When a reminder feels overwhelming

You can choose one small step - or leave this sheet aside.

A sound, place or other reminder can bring back distress. You do not have to explain what happened or work through a memory here. These optional ideas may offer a little support in the moment; they are not a test to complete. [1]
This sheet includes words you can borrow, because talking with someone you trust, or with a professional, can make difficult things feel more manageable.

First, consider what is happening now

If there is immediate danger, you cannot stay safe, or there may be a medical emergency, seek urgent help. Ireland: call 112 / 999; elsewhere, use local emergency services. This sheet cannot assess your safety. If someone is harming or controlling you, specialist support may be needed. [2]

1 Notice one ordinary detail, if that feels okay

You might look at a familiar object or name where you are. Choose something neutral in your surroundings. There is no required count, breathing pattern or sequence. If this makes you more distressed or disconnected, stop and seek support. [1]

2 Choose a manageable next action

Perhaps sit somewhere that feels comfortable, have some water, or pause what you are doing. You can skip any suggestion. You do not have to make yourself feel calm before asking for help. [1]

3 Ask for company without telling the story

"Something has left me feeling overwhelmed. Could you stay with me, or help me contact someone? I do not want to describe it right now." [1]

Someone I could ask for company, and how to reach them

Optional. A first name and a way to contact them is enough.

Use this only if it is helpful. Repeated, worsening or disruptive experiences deserve a conversation with a qualified professional. You can ask for support sooner if you are worried. [3]

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General information and support for adults. Not a substitute for professional assessment, advice, treatment or emergency care. Immediate danger or unable to stay safe? Call 112 or 999 (Ireland, UK), 911 (US, Canada), 000 (Australia) or your local emergency number. Free to print and share blank copies. Keep personal notes private. Full disclaimer: jonathanhaverkampf.com/disclaimer

Support beyond this moment

You can ask for help without having all the words.

When to seek professional help

Contact a GP (family doctor) or qualified mental health professional if reminders, nightmares, avoidance or feeling detached keep returning or affect daily life. These experiences have different possible causes; a sheet cannot diagnose PTSD. Severe confusion or a possible medical emergency needs urgent help. [2, 3]

Coping support and treatment are different

These prompts are not a tested PTSD treatment or a way to prevent PTSD. Effective trauma-focused treatments are available. A suitably trained professional can discuss options, your preferences and any practical or safety needs. You can ask: "What treatment do you suggest, and what evidence supports it?" [4]

If you are supporting someone

Offer a calm presence and practical help. Ask what would be useful. Respect their choice not to talk, and avoid pressing for details of the experience. You do not have to manage an emergency alone. [2, 5]

Someone to talk to, day or night

Ireland: Samaritans 116 123, or text HELLO to 50808. UK: Samaritans 116 123. US and Canada: call or text 988. Australia: Lifeline 13 11 14. Elsewhere: findahelpline.com lists free helplines by country. For urgent mental health advice, contact your GP, an out-of-hours doctor or your mental health team. Immediate danger: call your local emergency number (112 / 999 in Ireland). [2]

Sources and further reading

1. VA: Coping with traumatic stress reactions (www.ptsd.va.gov)
2. HSE: Get urgent help for a mental health crisis (www2.hse.ie)
3. HSE: PTSD symptoms and when to seek help (www2.hse.ie)
4. NICE NG116: PTSD recommendations (www.nice.org.uk)
5. WHO: Psychological first aid (www.who.int)

Original prompts informed by these sources; not a validated assessment or treatment. Sources checked 7 October 2026. No organisational endorsement implied. Support lines checked 25 October 2026.

Read this resource online

Scan for the reading page. Or visit the website below, choose Find Help, then Trauma help.

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