Using Flash Approaches to More Safely and Effectively Treat Complex Trauma

Thomas Zimmerman, Ms.Ed., LPCC

flattext@gmail.com

330 442-0428

Training Agenda 2
Objectives 3
Welcome and Introductions 3
About Thomas Zimmerman 3
What This Training Teaches You 4
Flash in a Nutshell 4
The Core Steps 5
Flash from a Memory Reconsolidation Perspective 6
Flash from a Predictive Brain Perspective 6
Flash in a Crisis Context 7
What a Memory Fully Processed in Flash Looks Like 7
Ways to Incorporate Flash as an EMDR Therapist 8
When to Use Flash/When to Use EMDR Therapy 9
When Flash is Not Needed as an Adjunct to EMDR Therapy 9
Step One: Developing, Using, and Understanding the Container 10
Step One (Continued): Teach the Shop-Vac Resource (Or Appropriate Accommodation) 11
Step Two: Developing, Using, and Testing the Calm Scene 12
Step Two (Continued): Teach Sensory Grounding 13
Step Three: Select the Memory, But Do Not Activate It 15
Step Four: Load Up the Calm Scene and Blink Every Five Seconds 16
Step Five: Microactivate the Memory, Contain What Comes Out, Return to Step Four 17
Step Six: Clean Up Debris in the Memory 18
Step Seven: The Flash Future Template 19
Abbreviated Script 20
Where the Four Blinks Version of Flash Breaks and How to Fix It 21
Tips for a "Safe" and Effective Practicum Experience 22
The Group Practicum Experience 23
LUNCH ON YOUR OWN 24
Preparation for the Practicum Breakouts 25
Practicum Worksheet for Steps Three Through Six 26
Debrief the Practicum Experience 27
Practicum Worksheet for Self-Administered Flash 28
The Group Four Blinks Protocol 29
Closing Practicum: Your Choice of Individual, Therapist-Client Pairs, or Small Groups 31
How I Most Commonly Use Flash as an EMDR Therapist 32
Existing Research into Flash 33
Definitions 34
Troubleshooting Tips 35
Frequently Asked Questions 37
Steps You Can Take to Learn More 40
Safety Sheet 41

Training Agenda

9:00 AM -11:00 AM	Development and evolution of Flash approaches, introducing the core steps of the Four Blinks Version of Flash, incorporating into an EMDR treatment plan, Flash and memory reconsolidation/research, developing the core resources, and troubleshooting.
11:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Group practice preparation, group practicum with trainer leading, group practicum debrief.
12:00 PM – 1:00 PM	Lunch
1:00 PM – 2:30 PM	Script reviews in preparation for one-on-one practicum, supervised Flash in individual sessions practicum (with observers), debrief individual sessions.
2:30 PM – 3:00 PM	Flash in assorted group contexts. Flash in self-administered contexts.
3:00 PM – 3:50 PM	Flash supervised practicum of your choice of supervised individual, group, or self-administered protocols, debrief practicum experience
3:50 PM – 4:00 PM	Wrap up, get your CEs, how to learn more, etc.

Objectives

- Effectively explain Flash approaches to clients as a gateway to deeper trauma work in EMDR therapy.
- Explain the purpose of each of the six core steps of the Four Blinks Version of Flash.
- Articulate the proposed working mechanism in Flash approaches from a memory reconsolidation perspective.
- Identify at least three ways that Flash approaches can increase the efficacy of EMDR therapy with clients with severe trauma.
- Identify the core safety concerns in Flash and how to address them.
- Demonstrate ability to conduct Four Blinks Version of Flash in individual counseling sessions.

Welcome and Introductions

Participant introductions.

About Thomas Zimmerman

Thomas Zimmerman, Ms.Ed., LPCC (Ohio). I am an EMDRIA Approved Consultant and provide EMDR therapy training in the Cleveland area and online. I provide trauma therapy consultation to therapists globally at https://EMDRTom.com. I created and manage the EMDR Therapist Resources group on Facebook, a networking group of nearly 31,000 EMDR therapists globally. I maintain the popular EMDR blog: http://GoWithThat.wordpress.com. I manage the EMDR Therapist Podcast: http://EMDRPodcast.com, which focuses on the intersection of EMDR therapy and complex trauma and http://EMDRThirdWeekend.com, which also contains resources for complex trauma for EMDR therapists. Author of EMDR With Complex Trauma, PDF available at: https://EMDRWithComplexTrauma.com and paperback on Amazon.com and other booksellers. I have provided trauma training to tens of thousands of therapists globally in transformational trauma care. I live in the Cleveland area with my nephew.

What This Training Teaches You

- How to do the seven steps of this approach well.
- How to determine when something is going wrong.
- How to intervene to return to effective processing.
- How to incorporate Flash into an EMDR treatment plan and how to know when Flash is not needed.
- How to do the Four Blinks Version of Flash in individual counseling sessions, in group settings, and as a self-guided process.
- How to learn more and get help going forward.

Flash in a Nutshell

- Flash was developed by an EMDR therapist named Phil Manfield (FlashTechnique.com) and was first described in 2017. Flash is not trademarked, which allows modifications that do not require permission or authorization of its original creator.
- Flash involves a series of non-intuitive approaches. We glance at a memory lightning-fast and access only a single piece/frame/aspect of it at a time. Trauma does not want to be accessed in that way. This takes practice. Microactivation of the memory brings a tiny piece of the memory into working memory.
- We then push that piece of the memory out of awareness and focus on a pleasant experience for about 30 seconds at a time.
- We interrupt the pleasant experience over and over by guiding the client to blink their eyes, glance away from their calm scene, or engage in some other form of purposeful motor movement that splits the 30-second exposure of the calm scene into six five-second calm scenes.
- This combination of microactivation and a large number of pleasant experiences seems to help the brain make the correct prediction that the tiny piece of the memory that we brought into working memory is not happening right here and right now. That microslice gets processed as over.
- This process is repeated until all aspects of the memory are experienced as over and no longer distressing.
- When Flash is done well, the memory fully and permanently resolves, it generalizes to other memory content, and adaptive beliefs about that experience spontaneously emerge.

The Core Steps

1. Develop a container to hold the micro-slices of the memory as we activate it (tiny pieces of the memory at a time will be working memory, but will not be in direct awareness/focus).

