

## **Working With Nightmares**

You wake up screaming, sweating, a racing heart, and you look bewildered around you. My gosh, luckily this was a dream. You are not locked up in prison for the next 15 years, or having a shark chase you anymore, this was happening in dream time. This was a nightmare.

The famous psychologist Carl Jung said that a nightmare represents 'either too much or too little fear'. In working with dreams, it is very important to remember that the dream is your friend, and will help and inform you about essential things in your life. A nightmare has the function of waking you up, often literally, and always to a new and broader level of consciousness. A nightmare contains something of value and by pushing it further away, it only becomes more frightening. Therefore we need to turn toward the nightmare and explore its possible meanings.

When there is not enough anxiety, you might be naïve or unaware of some danger in your environment. The dream could point this out to you. When working with these nightmares the person dreaming reports no or very little fear or anxiety in waking life. In the dream you might be doing a test and failing it. It might be that you are not well prepared and it would be wise to prepare better for a test or upcoming situation. Or you have just moved to a new city and take a route home every night that goes through a very dangerous part of town, but you have no anxiety while going home. You might not be aware of the danger and so dream about being beaten up or robbed in that area. With these nightmares when we are not frightened enough we need to take more precautions. You should start taking a different route.

When there is too much anxiety, something different, new and therefore unknown presents itself to you and you get scared. A new idea, perspective or energy that you experience as frightening tries to become part of our overall way of living/consciousness.

The shark that tries to bite you, could be an aggressive instinct that you need to develop. The imprisonment could be a necessary grounding of some aspect of your life that you resist.

I have developed a very successful 5 step approach to working with nightmares. This approach is being used by dream workers and therapist all around the world.

*1. Get to a safe place or supportive (dream) figure.*

This is a very important first step. See if there is a figure in the nightmare or a place that seems safe. Go to that figure or place, and experience its presence. If there is no safe place in the dream, then visit another dream with a positive figure or imagine this person you know in your life to be there with you. Have a dialogue with this supportive figure. Then center yourself in your body, through breathing, do this for at least one minute.

*2 Naming*

When one names a situation, or a problem it becomes easier to work with. The next step is to name the figure or place. Mean Boss is in my dream, or Red Eyed Monster follows me.

*3 What is frightening about the dream figures or situation and what are its negative qualities?*

For example, Mean Boss is overwhelming and very aggressive, he is dictatorial.

*4 What is the light/positive side of these qualities?*

The light or positive side of aggression is the ability to be assertive, to stand up for yourself, to voice your own opinion.

5 *Build a relationship with the dream figure.*

- a) We can achieve that by creating some art of what is chasing us or of the scary scene in the dream.
- b) We can also start to have a dialogue with what is frightening, either written on paper or in our mind. We can start asking questions, 'who are you, why are you here, what do you want to tell me?' See if there is anything that naturally arises from Other.
- c) Or look closely at what frightens you in the dream. Initially you will feel your own fear, and when you continue to observe Other you might sense into the energy and essence of this Other.

All these three techniques bring some of the energy of the scary other closer to us, and we get more familiar with it. This will help you be more adapted to your waking life and integrate an idea, perspective and energy that will be helpful to live a fulfilling life.

Do you want to get rid of your nightmare? Contact Machiel Klerk for a session.

**Machiel Klerk, LMFT** is a licensed marriage and family therapist with almost 20 years of dream work expertise. He followed a course at the Jung Institute in Zurich, Switzerland, and has a Master's degree from Pacifica Graduate Institute in Santa Barbara, California. Machiel is the founding president of the Jung Society of Utah and the Jung Platform. He also is a 'Utah affiliate of the Santa Barbara Healing Sanctuary'. He lectures internationally and gives workshops on dreams in Europe and the USA. For more information, visit [www.machielklerk.com](http://www.machielklerk.com)

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