

From nightmares to peaceful sleep with

The Dream Completion Technique *(Therapist Handout)*

- When bad things happen, we are supposed to dream about them – this is the mind's way of naturally processing and resolving traumatic memories.
- Intense images and emotions within dreams are therefore normal.
- We also dream every night, and anything can happen in a dream – sometimes weird and wacky, and for the most part we don't remember them unless they are particularly eventful.
- We don't need to interpret our dreams - the mind is just trying to process upsetting events and does this by bringing in new dream content from our unconscious mind and putting it on our '*dream shelf*', which is then ready to be taken into the dream.
- Nightmares and other sleep disturbances are just dreams that have become '*stuck*' (like a record or washing machine) and have run out of ideas (i.e. '*dream shelf*' empty) and keep repeating.
- The aim is to resume peaceful and effective sleep by providing a new dream idea or intervention for the most recent dream, which is like priming the dream process by stocking the '*dream shelf*' with things that will enable the dream to complete.
- We kick-start the dream with a new idea from the part of the most *recent* dream where waking occurred by asking: '*What do I want to happen next that feels good*'? This will often involve a sense of power and control.
- Allowing the dream to continue and complete promotes restful sleep and reduces trauma symptoms, and helps the mind relearn that it is ok to dream through anything.
- Anything can happen in a dream, so the new dream idea is uncensored, but must '*feel good*' to propel it into the dream. It is vital to have a change in perspective and believe '*There is nothing to fear in my dream*' – what happened, however awful, is now just a dream.
- A good idea is unconstrained and may violate the laws of physics, be violent, surreal, contain fictional characters or make absolutely no sense, but intuitively '*feels good*'.
- It may also not be the first idea thought of and not be what you would want to happen in real life.
- If you can't remember dream content, create an idea from either the emotion or sensation felt on waking – '*What do I want to happen next*' and '*How do I want to get rid of this feeling/sensation*'? What other positive situation could those feelings be about?
- Write it down and imagine the idea just before you go to sleep thinking '*This is what I want to happen in my dream*'.
- If your dream idea doesn't work, come up with another idea for your '*dream shelf*' remembering that its emotional intensity must be the same or greater as the dream at the point of waking.
- Turn the idea into a habit – you are trying to teach the brain to sleep through anything (which is its default position), and don't give up until you are sleeping peacefully through the night.
- Every time you are woken from a dream provides an opportunity for creating new dream ideas to allow dreams to complete and provide more healing.

Examples

Out of control car

This never happened in real life, but I used to have a nightmare about driving down a hill with my family in the car and the brakes failing. We hit a wall at the end and I woke up in a right state. My new dream idea was to imagine myself sitting in a car game at an amusement arcade, with my family around me cheering me on, whilst I threw the car violently to the left and right.

Being chased (Prison Officer)

In my dream I was being chased by some very dangerous prisoners down my local high street. I woke up at the point they jumped on me, and my wife was scared because I was thrashing around so much. The dream intervention that worked was that I was being tackled in a rugby game, but I dragged them over the try line and scored. The crowd went mad and it felt great.

Boat Collision (Military)

I was involved in a high-speed boat accident at night, and after the physical injuries had healed, I was left with terrible nightmares of the event, with water crashing everywhere and friends screaming. My new idea for the dream was that I was now on the log flume at Alton Towers, with my friends laughing behind me.

Ship being attacked

I was a machine gunner on the deck of a ship trying to shoot down a plane that was dropping bombs on us – it was very frightening, and I would often dream about it waking up in a terrible sweat. The new dream idea I created was to grab the plane out of the sky and fling it away and I haven't woken since!

Avalanche

I woke up as the avalanche was about to engulf me. My new dream idea was that I was now at the front of a school running race, pulling away from everyone, just about to cross the line and win to much cheering.

Dreams of infidelity

After my divorce, I would often dream of catching my ex-husband in bed with another woman, even though this never happened in real life. My dream idea was that I was now on a date with a Hollywood star, and we had a great time! My sleep recovered quickly after that.

Being shot at

When I returned from Afghanistan, I had dreams of being chased by armed insurgents most nights which really affected me, even though it never happened in real life. I love photography, so I made all the guns SLR cameras, and now we are a paparazzi pack chasing a celebrity for the perfect photo.

Being attacked

I woke up at the moment my attacker jumped on me. Now I pull out a massive two handed 'Braveheart' sword and he is history. It is all over and I have a smile on my face.

Tsunami wave

I wake up as this massive wave is going to wipe me out. My new dream idea is that I am peacefully scuba diving underneath the sea looking at lots of interesting creatures with a zen like calm.

Cannot remember dream

I woke up regularly but couldn't remember my dreams, which I found frustrating. I imagined a box full of my dreams, which I smashed with a sledgehammer, which made me feel better. I then started to sleep through the night.

Cannot remember dream

I woke up regularly lashing out, but couldn't remember my dreams. My new dream idea was to I imagine I was the Incredible Hulk throwing everyone off of me in an uncontrollable rage, which felt good.

Waking up sweating

I wake up sweating buckets, but don't remember any dream content. When I went to sleep, I imagined myself in a massive wind tunnel, blasting the sweat off me, and my sleep got better.