2. Develop a calm scene. The calm scene can be a YouTube video, a pleasant memory, or an imagined or actual process (petting a dog or rocking an actual baby).

3. Identify the memory (quickly and lightly) and push it out of awareness. We are careful not to activate the memory.

4. Focus only on the calm scene for 30 seconds at a time and do a series of guided **blinks every five(ish) seconds** to visually disrupt concentration on the calm scene.

5. Quickly peek at the bad memory and container whatever piece of it is activated in this millisecond. Return to the calm scene and do guided blinks. Continue the Step Five and Step Four loop until the client cannot easily find distress when accessing the memory quickly.

6. When the distress is zero, **walk through the video of the memory** looking for the first piece of residual distress. If distress is found, immediately container it and return to Step Four. If no distress if found, the memory is resolved.

7. **Process a future scene** related to the memory that was previously resolved in Flash or EMDR therapy.

Flash from a Memory Reconsolidation Perspective

It is possible to change implicit memory (only in the past 20ish years have we understood how to do so safely, predictably, reliably, and quickly). Approaches that produce rapid and transformational change appear to follow the steps of memory reconsolidation as described by Ecker (2024).

Process:

- Activate an individual difficult or traumatic memory. The memory will appear in a plastic state for up to several hours, during which modifications can be made to it before it is (automatically) returned.
- Have an experience that challenges the expectation or prediction encoded in the memory/schema. This looks different depending on the psychotherapy used.
- Continue to cycle between activation/challenging experiences until the memory loses its distress.

To read more about Memory Reconsolidation from this perspective, start with Bruce Ecker, *Unlocking the Emotional Brain (2024).*

Van der Kolk (2014) quote: we heal "by allowing the body to have experiences that deeply and viscerally contradict the helplessness, rage, or collapse that result from trauma."

Flash from a Predictive Brain Perspective

- Predictive processing has largely replaced triune brain as the organizing metaphor of brain function.
- The brain is in a black box and is constantly constructing our reality.
- It makes a large number of predictions and constantly updates in response to prediction error.
- It uses primarily your interoceptive state to construct current reality and also your senses.
- Trauma isn't meant to be updated without a compelling reason.
- The repeated calm scene informs the brain that the piece of the memory isn't happening right now because of the repeated prediction error of the mismatch between expectation in the memory slice and the right now interoceptive and exteroceptive states.
- For more on predictive processing, read Andy Clark, *The Experience Machine* or Lisa Feldman Barrett, *How Emotions are Made.*

Flash in a Crisis Context

If the client is able to avoid overactivating the memory and continuously have an experience in the calm scene, then this approach is likely to work. However, Flash may not work if the client comes to session with the memory already "loaded" into working memory. They will need to ground to get enough distance from the memory in order to microactivate little pieces of it.

Crisis contexts are difficult because the client is often starting in an overactivated, perhaps emotionally flooded state. You may need to begin with resources to make sure that the client is able to focus on a calm scene. A strong recommendation is to make the calm scene a video and not imaginary.

- Flash will probably be effective and may not be safe if the client cannot have brief and repeated experiences in the calm scene. The client may be numb or in shock and may not be able to experience disconfirming information at the present moment.
- Clients in crisis often have a large number of problems to solve. Start with grounding and try to separate future stressors from the present state of "okay."

What a Memory Fully Processed in Flash Looks Like

- Zero distress, more adaptive thoughts about self and world related to the memory, and clear body.
- The memory feels like it happened when it did.
- The memory gets inserted into the timeline and behaves accordingly.
- The client (and every part of the client's system) will report that the memory feels over.
- Intrusive symptoms drawing from the memory content will typically stop (including both flashbacks, content-specific rumination, and trauma related dreams).
- The reprocessed memory tends to generalize and other memories that may be stored as a part of its closely-associated network will lose a lot of their distress.
- The resolved memory becomes adaptive information about the self and the world.

Ways to Incorporate Flash as an EMDR Therapist

EMDR therapy requires that clients have the ability to tolerably activate, slow down, be present, and notice activation. Many of the tasks go against the default survival strategies of many clients with complex trauma. Doing EMDR therapy with some clients with complex trauma may require a comprehensive and lengthy Phase Two.

Flash can assist the EMDR therapist in Phase Two in the following ways:

- We can use Flash to help promote more initial stability by targeting the most destabilizing aspects of present experience first. A client who has more present-based stability is easier to resource and this typically expedites getting to deeper work sooner in EMDR therapy.
- The four core resources of this version of Flash make good supplemental or transitional resources that can also be used in EMDR therapy
- We begin by connecting the client with positive information of the positive scene. This is an anchor resource that can be carried out of session to promote a more concrete way of regulating between sessions.
- When memories fully resolve in Flash, that broader territory may be more approachable in EMDR therapy.
- When memories fully resolve in Flash, adaptive information is generated automatically as a result. Some clients will struggle if they have not had enough positive experiences to generate enough of the needed adaptive information in EMDR therapy.

When to Use Flash/When to Use EMDR Therapy

Flash can be used in a variety of ways for clients who could benefit from it, particularly as part of Phase Two of EMDR therapy. The following are some indications of clients who may benefit from using Flash as a gateway to deeper EMDR work:

- The client has a paper-thin window of tolerance. EMDR requires an adequate window of tolerance. Flash can be used to help widen the window of tolerance.
- The client is phobic of strong negative feelings. Flash can increase the feeling of client agency and capacity to address past issues.
- The client is phobic of the present. The center of EMDR therapy is noticing in the present.
- The client has little capacity to slow down. The pleasant scene in Flash is typically a dissociative experience. They do not need to slow down, be present, or notice in the present moment. They simply imagine being in the pleasant scene as it plays on YouTube.
- The client has a high risk of decompensation, hospitalization, of other severe functional impairment if we were to try to engage in EMDR therapy, yet stabilization strategies are needed.
- The client urgently needs to work in territories where they simply do not have enough of the needed adaptive information. Flash depends on the disconfirmation of the pleasant scene and does not depend upon the presence of enough of the needed adaptive information as conceptualized in the AIP.

