looking for my friends in the throng of people. A guy I know from the office approaches me. He is clearly drunk and swaying while he hands me a drink. I ask him if he's seen Susan or Rose. He does not answer, pulling me into the middle of the room and tries to dance with me. There is so much noise – people laughing, music – I start to feel disoriented. I pull away and head to a different room. I see Susan and Rose across the room and call out to them. I start toward them when the guy grabs my arm and pulls me out of the room. We are in a room alone. I am scared and feeling ill and tell him I have to leave. He pushes me down. I scream and wake up."



Nightmare Example 2. Service member who deployed after 9/11:

"I am headed toward the shower, looking forward to a brief break from the stench. A call comes for us to report for a mission. I'm not sure what's up, and I can feel my stomach clench. There's a sour taste in my mouth. We get a bare-bones briefing and mount up. I have this nagging feeling that something is wrong, but there's nothing to do but roll on. I'm in the back, sweating. Jones is on gunner. The sweat trickles down my back as I feel the truck slow down. I can taste diesel and I hear the foreign nationals outside. My heart speeds up. Something bad is coming—we need to keep moving. I shake my head. I know I'm dreaming—I can feel my weapon, feel the sweat drip down my back, but I'm in motion, and I cannot stop what I'm doing. My body is on autopilot. At the same time, I can see myself like I'm watching TV, watching death march in my direction. The truck stops and I hear Jones, shouting. I hear "IED! IED!" and then, BOOM! There's ringing in my ears and my vision is pulling in and out, distorting. I look right and see blood everywhere. I realize there are pieces of our translator on me. I smell burning flesh and fuel. I look for Jones. He's knocked out, bleeding, but I cannot see where from. My vision turns red and my eyes burn. I realize there's blood in my eyes. Is it mine? I hear the volley of gunfire starting—behind us, to both sides. I hear my heart whooshing in my ears and then my vision starts to fade, first grey, then black. I am useless."

- You'll have about ten minutes to write. Remember, if you start getting upset, that you are in a safe place, you are not alone; it is only a dream.
- Sometimes people feel like the nightmare is real or the trauma is happening all over again. It is NOT happening again. It is a dream. It is not real and it cannot hurt you. Remind yourself that it is not real and that you are safe. Look around and describe what you see. This can help you to have more control over your feelings about the nightmare. You are not alone. I will be here in the room for support but will be focusing on something else to give you space to write.

SUDS Rating: How tense/upset do you feel before writing out the nightmare (0-100)	
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You can use this space below to write out your nightmare:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

As you read your nightmare, be on the lookout for any of the following themes in your nightmare.

- **Safety:** Feeling unsafe, seeing dangerous things happening, or being in danger.
- **Power/Control:** Not being able to control what is happening, not calling the shots.
- **Intimacy:** Feeling close to other people, or a lack of closeness.
- **Trust:** Not being able to count on others or yourself.
- **Esteem:** Not feeling good about yourself or not feeling good about others.

SUDS Rating: How tense/upset do you feel after reading the nightmare (0–100)?	
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Congratulations! This was probably the hardest part of the therapy! You faced the thing that has been bothering you. You are already taking back your power and increasing the control in your life.

PROCESS NIGHTMARE

As you read your nightmare, did you notice any of the following themes mentioned above in your nightmare?

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These ideas you notice are very important to keep in your mind during this next part, when we get to make some changes. These ideas are considered “stuck points”—thoughts or feelings that you are having problems working through. Picking out these themes is the first step toward dealing with them.

CHANGE THE NIGHTMARE THEMES

Now that you have written out and read your nightmare, it is time to make some changes!

- The nightmare is not helping you. It is causing awakenings and distress and is not serving a purpose. The idea of rescripting the nightmare—that is, writing a new changed dream script—is to give your mind a different direction to go in during the night: different images, storylines, and emotions. This is like the way athletes

imagine their actions before a competition. If you have ever watched the Olympics, they typically show athletes closing their eyes and making body movements right before their performance. This improves performance. Rewriting the nightmare is a way of helping improve sleep performance.

- Another way to think about it is that we are priming the brain to have a different type of dream. Let's review an example of priming the brain. If you have ever been interested in getting a new car, you might think about some options. Once you are interested in a particular type of car, you start noticing them everywhere. The number of that type of car did not suddenly change. Your brain was just primed to notice them and started finding them around you more. Similarly, we want to prime the brain to be ready for different emotions and images at night that are not so intense and distressing that they cause awakening.
- Believe it or not, changing your nightmare is just like changing any other behavior, because it involves learning. When nightmares happen over and over for more than 1 month, the nightmare patterns become the automatic, or "default" dream pattern. Creating and repeating new dream scripts that are not bothersome during the day can reverse the old, bothersome dream pattern.
- What we have found is working with the nightmare in a safe environment will give you a chance to have more control over the nightmare. The changed version of the dream will also show your ability to control what happens in the dream.
- Imagery can be very powerful, and you may have many images stuck in your mind. You can learn to use imagery to help you master those negative images.

