

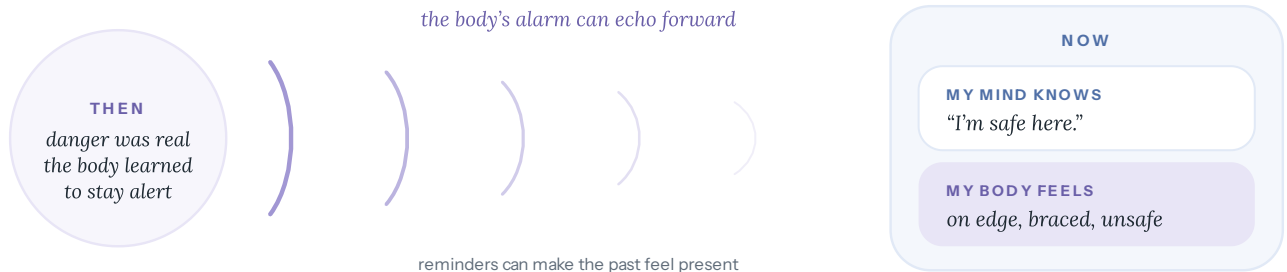
When You Know You're Safe But Don't Feel Safe

Understanding the gap between knowing and feeling after trauma

After trauma, many people notice that their mind knows they're safe, but their body still feels on edge. **This is a common, understandable response, not a sign you're doing something wrong.** The body's protective system learned from real danger, and it can take time and practice for it to catch up with the present.

01 Why this happens

the past can feel present



The alarm is fast

The body's threat response often fires before the thinking mind has a chance to check the facts.

Reminders can set it off

Sounds, smells, places or feelings linked to the past can trigger it, sometimes without us noticing why.

It can feel like "now"

Trauma memories can carry a sense of current threat, as if the danger is still happening.

02 Noticing the gap

one recent moment

What I know right now

What my body feels

- ☐ racing heart
 ☐ tight chest
 ☐ jumpy or startled
- ☐ frozen
 ☐ numb or far away
 ☐ on guard
- ☐ tense muscles
 ☐ urge to escape

03 What might my body be reminded of?

you don't need to know exactly

- ☐ a sound
 ☐ a smell
 ☐ a place
 ☐ a time of year
 ☐ a tone of voice
 ☐ a facial expression
 ☐ a sensation or feeling

04 Helping my body catch up

orienting to now, gently

1 Name it

"My body is remembering. This is an echo, not now."

2 Orient

Look around slowly. Name where you are, the date, five things you can see.

3 Ground

Feel your feet, the chair, something textured in your hand.

4 Breathe out slowly

Let the out-breath be longer than the in-breath.

5 Update with facts

"Then, I was... Now, I am..." (see below)

6 Move gently

Stretch, shake out your hands, walk if that feels safe.

THEN

Then, I was...

Then, I couldn't...

NOW

Now, I am...

Now, I can...

What helps my body feel even a little safer?

People, places or things that feel safe to me:

A gentle note

Sometimes the feeling of being unsafe is accurate. **If you are not actually safe right now**, for example in a relationship where you're being hurt or threatened, trust that feeling and reach out for help.

If it becomes too much

If flashbacks or distress feel overwhelming, or you have thoughts of harming yourself, **please don't manage this alone**. Contact emergency services or a crisis line _____

SOURCES

Ehlers, A., & Clark, D. M. (2000). A cognitive model of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 38(4), 319–345. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0005-7967\(99\)00123-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0005-7967(99)00123-0)
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