When Flash is Not Needed as an Adjunct to EMDR Therapy

Flash is not needed in cases where the client can engage safely in EMDR therapy. Flash is most easily justified in cases of severe complex trauma as a bridge to working safely in EMDR therapy. Metaphorically, EMDR therapy is like the huge Brush Hog that is pulled behind a huge tractor. It clears a very broad swath. Flash is kind of like a Weed Eater or a push lawnmower. EMDR therapy is slow enough for insight. Flash is too fast for client insight. EMDR therapy is slow enough for the client to play the scene differently, is deep enough to allow connections between different periods of trauma, and purposefully engages many forms of self-awareness.

Step One: Developing, Using, and Understanding the Container

Except for very brief periods, each piece of the memory will be pushed out of direct focus when it is microactivated. This allows us to bring a tiny bit of content into working memory, but not focus on it. The piece of the memory that we contain is the portion of the memory that is about to be fully or partially metabolized in the next round of the calm scene.

It is helpful to develop and visualize the container that will hold each micro-slice of the memory. It can be a file folder, a box, a book, a chest, or anything that works for the client. The container is then "pushed or sent" far away from the client (ideally hundreds of miles away) to help get it out of direct focus and awareness.

Script: ***We are going to work one memory at a time and one ultra-tiny slice of one memory at a time. We are going to try to resolve this memory this by not thinking about it or feeling anything about it. We want to develop a container or a box that will hold whatever small pieces of the memory we activate and keep it out of direct awareness. What kind of container might be helpful? It can be a file box, a safe, pottery with a lid, or anything that is able to hold something for just a little while.***

Ask the client visualize to container… ***What color is it? | What is it made of? | How does it close?***

Can you imagine a blank slip of paper or a business card going into this container? | Can you see the container close? | Can you imagine pushing that container far away until it is just a tiny dot on a tiny dot on the horizon? Does it feel like that container and its contents are far enough away for it to be out of your focus for just right now?

Parts Language: ***Does this container work for all parts of you? Are there parts of you that may need a different type of container or need to make modifications to this one?***

- The vast majority of clients are able to visualize a container. If the client struggles to visualize, see the troubleshooting sections of the script for ways to outsource the visualization component of the container and other visualization tasks.
- You can always use an actual container that is in the therapy office or in the client's room if working through telehealth.

Step One (Continued): Teach the Shop-Vac Resource (Or Appropriate Accommodation)

Many other versions of Flash produce sessions that end with residual distress and often it is not clear why. This version of Flash is grounded in a specific understand of how humans heal as its working mechanism, which focuses on the client experiencing the calm scene in ways that are disconfirming the expectation/schema in the bad memory. If the client is having body activation from the memory, the client may be having a confirming experience of the expectation in the bad memory ("I'm feeling how I felt when the bad memory was happening"). Body activation is a problem in the Four Blinks Version of Flash for this reason. When it appears, the client should be instructed to tell you, so you can help them "scoop" it out and put it in the container or Shop-Vac it out and push the Shop-Vac canister out of awareness. In Flash, the goal is to process the traumatic information as information and not as distress.

As with all resources, it is a good idea to develop and practice this resource before it is needed. It is very difficult for clients to learn a new resource when they are flooded or in significant trauma-related distress.

Script: ***Have you ever used a Shop-Vac or a large coin vacuum at a carwash?***

Can you imagine holding the hose of a vacuum with one hand and feeling its suction with the other?

Can you imagine it picking up a small pile of dirt or sand?

If you quickly scan your body right now, can you find a knot, pressure, tension, or emptiness, even if only a little bit?

Can you imagine the "gunk" of that going into your Shop-Vac hose and just try to see the stress or feelings leaving those places and going into the hose like it is colored smoke? Note: It is not important that the client vacuum it all (or even most of it) go away. The Shop-Vac can become a ritual-like resource that may help direct attention and awareness away from that triggering sensation in the body.

Good. Can you see the canister of the vacuum get pushed far out of awareness… just send it several hundred miles away?

We let the client know that we use the Shop-Vac resource anytime distress shows up in the body, even if using it requires time.

Accommodation: Vacuums are triggering for many people because of past medical experiences or past trauma from forced or punitive cleaning. Alternatives to Shop-Vac are EMDR's light stream exercise, imagining "scooping up" with the client's hands any distress and pushing it away, or the bean bag resource that we will explore throughout this training.

Step Two: Developing, Using, and Testing the Calm Scene

All reprocessing work in Flash is done while the client is experiencing a calming, funny, exciting, pleasant, or similar scene. The experience can be imaginary, in the form of a video or picture, or can be a process that the client is actively doing, like petting a dog or rocking a baby). The therapist will eventually (in Step Four) guide the client to make a series of rapid blinks while experiencing the calm scene, so the calm scene will need to be something the client can go in and out of quickly. Reading may not make a good calm scene, since the client will only be able read a few words each round. The scene can be anything that is calming, relaxing, distracting, compelling, or interesting. It needs to be compelling enough to catch the client's attention and cause an experiential shift that is different than the expectation/schema in the bad memory.

The calm scene, which Phil Manfield calls the Positive Engaging Focus, can be almost anything. These are examples:

- The client watches a beautiful, relaxing, or funny video on YouTube or another service.
- The client remembers a salient scene from a vacation.
- The client rocks an actual baby or pets an actual dog (or engages with memories of those activities). Or, the client watches a cute video of her dog or pet.
- The client plays a musical instrument (or imagines playing one if the client has those skills).
- The client listens to a song or Spotify playlist that induces peace, hope, enthusiasm, beauty, or relaxation.
- The client watches videos of food (hot pizza coming out of the oven, etc). Note: Assess client for disordered eating beforehand.

It is highly recommended to outsource the scene to a YouTube video. Anything that the client finds relaxing can work. It is difficult for many clients with complex trauma to create and notice a rapid shift in affect if the calm scene has to be created through imagination in the five seconds between "blinks." A client with a pervasively traumatized system likely has a very busy head. The first choice with complex trauma should be to outsource the calm scene to a video that the client selects.

The calm scene must not intersect with the bad memory in any way.

Verify that the client can "go into and load up the senses of the calm place" before proceeding. Verify that the calm scene induces a calming, comforting, amused, distracted, or relaxing state.

Parts Language: ***Does this scene/activity/video work for all parts of you? Do any parts need a different kind of calm scene?*** On occasion, different parts of the client will use different calm scenes in a parallel way (like you are teaching and using this resource in a group setting). See podcast episodes about working with client parts.

