DreamGuideHub

Nightmare worksheet: rewrite it, then rehearse it

A simple worksheet based on imagery rehearsal, the method tested in clinical trials: change a bad dream while you are awake, then picture the new version for a few minutes a day.

Before you start: choose a nightmare that is unpleasant but not your worst one. You do not need to write every detail. Stop if it becomes too upsetting. If a nightmare replays a traumatic event, or bad dreams are frequent or affect your days, work on this with a doctor or therapist rather than alone.

Date: _____ Nightmares in the last 7 nights: _____

1. The nightmare, in brief

What happens? (a few lines is plenty)

How upsetting is it when I think of it now? 0 = not at all, 10 = the worst

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

2. The change

Any change counts: the ending, a threatening figure that turns silly, a helper arriving, a door that opens, a different place. It does not have to be realistic or happy, only different from the original.

What I will change

3. My new version

Write it as a short story in the present tense. Keep the start, change what happens next, and add what you see, hear and feel.

The new dream

How do I feel at the end of the new version?

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Rehearsal log and check-in

Read or picture the new version for 2 to 10 minutes a day, ideally not right before bed if it keeps you alert. Keep it gentle and stop if it becomes distressing.

Day	Date	I practiced	Minutes	Upset after (0-10)	Nightmare last night?
1		☐			☐ yes ☐ no
2		☐			☐ yes ☐ no
3		☐			☐ yes ☐ no
4		☐			☐ yes ☐ no
5		☐			☐ yes ☐ no
6		☐			☐ yes ☐ no
7		☐			☐ yes ☐ no
8		☐			☐ yes ☐ no
9		☐			☐ yes ☐ no
10		☐			☐ yes ☐ no
11		☐			☐ yes ☐ no
12		☐			☐ yes ☐ no
13		☐			☐ yes ☐ no
14		☐			☐ yes ☐ no

Weekly check-in

Nights with a nightmare this week (count), and how intense:

Did the nightmare change? How?

What I want to change in the new version next:

If you wake frightened: turn on a light, feel your feet on the floor, and say out loud where you are and today's date. Then breathe slowly until your body settles. See a doctor if nightmares happen most weeks, you dread going to sleep, or your days are affected.

Method: imagery rehearsal (Krakow et al., 2001, JAMA, doi.org/10.1001/jama.286.5.537; American Academy of Sleep Medicine position paper, Morgenthaler et al., 2018, doi.org/10.5664/jcsm.7178). This worksheet is for self-reflection and is not medical advice or treatment.