One of your assignments this week will be to brainstorm ways you will change your nightmare. You can change any part you want—the beginning, the middle, or the end—as long as it targets the idea/theme you noticed. If you noticed several of the themes in your nightmare, it may be helpful to pick one or two to focus on for the next part of the treatment.

- For the treatment to work, your new dream needs to have some kind of connection to the nightmare. Here are some ideas that others have found worked well for them:
 - **Power-focused ideas:** more or better weapons, size change, rank change, control of time, control of environment.
 - **Safety-focused ideas:** body armor, physical cover, additional exits, change injury location/type, night vision, scopes, advance warning, prophetic dream/bad feeling, support person, law enforcement, ability to fly/teleport/be invisible. You can also consider changing/reducing the intensity of what happened—i.e., turning down the volume of what happened, or making a PG-13 version of what happened.
 - **Intimacy-focused ideas:** add in a trusted friend, have a battle buddy, increase honesty, emotional honesty.

- **Trust-focused ideas:** being believed, leadership following through, promises kept, consistent rules and punishment, added security, making multiple copies of items, conversation changes or adding conversations you wish would have happened.
- **Esteem-focused ideas:** act in a way that is in line with your beliefs, recognition from others, different/better training, honoring the dead/injured, result is a different ending, “spirit or ghost discussion” (can talk with someone who is dead/knocked out).
- Imagining yourself taking an active role in the new dream can be important.
- As you think about how to change your nightmare, try not to judge your ideas immediately. Write down any ideas you have on the log in your packet. As you think about changing your nightmare, it may feel strange or even “untrue.” If that happens, it’s okay! That is a sign that it is different from the old nightmare. We want to develop a “new” habit, so it may feel different at first. Some changes in nightmares are mild and realistic, and some are “wild and wacky.” Believe it or not, both can provide you with some relief.
- The changes we make in dream scripts are aimed to give you an increased feeling of control over the nightmare and its content, or to help you to complete the dream in a more comfortable way.

Let’s look at an example first.

Rescription Example 1. Sexual Assault Survivor

Target Themes: Power, Intimacy, Safety

Underlines show where changes were made to the nightmare.

“I walk into the room. It is very loud and there are people everywhere. The decorations are all green and everyone is dressed in green and gold. I am looking for my friends in the throng of people. A guy I know from the office approaches me. He is clearly drunk and swaying while he hands me a drink. I quickly text Susan and Rose our code phrase to indicate that I need help. This guy grabs me and pulls me into the middle of the room and tries to dance with me. There is so much noise – people laughing, music – I start to feel disoriented. I realize that a song I know is playing. It is “Thriller” by Michael Jackson. As it plays, this guy does the classic dance with his arms out and marches toward me, but suddenly the song stops and this guy freezes in place. Now I see Susan and Rose enter from across the room. They are wearing tan jumpsuits with proton packs on their back. A new song starts to play instead, and it is “Ghostbusters” from the classic movie. Susan and Rose walk up to me and hand me their extra proton pack. I position it on my back. I look at this guy still frozen. I am no longer alone. I am no longer afraid. I have the power. I look at my girls and say our code phrase from before, “Who you gonna call?” They shout in response, “Creepbusters!” We blast this guy with our proton packs and use them to capture him in the creep box. We toss the creep box into a side room and go back to the party. The next song comes on, and it’s “Girls just want

to have fun” by Cyndi Lauper. I scream with joy! Susan and Rose hold my hands as we walk on the dance floor, and I’ve never felt so strong.”



Rescription Example 2. Service member who deployed after 9/11:

Target Themes: safety and power/control

Underlines show where changes were made to the nightmare.

“I am headed toward the shower, looking forward to a brief break from the stench. A call comes for us to report for a mission. I’m not sure what’s up, and I can feel my stomach clench. There’s a sour taste in my mouth. We get a bare bones briefing and mount up. I have this nagging feeling that something is wrong, but there’s nothing I can do but roll on. I realize that I am in a dream. I look down at my hands. I feel my weapon just like I do every night. I have to take back control of this dream. I concentrate on my senses. I feel the vehicle rumbling. I feel my weapon in my hands. I can feel these things. If I can feel these things then I am here. If I am here then I can control them, I think to myself. I call for the vehicle to stop. This is different. I know that I have more options and I decide to take action. I roll up my sleeve to discover the high-tech wristband I have received. I push a button and activate a giant force field that surrounds our convoy. I hear the driver yell “IED,” and there is a loud boom but we all know we are safe. The debris from the explosion bounces off the force field like rain. The smoke clears and no one was hurt. Next I look to the sky, and I call for the end of the night. The sun rises and with its rays, the buildings around me crumble to dust, then the mountains. Soon a plane of nothingness stretches out before me as far as I can see. Grass starts first, shooting up around me, followed by flowers and shrubs. Finally, massive trees burst from beneath, showering me with dirt that gently falls off. A soft trickle gently rises to a quiet roar as a stream rushes past and into existence. I sit here and I know I am safe!”

