

# Responding to 'But that Wasn't Real!!!' Client Feedback

## During or After Imagery Rescripting

This guide offers a step-by-step framework and sample transcript to help Schema Therapists respond compassionately and effectively when clients challenge the emotional reality of imagery rescripting exercises.

### Step-by-Step Clinical Response

#### 1. Validate the Client's Reality

Acknowledge the client's emotional truth.

Example: "You're right. What happened in the imagery didn't actually happen in real life. That's a valid and important observation."

#### 2. Acknowledge the Limits of Therapy

Gently clarify that therapy cannot rewrite history.

Example: "Nothing we do in therapy can change the reality of what you went through."

#### 3. Reframe the Aim of Imagery Rescripting

Explain the purpose is not to change the past but to shift emotional experience.

Example: "The goal is to help that younger part feel safe and/or seen and less alone now."

#### 4. Link Present-Day Struggles to the Past

Use mode language to link historical trauma to current triggers.

Example: "Even now, little Jenny still feels unsafe on the train or in public."

#### 5. Justify the Use of Imagery

Normalize using imagination to facilitate healing.

Example/s: "We use imagery to access and heal those emotional parts of us, reprocessing those key memories and events that were never dealt with on an emotional level." or "We're giving that younger part a healing experience she never got (... feeling safe, validated, protected, understood etc.)"

#### 6. Emphasize Emotional Learning

Explain the work aims to change emotional truth, not historical facts.

Example: "This is to help her feel that she's finally safe."

#### 7. Invite Reflection and Integration

Ask if any part of them felt soothed.

Example: "Was there any part of you that felt even a little comforted?"

## 8. If resistance continues – look for a potential (blocking) coping mode

Continued resistance to this kind of intervention highly indicates a potential (blocking) coping mode. Explore if this is the case, and if so this coping mode will need to be addressed/ negotiated with before imagery rescripting might (effectively) commence.

### Optional Metaphor: The Broccoli Analogy

Use metaphors to normalize emotional dissonance.

Example: “It’s like introducing broccoli to someone used to chips—strange, but healthy.”

(See Podcast Episode 50 from ‘What’s the Schemata?’ **Eating Your Schema Broccoli and Opening up the "Can of Worms"; Metaphors and Axioms in Schema Therapy Practice**)

### Example Therapist Transcript

Okay, Jenny... I think maybe I need to apologize a little bit. When you say, 'That's not real,' it makes me wonder if I haven't explained the purpose of this technique clearly enough.

Because you're right—this isn't real, in the sense that we're not changing the facts of what actually happened to you. Nothing we do here, including going back to speak to little Jenny in imagery, can change the historical reality of what you lived through. That's something I fully acknowledge.

This imagery work isn't meant to rewrite your past. There's a history we have to honour, and that can't be erased. I completely get that. Nothing we do here can erase or change the facts of what happened (to you).

But here's the thing, and it's the part that really matters to me as your therapist: even though the past is over, you're still struggling with the emotional consequences. You still feel unsafe. Whether it's going shopping, catching a train, being in public—these moments can leave you feeling as vulnerable and terrified as little Jenny once felt.

And that's where the problem lies. That little Jenny inside you hasn't quite realized that it's over. That she's safe now. She's still carrying the fear, the pain, the sense of being completely alone, helpless and unprotected.

So, when I guide us through imagery rescripting—when I go back and speak to her, protect her, and help her feel seen and validated, it's not to deny what happened. It's to help her feel that she's not alone anymore. That she's not stuck in those terrifying moments – in a sense to let Little Jenny know that it is over now... she is safe.

This is how we start to shift how those memories live in your body, and in your heart – in the felt sense. We can't change the facts. But we can change the emotional power those memories still hold over you. We're helping little Jenny begin to sense that she's safe now—and that she doesn't have to keep bracing for danger every time you step out into the world.

That's what we're aiming for here.