

What is Imagery Rescripting?

Imagery rescripting is a technique that is used in CBT-based therapy to deal with upsetting or intrusive memories, or future worries, that interrupt daily life by triggering unpleasant images, thoughts, emotions, or sensations. These memories or worries may also interfere with your sleep by making it hard to get to sleep, cause you disturbed sleep throughout the night, or even wake you too early in the morning. As these memories/worries are usually upsetting we try to avoid and push them away - unfortunately, this only makes things worse. With imagery rescripting we work WITH the issues, processing and reworking them so they no longer have power over you in the here and now.

What happens when you are traumatized?

Most of the time your body routinely manages new information and experiences without you being aware of it. However, when something out of the ordinary occurs and you are traumatized by an overwhelming event (e.g. a car accident) or by being repeatedly subjected to distress (e.g. childhood neglect), your natural coping mechanism can become overloaded. This overloading can result in disturbing experiences remaining frozen in your brain or being "unprocessed". Such unprocessed memories and feelings are stored in the limbic system of your brain in a "raw" and emotional form, rather than in a verbal "story" mode.

This limbic system maintains traumatic memories in an isolated memory network that is associated with images, emotions and physical sensations, and which are disconnected from the brain's cortex where we use language to store memories. The limbic system's traumatic memories can be continually triggered when you experience events like the difficult experiences you have been through. Sometimes the memory itself is forgotten, but the painful images and feelings such as anxiety, panic, anger, or despair are continually triggered in the present. Your ability to live in the present and learn from new experiences can therefore become problematic. Imagery rescripting helps create the connections between your brain's memory networks, enabling your brain to process the traumatic memory in a very natural way.

What is an Imagery Rescripting session like?

Imagery rescripting uses your brain's creative processes to heal itself. After a thorough assessment, you will be asked specific questions about a disturbing memory or a future worry. We will map out and work through the "internal movie" and like an editor you will decide how you would like to change it. This is a collaborative process and I can help you decide on a graduated and safe approach. Like movie editors we can watch, rewind, and edit this imagery over and over again until we get it just right. In this process you are taking charge of the image and there is no limit to the changes you can make - they can be as realistic, or fantastical as you like. It doesn't matter how realistic or fanciful the new imagery is, what matters is what it now represents and means to you. By processing the image in a well-supported and safe environment and modifying it, we change its meaning and decrease its power.

But wait, I'm sure you are thinking ... 'what is the point of all this pretending? That's not what really happened!' Imagery rescripting is not about pretending that something bad didn't happen. It is terrible when someone goes through trauma, and the event itself cannot be changed. However, what is also terrible is when the past memory of this trauma continues to hurt the person over and over again. When trauma is stuck, we use imagery rescripting to change the way we interact with this past event in the here and now. Experiences during a session may include changes in thoughts, images, and feelings. With repeated rescripting, the imagery tends to change in such a way that it loses its painful intensity and simply becomes a memory of an event in the past. Interestingly, other associated memories may also heal at the same time, or we can explicitly target them for rescripting as well. This linking of related memories can lead to a dramatic and rapid improvement in many aspects of your life.

Imagery rescripting is a bit like putting an awful photograph back into its album and back on the shelf where it belongs, rather than carrying the photo around in your front pocket all the time. We can finally relate to these images as "just images", and put them to rest, so they have little impact on our daily life now

What can Imagery Rescripting be used for?

As a CBT-based therapy, imagery rescripting has been well researched and has shown to be beneficial for both PTSD and complex PTSD.

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) notes that CBT is a Level 1 treatment for PTSD in their published results for 'Evidence-Based Psychological Interventions: A Literature Review' (2018) for both young people and adults. This is the highest rating that can be applied to a specific therapeutic approach. Research has also found imagery rescripting is also beneficial for Depression and anxiety-based disorder with extremely good results. The World Health Organization (WHO) also supports the use of imagery-based rescripting as part of a trauma-informed CBT for PTSD.

In addition to its use for the treatment of PTSD, research shows that Imagery Rescripting has been successfully used to treat:

- Depression
- Social Anxiety Disorder
- OCD
- Depression
- Personality Disorders
- Eating Disorders
- Health Anxiety
- Panic Disorder and
- Nightmares

Can anyone benefit from Imagery Rescripting?

Imagery Rescripting can accelerate therapy by resolving the impact of your past traumas and allowing you to live more fully in the present. It is not, however, appropriate for everyone. Specifically, people with Aphantasia (the inability to voluntarily create mental images) are unsuitable for this therapeutic process and may benefit from a more narrative approach.

Will I remain in control and empowered?

During Imagery Rescripting, you choose how you wish to reimagine your experiences. Like other psychological treatments we will ensure that you have an appropriate emergency brake signal so you can stop the process at any time. Throughout the session, the therapist will support and facilitate your experience and will help you to immerse and rescript. Reprocessing triggers spontaneous and new connections and insights. As such, many people feel empowered by this type of therapy.

How long does treatment take?

Imagery rescripting forms a part of a longer psychotherapy program. One or more sessions are required for the therapist to understand the nature of the problem and to decide whether Imagery Rescripting is an appropriate treatment for you. During these initial sessions I will discuss Imagery Rescripting with you more fully and give you an opportunity to ask questions. Active Imagery Rescripting sessions easily fit within a standard 55-minute session.

What will it cost?

To conduct Imagery Rescripting sessions in Australia psychologists undergo specialized training. Sessions at our clinic are \$180 (55-minutes). CBT-based imagery rescripting is an approved focused psychological service by Medicare Australia and session rebates (indexed at \$88.25 as of July 1, 2021) may be used. As this treatment is encompassed as part of a CBT-based program it is also frequently supported by your private health insurance (please check with your specific provider for confirmation).



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