Step Two (Continued): Teach Sensory Grounding

Sensory grounding is a needed resource in trauma work when the therapist asks the client to "glance" at a traumatic memory but advises them not to fall into the memory. Sometimes, simply interacting with the memory in any way can cause the client to dissociate into the memory. Sensory grounding in the present brings the client back into the current room. It brings the client back into a place where the bad thing isn't happening.

If you already do 5-4-3-2-1 grounding, you do a version of this. However, this version has several key differences from common approaches:

- Ask permission of parts to engage in this (or any other) exercise. Asking permission gives parts the chance to consent.
- Let the client know how long this exercise will last (and it should be really quick).
- Solicit verbal feedback at the end of the process, not during.
- We will have already identified something in the room that the client can use for the sense of scent (a candle or essential oil) and possibly taste/temperature (a warm or cold drink) prior to engaging in this exercise.

Teaching this Resource

Teach this resource before it is needed in sessions to manage flashbacks or any periods of overactivation.

Script: ***When we have difficult experiences, those experiences may be linked in the parts of the brain that doesn't or can't know that the experience is over. Sometimes accessing a memory takes us out of the present and puts us into an experience when we did not feel safe. I'd like to show one strategy that you can use to find your way back into the present. Often the present may not feel "safe," but it is likely to be safer than the experience from the bad memory. The exercise will ask you to very briefly engage your senses, one at a time. We will spend only a few seconds at a time getting information from each of the senses. If we keep it very brief, many people are able to tolerate this exercise well. If anything difficult comes up, we can stop. Is this an exercise that any part of you might object to, assuming that we do it quickly and that you can stop anytime you like?***

If there is an objection, stop and explore that objection. See if there is a way to do this that is not objectionable to the client or parts of the client. Otherwise, stop (parts will need to know that they can stop).

Vision: ***I invite you to look around the room and notice several things you see. Notice several objects and notice the color of those objects. Also notice that if you were to go up and touch these objects, would they be hard, soft, or some other texture?*** [Wait 5-10 seconds]

Touch: ***Place an open hand on the table or furniture next to you for just a moment and notice if it is colder, warmer, or the same temperature as your hand.*** [Wait 2-5 seconds] **Good.** ***Move your fingertips across the surface and notice if it is completely smooth or has a texture.*** [Wait 2-4 seconds] ***Good. Move your fingertips across the texture of that surface and just notice if the temperature changes as you move.*** [Wait 2-5 seconds] ***Good.***

Hearing: ***I'm going to be very quiet. Notice whatever you hear in order of loudest first.*** [Wait 5-8 seconds] ***Good.***

Smell: ***I'll give you a few moments to smell the essential oil [or another object] that you selected.*** *[Wait 5-10 seconds]* ***Good.***

Taste: ***I'll give you a few moments to taste, smell, or feel the temperature of the drink that you brought to the session.*** [Wait 5-10 seconds] ***Good.***

How was that? [explore] ***What was your experience with that exercise?*** [explore] ***Which of those senses seemed to be the most helpful in bringing your awareness more into the present?*** [explore]

As with all resources for a client with complex trauma, send the client home to practice first at their baseline and not when something has happened that has severely triggered them. Once the nervous system becomes comfortable with this resource, then use it as a fire extinguisher.

Step Three: Select the Memory, But Do Not Activate It

This step requires a little caution. We need to identify the memory the client will target, but we need to be careful not to activate it. This is similar to using the cursor to point to the file on the computer desktop that we want to use, but not double-clicking it or thinking about what is in the file. Encourage the client not to talk about it--not even for a few moments. It is important that the memory is an actual and individual memory and not a thought, a negative cognition, a general presenting issue, existential questions, or a cluster of memories. It is also important to instruct the client that we are working on only one memory at a time and that if other memories want to come, we will need to contain them in a large overflow vault or put them on a shelf for the moment. You may be tempted to check the SUDs here (**we do not check the SUDs in this version of Flash**). Evaluating the distress in the memory is an activation strategy and we are trying to avoid all activation in this step.

Step Three should last a maximum of 15-20 seconds most of the time. If you are taking longer than 15-20 seconds, the client may be overactivating the memory by bringing large pieces of it into working memory (which is one of the major reasons why some Flash sessions don't result in a fully resolved memory).

Before finalizing the selection of the memory, you should always engage client parts for consent or guidance: Do any parts of you have concerns about working on this memory? If a part objects, involve that part in selecting a memory that may be more tolerable, then ask all parts if the new memory is an acceptable memory. Repeat if necessary.

Once you identify a memory, instruct the client to see the general idea of the memory go out of awareness.

We have talked about using Flash to work on difficult memory. Do you have a specific bad memory that would be helpful to work on today? Maybe one that has been coming up the past week or so. It can be recent or old, but it should be an individual memory and we will only work on this memory. Without telling me much about it, can you let me know when you have a memory that you would like to work on? Good. Do all parts of you think working on that memory is a good idea today. Cleck. If so, see the general idea of that memory go out of your awareness, look at a blank wall if that is helpful. Send it miles and miles away. Let me know when it is gone.

You may need to use the Shop-Vac resource to get distress out of the body if identifying the memory caused body activation.

Step Four: Load Up the Calm Scene and Blink Every Five Seconds

This is the step where we will spend most of our time and where all of the reprocessing of the microslices of the memory occurs. Most of the Four Blinks Version of Flash is spent in a loop between Steps Four and Five. This is the only step where blinks are included. Teach the client how to do the blinks before starting.

When you are in the calm scene, I will say blink every five seconds and when I do, you just blink your eyes once slowly or several times quickly. After blinking, go right back into the calm scene. We will do this for about 30 seconds at a time.

Load up your calm scene, let me know when you are there.

While the client is in the calm scene, the therapist says ***blink*** about every five seconds for a total of five times (about 30 seconds for the whole set). Verify that the client is blinking once slowly or several times rapidly. If the client blinks more than several times quickly or blinks too slowly, it will consume time unnecessarily from the next five-second exposure to the calm scene. Most clients simply blink twice rapidly. It is not essential that the blinks occur at exactly five seconds (sometimes four seconds, sometimes ten seconds are just fine--nothing magical happens at five seconds).

