

## Nightmare Protocol, Step by Step

### When Nightmares Keep You from Sleeping

**1. Practice relaxation, pleasant imagery, and coping skills first, to be sure you are ready to work on changing your nightmares.**

Do progressive relaxation, paced breathing, and/or Wise Mind exercises; listen to music or guided imagery; review the distress tolerance crisis survival skills.

**2. Choose a recurring nightmare you would like to work on.**

This will be your target nightmare. Select a nightmare you can manage now. Put off trauma nightmares until you are ready to work with them—or, if you target a trauma nightmare, skip Step 3.

**3. Write down your target nightmare.**

Include sensory descriptions (sights, smells, sounds, tastes, etc.). Also include any thoughts, feelings, and assumptions about yourself during the dream.

**4. Choose a changed outcome for the nightmare.**

The change should occur BEFORE anything traumatic or bad happens to you or others in the nightmare. Essentially, you want to come up with a change that will prevent the bad outcome of the usual nightmare from occurring. Write an ending that will give you a sense of peace when you wake up.

*Note: Changes in the nightmare can be very unusual and out of the ordinary (e.g., you might become a person with superhuman powers who is able to escape to safety or fight off attackers). Changed outcomes can include changed thoughts, feelings, or assumptions about yourself.*

**5. Write down the full nightmare with the changes.****6. REHEARSE and RELAX each night before going to sleep.**

Rehearse the *changed* nightmare by visualizing the entire dream with the changes each night, *before* practicing relaxation techniques.

**7. REHEARSE and RELAX during the day.**

Visualize the entire dream with the change, and practice relaxation as often as possible during the day.