Remember, looking for the idea(s) and making them part of your changed dream can make you feel more in control.

DEEP BREATHING RELAXATION

Now that we have gone through the nightmare work for the first time, let’s practice another relaxation skill.

For many of us, breathing with our chests is a habit, and it may feel strange to breathe into the belly. Next, we will go through an easy way to start mastering belly breathing.

<p>SUDS Rating: First, tell me how tense you feel on a scale of 0–100, with 0 = completely and deeply relaxed throughout your body, and 100 = extremely tense throughout your body.</p>	
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- Put one hand on your upper chest and one on your belly, just below your rib cage.
- Close your eyes and breathe in slowly through your nose.
- Expand your belly as you breathe in.
- The hand on your belly should move a lot, while the hand on your chest will barely move.
- Pause naturally, then tighten up your stomach muscles and slowly exhale, allowing the air to gradually escape through your lips.
- The hand on your stomach will fall quite a bit, while the hand on your chest will hardly move.
- Try to keep your breathing slow, smooth, and easy. Many people find it easiest to breathe through their nose, but do whatever is most comfortable for you and allows you to breathe most naturally.
- When you breathe in, think “one” to yourself.
- Then breathe out slowly and think the word “relax.”
- On your next breath, think “two” as you breathe in, and “relax” as you breathe out.
- Continue counting until you reach “eight,” and then count backward, back down to “one.”
- Try to focus only on your breathing and the words. Open your eyes when you are finished.

<p>SUDS Rating: Great, now how tense do you feel on the same 100-point scale, with 0 = completely and deeply relaxed throughout your body, and 100 = extremely tense throughout your body.</p>	
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How was that for you? Any difficulties?

SESSION 3 HOME PRACTICE

- Follow your “New Sleep Plan.”
- Complete the Sleep Diary and Nightmare Log.
- Review session information in the patient packet and bring any questions to the next session.
- Practice the relaxation exercise at least two times per day, with one of these times near bedtime, and record your practice on the Sleep Diary and Nightmare Log.
- These media files are available to share or download:
 - Progressive Muscle Relaxation Guided Imagery Script One:
<https://vimeo.com/480387339>
 - Progressive Muscle Relaxation Guided Imagery Script Two:
<https://vimeo.com/480399123>
 - Progressive Muscle Relaxation without Music:
<https://vimeo.com/480401030>
 - Progressive Muscle Relaxation with Music:
<https://vimeo.com/480402598>
- Other relaxation resources that are preferred can be used as well. It is recommended that relaxation practice be at least 10-15 minutes and include some element of guided imagery.
- Start thinking about and making notes of ways to change your nightmare using themes we discussed today. We will write the rescription or changed dream at the next session.

My New Sleep Plan: Session 2-6											
Habits		Under "Habits," check which habits you want to focus on now or later in treatment. Write "NA" for habits that don't apply.									
Now	Later	Date:									
		1. *To help me get out of bed at the same time every day at _____, I will:									
		2. *I will use the bed and bedroom for sleep and sex only. I will not sleep in places other than the bed. To help me do this, I will:									
		3. I will unwind before bed by:									
		4. I will go to bed only when I am sleepy. I will know I am sleepy when:									
		5. *I will get out of bed if awake more than ~ 15 minutes. I won't clock-watch. I will do these activities until I feel sleepy (or for a limited amount of time):									
		6. *I will not nap during the day (or I will only nap for less than 30 minutes before 3:00pm). I will keep myself from napping by:									
		7. I will change my sleep environment by:									
		8. *I will cut down or stop nicotine, alcohol, and/or cannabis at bedtime and at night and will do the following to help myself make these changes:									
		9. I will stop having caffeine at this time:									
		10. I will use these grounding skill(s) to help me after a nightmare:									
		11. I will reduce safety behaviors at night by:									
		12. I will have scheduled worry time or planning time at:									
		13. Other:									
* One of the most important habits.											

Sleep Diary and Nightmare Log Instructions

General Instructions: Complete your sleep diary every day within one hour of getting out of bed in the morning, if possible. If you forget to fill in the diary or are unable to remember, leave the diary blank for that day. Try not to worry about giving exact times and you should not watch the clock. Just give your best estimate.

This diary can be used for people who are awake or asleep at unusual times and in places other than a bed.

"Day" is the time when you choose or are required to be awake. The term "bed" is the place where you usually sleep.