When you have said ***blink*** a total of five times at about five seconds apart, ask the following question: ***"Good. We you able to keep finding your way back into positive scene?"***

If the client struggled to stay in the scene because of distractions, normalize that. It is not necessary to be in the calm scene 100% of the time when distractions come. If the client is struggling to return to the calm scene after the blinks, consider switching to a more compelling scene or to a compelling, interesting, or exciting video that the client can watch.

If part of the trauma memory intrudes on the calm scene, that is called an "intersection." If the memory intersects with the calm scene, instruct the client with the following: ***See the part of the memory that came into your calm scene go into your container, see the door close, and push your container even farther away. Push it several hundred miles away.***" Then immediately return to Step Four for another round of calm scene with blinks.

If the client reports that he was able to be mostly in the scene, go to Step Five to get the next link of activation. Again, most of the work will occur in a cycle between Steps Four and Five.

Important suggestion: Since loading the calm scene quickly is such a key part of this therapy, it is a good idea to do two rounds in Step Four before checking the bad memory in Step Five the first time you arrive in Step Four. Do not do repeated rounds of Step Four after the first time you are in this step when working on a memory or it will unnecessarily slow the process.

Step Five: Microactivate the Memory, Contain What Comes Out, Return to Step Four

The goal in this step is to microactivate a tiny, tiny, piece of the memory. We decrease activation by decreasing the amount of time that the client is exposed to the bad memory. Activating the memory too much may cause the following, all of which are problems that must be addressed and resolved immediately in this version of Flash:

- The "video" of the memory plays and the client encounters substantial distress (we want a single frame only from the bad memory when we first engage with it… not video content).
- Body activation appears (if body activation appears, see the Shop-Vac resource in this guide or in the resource videos on FourBlinks.com). Too much body activation may cause memories other than the one we are targeting to come into awareness.
- A flashback occurs (teach all clients the sensory grounding resource in this guide or use your own sensory grounding exercises).
- Problems containing are usually problems of overactivation.

In order to lightly activate the memory and container it, say something like the following:

Very quickly, think about the bad memory. Whatever is distressing in this millisecond, catch it, container it, and push it out of your awareness. Let me know when it is gone.

When the client indicates that the microslice of the memory is contained, quickly go back to Step Four and cycle between Steps Four and Five until the client can glance at the memory and can't identify any distress.

Most of the session is spent in a non-distressing loop between microactivation/containment (Step Five) and calm scene/blinks (Step Four). **If distress emerges, stop and immediately use a resource. We do not push into distress.**

If the client has several consecutive rounds in Step Five where substantial distress appears, that is a strong indicator that the client is thinking about the memory too long. We manage activation by thinking about the memory much shorter in subsequent rounds. You can ask the client to look at the memory 100 times faster than they did last time, even if they have difficulty knowing what is distressful in it. Underactivation is preferable to overactivation.

When the client cannot find any distress when glancing at the memory, go to Step Six.

Step Six: Clean Up Debris in the Memory

After the client cannot identify any distress in the memory in Step Five, say:

Now that you can't find distress when looking quickly, let's walk through the memory slowly like it's a video you are playing from the very first frame. Let me know the instant you find any distress, even if it's a tiny bit.

If there is any distress, say the following: ***Catch it, contain it, and send it far away. Let me know when it is gone.***

When the client indicates that the memory is containered, quickly return to Step Four and do another round of calm scene with blinks. Then, return to Step Six and ask the following question: ***Is there any distress remaining in that part of the memory that just had distress a moment ago?*** If there is any residual distress, return to Step Four for a round of calm scene with blinks. Keep checking for distress in just that piece of the memory and send the client back to Step Four until there is no distress in that piece of the memory.

When there is no distress in that part of the memory, instruct the client with the following phrase: ***Play the memory forward and let me know as soon as you find the next link of distress.*** When the next piece of distress is found, catch it, contain it, and send it far away. Keep doing loops between Step Four (the calm scene with blinks) and checking the distress the last piece of activation until all distress is gone in that piece. Keep playing the memory forward until the client can play the full memory with no distress on any channel.

Sometimes the distress that comes at this stage may be in the form of thoughts, for example, "It's just upsetting that it happened." Put that thought in the container and it is likely to decrease in distress after a round or two of blinks in the calm scene. Sometimes clients need to visualize thoughts being written into a piece of paper and see that paper go into the container in order make the thoughts concrete enough to container.

If the client is able to play all parts of the memory and there is no distress on any channel, then the memory is resolved. Check in with the memory next session to verify that all parts of the memory remain resolved.

Note: Do not be surprised if clients find pieces of the video of the memory in Step Six that still feel intensely distressing. This happens often. Those pieces of distress, including large pieces, are likely to be metabolized quickly after several rounds in the calm scene with blinks.

Step Seven: The Flash Future Template

The Flash future template allows you to easily leverage the work you just did when the memory resolved toward a future scene. The future scene should not be catastrophic. No one should die or become seriously ill. It is a test of something that is likely to happen that is related to the memory the client just resolved.

Script: ***Can you think of something that is related to the memory that you just completed that might happen in the next few weeks or months that would be helpful to explore? That future scene should not be catastrophic (no one dies or gets seriously sick).***

If so, push that future scene out of your awareness. Look at a blank wall or ceiling if that is helpful. When it is gone, load up your calm scene. Let me know when you are there.

Engage in the following loop until the client can play the future scene and there is no distress on any channel:

Microactivate the Future Scenario	Do Calm Scene with Blinks
"Think very quickly about that future scene. Whatever is distressing in this moment, catch it, contain it, and send it far away. Let me know when it is gone." When client indicates it is gone, go to the right column of this table for more calm scene with blinks and continue looping between left and right columns until there is no distress in the future scene. Before finishing, check to make sure that the client can play the video of the future scene. Container and calm scene with blinks until the whole future scene is metabolized.	***Load up your calm scene and let me know when you are there.*** When the client indicates they are there, say the word ***blink*** every five seconds for a duration of 30 seconds (exactly the same as you did in Step Four when working on the memory). After 30 seconds in the calm scene with blinks, ask the client the following: ***Were you able to stay in the calm scene?*** If so, go to the left column and continue looping between the left and right columns until the client cannot find any distress in the future scene. If activation intruded on the calm scene, container that activation and return to the calm scene with blinks, before returning to check the part of the memory that last intruded.

End by playing the video of the future scene, containering any distress that appears, and doing rounds in the calm scene with blinks until the client can play the future scene with no distress.

