

Imagery Rescripting

Memories of early negative body image experiences

People with body image issues often say that memories of early negative appearance experiences, like being teased about how they look, can still affect how they feel about their body, even years later. These negative images can get 'stuck' in our minds.

We can't change what happened, but these past experiences don't have to continue to impact our lives today.

With a 3-step strategy called 'imagery rescripting', we can look at those old memories in a new way, which helps us stop letting them affect how we see ourselves.

Step 1: *Think about the earliest event you can remember of an unpleasant body experience where you felt ashamed or embarrassed of your body or how your body looks.*



It could be something that happened to you when you were a child, or a teenager. Some examples are:

- being teased by your peers about how you look
- receiving negative/critical comments about your body or appearance
- feeling uncomfortable or insecure about your body when trying on clothes in a change-room, looking yourself in the mirror, getting ready with friends to go to a party, walking past a group of people who were looking at you, out in public.

Take a moment to close your eyes and imagine this earliest event as if it is happening right now. Please continue when you have a clear picture of this earliest event in your mind.

Now write down this event as if it is happening right now.

1. Write using "I" language (e.g., "I'm in the change room, trying on a pair of blue jeans. My friend is in the change room next to me also trying on clothes.")

2. Include as much detail as you can - what you are doing, who you are with, what you can see, how you are feeling, and what thoughts are going through your mind?

Step 2: *Think about the same memory again. This time, when you close your eyes and **imagine** this event, imagine it as if you were someone else watching the event happen from the outside, or on a screen.*



When you have a clear picture, write about this event in a few sentences as if it were happening to your younger self right now, but this time, write about what someone else would see if they were watching the event happen.

1. Write as if someone else is telling the story about you (e.g., if your name is Sarah, write "I see Sarah in the change room, she is trying on a pair of blue jeans. She's with her friend who is also trying on clothes.")
2. Include as much detail as you can, such as where Sarah is, what Sarah is doing, who Sarah is with, how Sarah might be feeling, and what thoughts might be going through Sarah's mind.

Some Tips on Writing

1. Use pen and paper to help increase formation of new connections in the brain that can embed new interpretations of an old memory.
2. Don't write to impress others, write openly and honestly. Don't overthink it.
3. You may experience some strong emotion while writing, but this will stabilise quickly.



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Step 3: Think about the same memory one last time. This time, you are your younger self again (using “I” language), but your wiser and kinder older self is with you in the room. Your older self can get involved if you want them to. They can offer you kindness or provide new updated information based on what you know now, they can talk to you (or others) or do anything else that feels helpful and right in the situation.

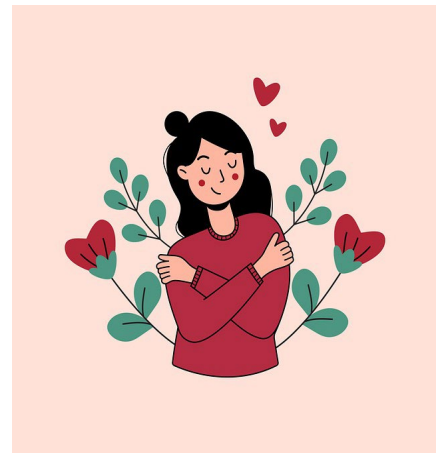


Now, in a few sentences, write about this event as if it is happening right now, but this time, your wiser and older self is with you and can get involved if you want them to.

1. Write using “I” language like you did earlier (e.g., “I’m in the change room, trying on a pair of blue jeans. My friend is in the change room next to me also trying on clothes.”) but, when you talk about your older self, write it like you’re telling a story about them (e.g., “older Sarah said...”).
2. Include as much detail as you can, such as what you are doing, who you are with, what you can see, how you are feeling, and what thoughts are going through your mind.
3. Describe what your wiser and kinder older self does in the situation. Remember, they can offer you kindness or provide new updated information based on what you know now, they can talk to you (or others) or do anything else that feels helpful and right in the situation.

Wrapping it all up

- Do this exercise three days in a row, take no more than 15 minutes on each occasion.
- Note how the messages in the third step develop and change.
- At the end of this exercise, write down in the notes section of your phone the key messages that came out of step 3 that make you feel differently about the old memory.



The evidence

Science tells us that when people use this imagery rescripting exercise, they experience increased body image acceptance and self-compassion. It is another example of how practising new styles of thinking can create new neuronal pathways in your brain, called neuroplasticity:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELpfYCZa87g>

