



Info on Panic Attacks and Triggers

Trigger: A specific thing seen, heard, smelled, touched or felt, which is currently being experienced and that is associated with a past abuse or assault experience. A trigger can bring up old feelings and reactions automatically.

Panic Attack: an intense fear reaction in the body to a trigger. It can include things like sudden fear, sweating, difficulty breathing, accelerated heart rate, difficulty thinking clearly, feeling something bad is going to happen, or that you have to flee. Often things can feel unreal.

- Panic is when a person's emotions become too frightening or overwhelming and one is unable to calm one's self.
- Panic can occur when feelings and memories that have been suppressed start to emerge, or when you're trying like mad to suppress feelings or memories.
- Although panic sometimes seems to come out of the blue, there is always a trigger/connection. Often it is a reminder of the trauma that you aren't consciously aware of. In a panic attack you are usually not aware of these connections. You simply feel out of control.

Ideas for coping:

- If you start to feel panicky, breathe. Sit with the feeling. Often times we think we have to do something quickly to get away from the feeling. This frenzy to escape can escalate the fear rather than relieve it.
- Reassure yourself that this is just a feeling; you aren't in actual danger right now.
- The most effective way to deal with panic is to catch it early.
- The most important thing in getting calm is to do whatever works for you, even if it seems silly or embarrassing.

Through trial and error, you can develop a list of things that help. Try including comfort for as many of the senses as possible. Create your own list and post it in an easily accessible location.

Breathing out long breaths and breathing in short breaths is the most effective way to calm down the body

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Sexual Assault Support Services - www.sass-lane.org
24 hr. Crisis/Support Line: 541-343-7277 or 1-800-788-4727



Consider these activities:

Create a safe spot: Create a safe spot in your house where you can go when you're scared. Make an agreement that if you start to feel out of control and afraid of what you might do, you'll go to that spot and stay there, breathing one breath at a time until the feeling passes. Your safe spot might be a window seat on the stairway, your bed, or a favorite reading chair. It might be a hiding place where no one can find you. Take your own nurturing seriously, no matter what.

Change your environment: Consciously changing your environment can sometimes snap you out of panic. Leave the room or building you are in, look up at the sky or something else in nature to give you a sense of perspective. Be aware of sensory triggers such as smells, tone of voice, sounds.

Reach out: Sometimes it's hardest to reach out when you need it the most, but give yourself a loving push to break out of your isolation. Plan for this ahead of time. Stick to your agreements to yourself or to the person you've committed to call.

Some things to avoid: Don't enter stressful or dangerous situations, stay off the road, don't drink or use drugs. Avoid making important decisions. Don't hurt yourself or anyone else.

After you feel calmer: When you're on the other side of an attack of panic, relax and rest a bit. Such emotional intensity is exhausting and you need/deserve to replenish your energy. When you feel balanced again, try to determine what triggered it.

- What was the last thing you remember before you felt overwhelmed?
- Where were you? Who were you with?
- Was there anything disturbing that happened to you in the last day or two? (work, friends, mail, phone call)
- Was there a glimmer of any other kind of feeling before you lost touch with yourself?
- Are you under any unusual stresses? Time pressures?
- Were there thoughts in your mind that you quickly pushed away because they were uncomfortable?
- Do these things remind you of your abuse in any way?

Sometimes questions like these can help you find the roots of the panic. It may take a series of episodes with similar dynamics before you are able to pinpoint the source, but it's worth the work.