

Coming Back

For the middle of an emotional flashback or a dissociative drop, when reading is the thing that's gone. Nothing here has to be done in order, or done at all.

**This is a flashback.
This is not now.
I am safe enough.
It will pass — it always has.**

And if even that is too much to take in — **one hand on the chest, one slow breath out, a little longer than the breath in.** That alone is enough. Everything below can wait.

A few ways back — as much or as little as you can



FIRST, A CHECK

If you're losing time, the room feels unreal, or nothing here is landing — **stop here.** Try cold water on your hands, naming the room out loud, or reach someone now. This page is for when enough of you is present to use it.

Name it

Quietly, even just inside: *this is a flashback.* The past is here — it is not happening now.

Find the room

If you can: the floor under your feet, the date on your phone, your adult hands, five things you can see.

Reach the young one

Let them know the footsteps aren't coming this time. They did so well to survive it.

Let it move

Nothing to fix or force. The wave has an end, even when it feels total.



However high it climbs, the line always comes back down — and you are somewhere on it.

Coming Back — the longer read, for a steadier moment

Understanding It

When the wave has passed, it can help to know what just happened — and why it was never a failure on your part.

The past doesn't always announce itself. Sometimes it just fills the room.

An emotional flashback often arrives with no image and no story — only a state: shame that feels like a verdict, fear with no object, a sudden smallness or collapse. Because it doesn't look like the films, many of us never recognise it as trauma at all. It belongs to complex trauma, but the same waves move through dissociation, autistic and ADHD overwhelm, and any nervous system that learned early to brace. It can take more than one shape.

one

When it arrives as feeling

Shame so total it feels like a verdict. Fear with no object. The sense of being very small, exposed, wrong — or a collapse, as the curtains draw. Because it comes without a story, it gets blamed on the present.

no image · only the state

two

When you've left the room

No flashback exactly — a going-blank, a deadness, the curtains quietly drawn. Not the absence of feeling but a guard against too much of it. Re-entry isn't forced; the body is invited back through what still reaches it — warmth, texture, weight, a familiar sound.

dissociation · shutdown

three

When it won't stay still

Not one state but the gap between them — flooded, then blank, then flooded again, sometimes within minutes. More frightening than either alone, because nothing holds long enough to stand on. A nervous system trying more than one exit at once. The switching, too, will slow.

switching · neither one nor the other

The flashback as loyalty

Most frameworks call a flashback a malfunction — the nervous system firing when it shouldn't. But when the early world was dangerous, staying alert to threat wasn't pathology; it was survival, and often love. The flashback isn't the system breaking down. It's the system keeping a promise — still listening for the footsteps on the stairs. Healing is a slow renegotiation of that loyalty: not a betrayal of the past, but a gradual permission to let the present be different.

None of this is weakness, and none of it needs earning. The state is real, but it is not the truth of now — and you have come back from every one of them so far. Begin again from wherever you are. — Dr Jay x

Coming Back to Now

You might not be able to think clearly when this is happening again. You might be able to read. Write these now, in your own words, so they're already here. You don't have to fill this in now — build it on a steadier day, so the words are ready when finding them is the hard part. One box is enough.

1 My early signs I'm slipping into one

a particular tiredness · a creeping self-consciousness · the world narrowing · sound too sharp · a slight unreality

2 What it tells me — that isn't true

I'm too much · a burden · back to square one · this is just who I am

3 What actually brings me back

cold water · texture in the hands · feet on the floor · today's date · a familiar voice

4 What the young one needs to hear

the footsteps aren't coming this time · we're not there anymore · I've got us · you did so well to survive it

5 People I can reach, and how

a name · a short text I could send · a line I could copy and paste when words are gone

6 One kindness for the version of me who came back shaken



CUT OUT & KEEP CLOSE — a pocket, a phone lock-screen, a wallet

I am in a flashback.

This is not now.

I am safe enough.

It will pass — it always has.

Find: the surface beneath me · five things I can see · today's date · my adult hands · one slow breath out, longer than the breath in