

Nightmares & C-PTSD

Today's podcast is about nightmares when you have C-PTSD.

If you have PTSD or C-PTSD, you know about nightmares. You have them so often, they aren't a surprise. They're just a way of life. Yet, little information about the nightmares is available.

I'd always had frequent nightmares, but it got much worse in 2012 which is when I realized I had C-PTSD. I suddenly began having several nightmares almost every night, which of course led to a lot of fatigue. The nightmares also became even more vivid than usual, which is impressive since I've always had very vivid dreams. They became so vivid in fact, that often I would wake up feeling as if I'd just done whatever I did in the dream. If I dreamed I ran a marathon, for example, I would wake up physically tired & achy.

When first learning about C-PTSD, I assumed the nightmares would be about reliving traumatic events, which does happen, but very rarely. Most of my nightmares are about strange things like being an adult yet having to repeat high school & relying on my mother to take me rather than driving my own car; being unable to find or remember the combination to my locker in those school dreams; my car being stolen &/or totaled; my husband mocking me when I was obviously upset or rejecting me somehow; or someone stealing my cats. I finally asked God about my weird dreams. What He shared made a lot of sense.

The brain constantly processes all information. Our dreams are often a result of that processing, because the brain doesn't take breaks. Sometimes we don't remember dreams because they weren't important- the brain simply processed something unimportant. Other times, it tries to make sense of horrible things that have happened, which is where nightmares come into it. Sometimes the brain relives those awful, traumatic events in an attempt to understand it, but not always. Sometimes nightmares look as if they have nothing to do with traumatic events on the surface, yet they actually have a lot to do with them.

While the nightmare's circumstances may be different, the emotions they stir up feel exactly like some trauma you have experienced. My nightmare of my car being stolen & totaled? It caused me to feel anxious, afraid & completely helpless. I realized it triggered the exact same emotions of my seventeenth birthday. That day, my mother destroyed my birthday gifts from my then boyfriend who is now my ex husband on the way home from school. We stopped to pick something up & while I was doing that, she waited in the car & destroyed my gifts. She blamed me for making her do what she did. The event caused me anxiety because I'd have to tell my ex what happened to his gifts, fear of his reaction, fear because of wondering what she was going to do next & I felt helpless because she destroyed the gifts as I was picking up something for her. I gone for maybe 3 minutes- I couldn't have known what she was going to do or stop her from doing it. Upon realizing that, I haven't had the nightmare again.

When these nightmares happen, the good news is that they have a purpose. They show you that there is an area in which you need more healing. Ask God about it if you're not sure what that area is. He loves you & wants to help you, so let Him! Ask Him what did that dream mean?

You also can look up symbols on a dream dictionary website. I do this along with praying. I write down everything I can from my dream- items, colors, feelings- then look up what each means & write it down beside each item. Sometimes things make more sense to me when I see them in writing so that can be a helpful tool.

Once you realize what the dream was trying to make sense of, you can heal. Work on coping with the traumatic event however works for you- pray, talk to a therapist, talk to a close friend, write in your diary.

I know nightmares are a very difficult part of C-PTSD, but they are also unavoidable. Why not make them work in your favor by learning what they're trying to help you cope with? Once you do, the nightmares often go away or at the very least don't happen nearly as often.

Thank you for listening to my podcast.