Step-by-step Instructions:

0. **Date.** Enter today's date even though some of the information you input will be from yesterday.
1. **What time did you get into bed?** Record the time you physically got into bed.
2. **What time did you "try" to go to sleep last night last night?** Record the time that you began "trying" to fall asleep. Some people begin trying to go to sleep as soon as they get in bed, while others get into bed and read, watch TV, or other things. *What we want to know for this question is when you first started trying (e.g., closed your eyes, turned out the lights) to go to sleep.*
3. **How long did it take you to fall asleep in minutes?** Beginning at the time you wrote in question 2, record how long it took you to fall asleep.
4. **How many times did you wake up, not counting your final awakening?** How many times did you wake up between the time you first fell asleep and your final awakening? This would include if you woke up for any reason (e.g., nightmare, sounds, perimeter check, check on the safety of the house or a family member).
5. **In total, how long did these awakenings last in minutes?** What was the total time you were awake between the time you first fell asleep and your final awakening? For example, if you woke 3 times for 20 minutes, 35 minutes, and 15 minutes, add them all up ($20 + 35 + 15 = 70$ minutes or 1 hour and 10 minutes).
6. **What time was your final awakening?** Record the last time you woke up for the day.
7. **What time did you get out of bed for the day?** What time did your feet hit the floor with no further attempt at sleeping? This may be different from your final awakening time (e.g., you may have woken up at 0625 but did not get out of bed to start your day until 0720).
8. **How would you rate the quality of your sleep?** "Sleep Quality" is your sense of whether your sleep was good or poor.
9. **In total, how long did you nap or doze yesterday?** Estimate the total amount of time you spent napping or dozing, in hours and minutes. For instance, if you napped twice, once for 30 minutes and once for 60 minutes, and dozed for 10 minutes, you would answer "1 hour 40 minutes." If you did not nap or doze, enter 0 hours 0 minutes.
10. **Last night, how many nightmares did you have that woke you up?** Record the number of nightmares that caused you to wake up from your sleep last night.
11. **How would you rate the overall severity of your nightmares?** What was the overall severity of the nightmares you experienced last night on a scale on 0 to 4, with 4 being the most severe. If you did not experience any nightmares last night write NA.

ITEMS IN BOX ARE ONLY TO BE COMPLETED WHEN ASSIGNED BY THE THERAPIST

12. **Relaxation practice SUDs ratings Practice 1:** Report your Subjective Units of Distress, or SUDS, directly before and after you practice the relaxation exercise during the day. SUDS range from 0 (meaning no distress/tension) to 100 (meaning the most distress/tension you can imagine).
13. **Relaxation practice SUDs ratings Practice 2:** Report your Subjective Units of Distress, or SUDS, directly before and after you practice the relaxation exercise at night before bed on the same 0-100 scale.
14. **How many times did you practice imagining the new dream yesterday and for how many minutes total?** Record the number of times you practiced imaging your new dream and the total time of practice yesterday. For example, if you practiced twice for 10 minutes each, add the time up to equal 20 minutes total and record "2 (20 min)."
15. **Comments:** If your sleep is affected by some unusual event (such as an illness, an emergency, a dog barking, kids crying or some other disturbance), please make brief notes.

Sleep Diary and Nightmare Log

ID/Name: _____		Appointment/Date: _____				
Date	Sample 3/31/22					
1. What time did you get into bed?	8:30 PM					
2. What time did you try to go to sleep last night?	9:30 PM					
3. How long did it take you to fall asleep in minutes?	55 min.					
4. How many times did you wake up, not counting your final awakening?	3 times					
5. In total, how long did these awakenings last in minutes?	70 min					
6. What time was your final awakening?	6:30 AM					
7. What time did you get out of bed for the day?	7:10 AM					
8. How would you rate the quality of your sleep? (0=Very Poor, 1=Poor, 2=Fair, 3=Good, 4=Very Good)	3					
9. In total, how long did you nap or doze yesterday?	45 min					
10. Last night, how many nightmares did you have that woke you up?	2					
11. How would you rate the overall severity of your nightmares? (0=Not at all to 4= Extremely; NA=not applicable)	4					
TO BE COMPLETED ONLY WHEN ASSIGNED						
12. Relaxation Practice 1: SUDs ratings	Before <u>65</u> After <u>50</u>	Before ____ After ____	Before ____ After ____	Before ____ After ____	Before ____ After ____	Before ____ After ____
13. Relaxation Practice 2: SUDs ratings	Before <u>65</u> After <u>50</u>	Before ____ After ____	Before ____ After ____	Before ____ After ____	Before ____ After ____	Before ____ After ____
14. How many times did you practice imagining the new dream yesterday and for how many minutes total?	1 (15 min)					
15. Comments	I have a cold 10 mg Ambien 4 beers					