Abbreviated Script

Before starting, do the following if you have not already: Explain Flash to a client and why it may be a good approach for them. Explain what this approach requires of them (microactivating and having hundreds of exposures to the calm scene). Teach the client how to blink in Flash. Step One and Step Two are already done. In this context, you don't need to repeat them.

Step Three: Select the memory but be very careful not to activate it.

Is there a memory that you would like to work on today? | [do not let the client tell you much about it] | ***Is this an individual memory that happened at a particular place and time?*** | ***Do all parts of you think working on that memory is a good idea today?*** | ***Good, just push the general idea of it out of your awareness, look at a blank wall or ceiling to blank it out. Let me know when it is gone.***

Step Four. When in Step Four the first time in a session repeat it.

Load up your calm scene, and let me know when you are there. | ***Blink*** | ***Blink*** | ***Blink*** | ***Blink*** | ***Blink*** | ***Good, how did that go?*** [Repeat once.]

The Step Five and Step Four Loop. Do the loop below until the client can't find distress when glancing quickly at the memory.

Step Five	**Step Four**
Lightning fast, think about the bad memory. Whatever is distressing in this millisecond, catch it, contain it, send if far away. Let me know when it is gone.	***Load up your calm scene. Let me know when you are there.*** ***Blink*** | ***Blink*** | ***Blink*** | ***Blink*** | ***Blink*** [pausing five seconds between] ***How did that go?***

The Step Six and Step Four Loop.

Step Six	**Step Four**
In the first round of Step Six say: ***Play the memory from the very first frame and let me know when you find the first little piece of distress.*** [When distress is found, say:] ***Lightning fast, catch it, contain it, and send it far, far, away. Let me know when it is gone.***	***Load up your calm scene. Let me know when you are there.*** ***Blink*** | ***Blink*** | ***Blink*** | ***Blink*** | ***Blink*** [pausing five seconds between] ***How did that go?***
After the first round, keep checking the last piece of activation in the video until it is digested using language like, ***"Check the piece of the memory that just had distress in it. Is there any distress in it now?"*** If so, catch it, contain it, and then do another round of calm scene with blinks. If not, play the memory forward, digesting each piece fully until no distress remains in the memory.	

Where the Four Blinks Version of Flash Breaks and How to Fix It

- Problem: Overactivation. Solutions: In subsequent checks of the memory, encourage the client to think about the bad memory even faster. A flashback is a clear example of overactivation. If this happens, use the grounding resources in this guide. Check for body activation. Body activation from the memory will contaminate the client's calm scene. Strategies to manage overactivation:
    - Look at the memory much faster next time.
    - See the bean bag activation strategy on FourBlinks.com.
    - Get consent from parts to only get a tiny piece of the memory.
    - Work on a smaller or more tolerable memories first.
- Problem: Containering not working well. Solution: This is also usually a result of overactivation. Minimize activation next round by shortening exposure to the memory. "See" the activated piece go into the container. "See" the container close. "See" the container go out of awareness. Push it farther away, ideally hundreds of miles away.
- Problem: The problem is not overactivation and containering appears to be working, but the client reports that distress is not decreasing and the memory isn't changing any after 20-30 minutes. Solution: Check to make sure that the experience of the calm scene is inducing an experience in the client that is different than the experience of the bad memory. The calm scene must induce an experience and the client needs to be able to find his way back into it quickly. Let the client know that if the calm scene isn't producing a calming, relaxing, distracting, or amusing experience Flash will not work well.
- Problem: You are working with a system of parts and you did not get consent from the client's parts to do this work. Solution: Engage all parts in all parts of this work, including Steps One and Two. It is essential that you engage all client parts in Step Three when selecting the memory.

Tips for a "Safe" and Effective Practicum Experience

- Try to not use an imaginary calm scene. If you are an EMDR therapist, you may have a strong preference for using an imaginary calm scene. However, we use the calm scene completely differently in Flash than EMDR. I strongly encourage you to use YouTube video. This will let you practice using a strategy that your clients are likely to be able to use and tolerate.
- Please be sensible about the memory that you select to make sure that it isn't too big for this context.
- If distress is present at any point, **IMMEDIATELY STOP**, and deal with that distress using one of the four core resources. Do not press forward into distress. That is a recipe for potential harm in this approach. Flash works only when your experience is different from the expectation in the trauma memory. If you are activated, Flash will not work well and may not be safe.
- We work **ONE MEMORY AT A TIME** in this version of Flash. If other memories want to come, we don't let them. This rule is not negotiable. Multiple other memories wanting to come is a sign of overactivation, particularly in the body. Check it. Shop-Vac as needed.
- If you are having trouble getting only a tiny piece of the memory, use the bean bags to help you stay present and microactivate. Only think about the memory when the bean bag is in the air (and do not toss it high). If that doesn't work, ground and select a more tolerable memory.
- If you have several rounds of back-to-back distress, you may be overactivating. The way that you manage activation in Flash is to look at the memory in subsequent glances much faster. Try to look at the memory 100 times faster than you did last time.
- If you are having trouble containering, assume overactivation and use a resourcing.
- If you are having distress and do not know what to do, ground. Grounding is the most powerful resource of the four core resources.
- If overactivation is occurring and you are using your resources, it is okay to get out of sync with me. If you were just using a resource to manage distress, do not come back into the flow of the group in the activation of Step Five. Flow back in when I ask you to "Load up the calm scene, let me know when you are there."
- If a piece of the memory appears in awareness when you are in the calm scene, immediately stop, catch the distress, container it, and send it far, away. Send it thousands of miles farther away than you did last time.
- If your eyes are irritated or you are having problems with the blinks, you do not have to blink. Just find a fixed object in the room and look at it when I say "blink," then return to your video.
- Let your eyes blink organically whenever you need. You do not have to wait for me to say "blink" if you need to blink. Those normal blink's don't count.
- If grief comes, pause and let yourself feel it. We grieve by grieving. When the grief settles, you can resume.

The Group Practicum Experience

The group practice that I will guide you through has the following structure:

- Two rounds in the calm scene with blinks.
- Select the memory. Verify that it meets criteria and is okay with your parts. Push it out of awareness.
- Two more rounds in the calm scene with blinks.
- Start the Step Five/Step Four loop of lightly activate/container and calm scene/blinks until you can no longer find distress in the memory.
- Start the Step Six/Step Four loop until you can play the memory and there is no distress on any channel. If you finish early, just hang out in your calm scene without blinks.

