

Information Handout

Professional Version | US English

Rewind Technique



Description

The 'rewind technique' is also sometimes referred to as the 'visual-kinesthetic dissociation technique'. It is an imagery technique used by some therapists in the treatment of traumatic memories. The *Rewind Technique* worksheet contains therapist instructions for the technique as described in a paper by Hossack and Bentall (1996).

Therapists should be aware that there are many good evidence-based techniques for processing intrusive traumatic memories. These include: prolonged exposure, reliving with updating (enhanced reliving), and eye-movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR). It is believed that a key ingredient in all of these techniques is the component of exposure to the traumatic memory. In theory, therefore, the rewind technique might be helpful given that it contains the element of exposure – like any exposure technique it may be helpful if it helps clients feel safe enough to approach a traumatic memory.

However, therapists should be aware that the evidence for using the rewind technique in isolation is very much weaker – there are no RCTs exploring the use of this technique. It is strongly recommended that an evidence-based treatment approach for PTSD, informed by an appropriate therapeutic model (i.e. CBT or EMDR) be attempted as first line treatment. Therapists should be cautious regarding unwarranted claims made on the internet regarding the rewind technique – it is unlikely to be a 'cure all' or 'magic bullet'. Clients should be cautious if their therapist is only proficient in the rewind technique and does not have trauma-specific CBT or EMDR training.

References

Muss, D. C. (1991). A new technique for treating Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 1991, 30, 91-92.

Hossack, A., Bentall, R. P. (1996). Elimination of posttraumatic symptomatology by relaxation and visual-kinesthetic dissociation. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 9(1), 99-110.

Rewind Technique

This is a description of the “rewind technique”, sometimes called the “visual-kinesthetic dissociation technique” (v-k dissociation / vk dissociation). This approach has been proposed as a treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder, and essentially consists of instructions for imaginal exposure with suggestions for separation / distance / ‘dissociation’ from the image. Empirical evidence for the use of this technique in the treatment of trauma is very limited. The use of imaginal exposure as part of a treatment plan implemented by suitably a qualified professional is supported by data, though.

The description here is of a technique similar to that used in a 1996 study by Hossack and Bentall.

1. Relaxation exercises before beginning the re-living, or a hypnotic induction.
2. Introduction along the lines of: I’m going to ask you to do certain things which will help to relieve the distress caused by recurrent images. I will give directions one part at a time and then I want you to ‘go inside’ and do it. At each point I will ask you to nod when have done what I ask.
3. I want you to imagine that you are sitting in the middle of a cinema. It is dark and there is no-one else there as the cinema has been hired just for you. It’s a comfortable seat, the cinema is warm, and you feel quite safe. (Nod when you are there).
4. On the screen you can see a black and white snapshot, a still in which you see yourself just before the traumatic event, just before you had the experience. (Nod when you are there).
5. Now I want you to float out of your body up to the projection room in the cinema where you can watch yourself watching yourself on screen. From this position you will be able to see the whole cinema including your head and shoulders sitting in the middle of the cinema and also see yourself in the still picture on the screen. (Nod when you are there).
6. When I say so, I want you to turn the snapshot on the screen into a moving film and watch it at the normal pace from the beginning to the end. You will see and feel what occurred at the time, and this might include sound. When you get past what is the worst of the experience the memory begins to fade, and I want you to stop the film and allow it to become a still again. Start moving the film now and experience what happened. (Nod when you have completed this).
7. When I ask you to, from your position in the cinema I want you to go down to the screen, right up to the still picture, and jump into it: jump inside the experience, seeing everything as if it were happening now. Feel the temperature of the air around you, notice what is going on, be aware of any sound, smell, or taste. Then run the film backwards, all the people will move backwards, everything will move in reverse, just like rewinding a film except that you are inside this film, and you will experience everything happening in reverse. I want you to do this at about four times normal speed. The film is now is colour. I want you to experience this as accurately and quickly as you can. When I say “now”, go down to the still picture and jump inside the experience and begin rewinding. (Nod when you are back at the beginning). Go down to the still now, jump inside, and begin rewinding.
8. Repeat this experience, covering different aspects of the events if necessary.
9. Suggest: Whenever your memory is triggered, the rewind technique will come in to play until you are back at the safe starting point and you are left with a good image. You will be able to get back to normal activity quickly.

Hossack, A., Bentall, R. P. (1996). Elimination of posttraumatic symptomatology by relaxation and visual kinesthetic dissociation. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 9(1), 99-110.

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