Reminder: When you can't find distress when looking at the memory quickly in the Step Five and Step Four loop, pivot to the Step Six and Step Four loop where you play the video of the memory and container the first piece of distress that comes. You are not done until you can play the whole memory without any distress on any channel.

Please scan the safety sheet at the end of the manual that describes almost any problem that you might encounter.

Notes and questions?

LUNCH ON YOUR OWN

Return at 1:00 PM ET.

Preparation for the Practicum Breakouts

In this practicum, someone will need to be in therapist role and someone will need to be in client role. There may be multiple observers. I strongly encourage everyone to dig deep and try to be in an active role if you can. If there is time after the first round, you are welcome to either switch roles or engage in a Flash future template.

In this practicum, we are practicing Step Three through Step Six, since everyone participated in the core resources earlier in the day.

It is essential that you discourage the client from telling you anything specific about the memory, since that may bring the memory into working memory.

Since many of us will be in the same room, please be aware of the volume of your group. Many groups become too loud during the debrief after the processing. Again, please be aware that people near you may still be working.

Before starting, the therapist and client should scan the Safety Sheet at the back of the book.

Practicum Worksheet for Steps Three Through Six

Do the following:

- ☐ Make sure client has their grounding objects near. Have bean bags, etc.
- ☐ Practice options for blinking.
- ☐ Remind the client that if distress emerges, let you know and we will use the resources to manage it. Both therapist and client should review the safety sheet (p. 39).

Step Three: Select the memory but be very careful not to activate it.

- ***Is there a memory that you would like to work on today?*** | [do not let the client tell you much about it] | ***Is this an individual memory that happened at a particular place and time?*** | ***Do all parts of you think working on that memory is a good idea today?*** | ***Good, just push the general idea of it out of your awareness, look at a blank wall or ceiling to blank it out.***

Step Four: ***Load up your calm scene, and let me know when you are there. / Blink / Blink / Blink / Blink / Blink*** [pausing five seconds between] ***Good, how did that go?*** [repeat this step]

The Step Five and Step Four loop. Do the loop below until the client can't find distress when glancing quickly at the memory.

Step Five	Step Four
Lightning fast, think about the bad memory, whatever is distressing in this millisecond, catch it, contain it, send it far away. Let me know when it is gone.	***Load up your calm scene. Let me know when you are there.*** ***Blink*** | ***Blink*** | ***Blink*** | ***Blink*** | ***Blink*** [pausing five seconds between] ***How did that go?***

The Step Six and Step Four Loop.

Step Six	Step Four
In the first round of Step Six say: ***Play the memory from the very first frame and let me know when you find the first little piece of distress.*** [When distress is found, say:] ***Lightning fast, catch it, contain it, and send it far, far, away. Let me know when it is gone.***	***Load up your calm scene. Let me know when you are there.*** ***Blink*** | ***Blink*** | ***Blink*** | ***Blink*** | ***Blink*** [pausing five seconds between] ***How did that go?***
After the first round, keep checking the last piece of activation in the video until it is digested using language like, ***"Check the piece of the memory that just had distress in it. Is there any distress in it now?"*** If so, catch it, contain it, and then do another round of calm scene with blinks. If not, play the memory forward, digesting each piece fully until no distress remains in the memory.	

Debrief the Practicum Experience

Questions about the practicum experience?

What was your experience as the therapist?

What was your experience as the client?

What was your experience as the observer (if present)?

Practicum Worksheet for Self-Administered Flash

We will return from this exercise at: ____:_____

The next practicum will be a self-administered exercise for about 30 minutes. You will need an internet-capable device in order to do it (phone, tablet, etc). If you do not have a device, please use the practicum worksheet from the prior practicum to walk yourself through this exercise. Use your phone to load up your calm scene. The MP3's below will play in the background and walk you through the process.

You are welcome to move around the room, go outside (if weather allows), or be in the gym. Please be careful on any stairs that you might navigate when doing this work… it can tax your attention.

I will walk you through this exercise using the MP3's at the following URL:

https://FourBlinks.com/mp3

If you encounter difficulties, find me or text me at: 330 442-0428.

Your questions from this exercise:

The Group Four Blinks Protocol

The full Four Blinks group protocol is available at: https://traumatherapygroups.com/, but we are using the abbreviated protocol below as an introduction to group processing. It is important that all group members have demonstrated that the resources resonate with them. The four core resources are like the four walls of a chimney, they allow us to do this work without burning the house down.

Reprocessing (35 Minutes)

We will start with two rounds in the calm scene and then we will select the memory to work on. For now, just load up your calm scene and notice it. [Wait 10-15 seconds until it appears people are engaging in their calm scene]

[Wait 5 seconds.] ***Blink… Good. Notice your calm scene.*** [Wait 5 seconds.] ***Blink*** [Wait 5 seconds.] ***Blink*** [Wait 5 seconds.] ***Blink*** [Wait 5 seconds.] ***Blink*** [Wait 5 seconds.]

If that went okay, let's do another round. Load up your calm scene.

[Wait 5 seconds.] ***Blink… Good. Notice your calm scene.*** [Wait 5 seconds.] ***Blink*** [Wait 5 seconds.] ***Blink*** [Wait 5 seconds.] ***Blink*** [Wait 5 seconds.] ***Blink*** [Wait 5 seconds.]

Good. Let's select the memory you would like to work on. Make sure it is an individual memory that happened at a specific place and time. Do all parts of you think that working on this memory today is a good idea? [Wait a few seconds] ***If so, just push it out of awareness. If not, work with that part until you can find something safer to work on. Again, push that memory out of your awareness, look at a blank wall if you need to or use your Shop-Vac if you need to. When it is gone, load up your calm scene and just notice it.***

Calm scene. [Wait 10 seconds.] ***Blink.*** [Wait 5 seconds.] ***Blink*** [Wait 5 seconds.] ***Blink*** [Wait 5 seconds.] ***Blink*** [Wait 5 seconds.] ***Blink*** [Wait 5 seconds.] Good.

[The text in the table below is what you will repeat over and over for what remains in the 35 minute reprocessing part of the group. Read quickly the text on the left side. Make note of the time this loop will end, roughly 30 minutes from now.]

Very quickly, glance at the bad memory and whatever is distressing in this millisecond, catch it, contain it, and push it far, far away. When it's gone, notice your calm scene.	***[Wait 10 seconds.] Blink. [Wait 5 seconds.] Blink [Wait 5 seconds.] Blink [Wait 5 seconds.] Blink [Wait 5 seconds.] Blink [Wait 5 seconds.] Good.***

[On about the third round after starting and after reading the right column, you can say something like this once: ***Don't forget to check your body and Shop-Vac if you need to.]***

[After about 20 minutes and after reading the right column, you can say something like this once: ***If you are having trouble finding the distress when looking quickly at the bad memory, start playing the memory like a piece of video and catch the first piece of distress. Keep doing this until there is no distress in any part of the video of the memory.***]

In the last few rounds before running out of time, simply let participants know the following after reading the right column: ***We have [3,2,1] more rounds before we will need to go to closure.***

Closure

Good. I hope that went okay. If you did not get to finish your memory, please feel free to scoop it up and put any residue into the container and we can work on that next time. Also, remember that you have your calm scene (which you can load up anytime without blinking), you have a container if other memory or sensations appear, your Shop-Vac resource, and sensory grounding. Use all of these resources as needed to manage any residual distress.

Closing Practicum: Your Choice of Individual, Therapist-Client Pairs, or Small Groups

In this practicum, you can practice Flash in your choice of the following ways:

- As an individual practice again, as you did before. See the page titled: Practicum Worksheet for Self-Administered Flash, several pages prior.
- You can form pairs and continue the therapist/client roles from earlier today.
- You can form small groups where one of you volunteers to guide a small group through the group protocol that we just reviewed.

We will come back at about 3:45 for questions and for closing materials for the training.

How I Most Commonly Use Flash as an EMDR Therapist

- Knock out the most intrusive memories appearing as flashbacks/dreams/triggering, which can dramatically decrease the amount of time it takes to resource clients for more intensive therapies because we are working directly on the presenting issue as soon as the second session (clients noticeably get better sooner).
- If there is not time in a session to do EMDR reprocessing, there is probably time to work on a memory with Flash.
- Close difficult stuff that gets opened in EMDR therapy.
- Use Flash with somatically dissociated clients (clients who struggle noticing), overly rational clients (clients who get stuck in trying to figure it out), clients with very little adaptive information (and severe attachment wounding), clients with histories/risk of body-based catastrophes in EMDR (abreactive vomiting, high risk of panic attack), and clients with DID symptoms whose parts do not consent to the distress of EMDR.
- When I have a voice-only connection with the client. I can guide the client through Flash through the phone.
- Give the client choice and options related to how they want to interact with the memory.
- I use Flash to generate some of the adaptive information that may be missing and will be needed for the client to engage in EMDR therapy.
- Send many clients home to do Flash approaches on themselves when moderately or severely activated with intrusive trauma symptoms between sessions.

Existing Research into Flash

- Brouwers, T.C., Matthijssen, S.J.M.A., de Jongh, A. (2021). **The effects of the Flash Technique compared to those of an abbreviated Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy protocol on the emotionality and vividness of aversive memories.** Frontiers in Psychology. 12:741163.
- Manfield, P., Lovett, J., Engel, L., & Manfield, D. (2017). **Use of the flash technique in EMDR therapy: Four case examples.** Journal of EMDR Practice and Research, 11(4), 195–205.
- Shebini, N. (2019). **Flash technique for safe desensitization of memories and fusion of parts in DID: Modifications and resourcing strategies.** Frontiers of the Psychotherapy of Trauma and Dissociation. 3(2):151-164.
- Wong, S-L. (2021). **A model for the Flash Technique (FT) based on working memory and neuroscience research.** Journal of EMDR Practice and Research, 15(3).
- Wong, S.-L., & Forman-Patel, H. (2022). **Doing the flash technique without bilateral stimulation and without prompted blinking: Two vignettes**. *Journal of EMDR Practice and Research*, *16*(2), 61–67.
- Wong, S-L. (2019). **Flash technique group protocol for highly dissociative clients in a homeless shelter: A clinical report.** Journal of EMDR Practice and Research, 13(1), 20–31
- Yaşar, A. B., Emre Konuk, Kavakçı, Ö., Uygun, E., Gündoğmuş, İ., Taygar Afra, S., & Uludağ, E. (2022). **A randomized-controlled trial of EMDR Flash Technique on traumatic symptoms, depression, anxiety, stress, and Life of quality with individuals who have experienced a traffic accident**. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*.
- Yaşar, Alisan & Gundogmus, Ibrahim & Gündüz, Anil & Konuk, Emre. (2019). **Investigation of the effect single session of "Flash Technique" at a group.** Klinik Psikofarmakoloji Bulteni, 29, 73-73.
- Yaşar, A. & Gundogmus, I & Gündüz, A & Konuk, E. (2021). **The effects of single session EMDR flash technique group application on traumatic symptoms.** The Israel journal of psychiatry and related sciences. 58(2), 41-46.

Definitions

- **Disconfirming.** This memory reconsolidation term means that the felt experience of the calm scene should be experientially different than the expectation encoded in the bad memory. For instance, a calm scene of petting a dog can be experientially disconfirming if we are working on a memory that has beliefs encoded related to safety. Flash teaches us that the experience in the calm scene only needs to be generally calming or disconfirming. It does not need to be the direct opposite of the expectation in the bad memory. The scene of a bubbly hot pizza coming out of an oven is disconfirming enough to help a client process a memory of physical abuse with beliefs about safety (note that hunger for pizza is not directly about safety, but it still works).
- **Intersection.** When some traumatic information intrudes into the calm scene. This is a problem because it will interfere with the ability of the calm scene to produce a disconfirming experience. Intersections are often caused by either overactivation or the container not being pushed far enough away. The best initial intervention when an intersection occurs, is to see the memory go into the container and to push the container hundreds of miles away. Be careful about overactivation the next time you are in Step Five by asking the client to think about the memory for even less time than the last exposure to it. Again, we are just looking for one frame of the memory, not a moving part of the video.
- **Memory Reconsolidation Approaches.** An understanding of how humans heal. For more, see Ecker, Bruce; Ticic, Robin; Hulley, Laurel. (2012). *Unlocking the Emotional Brain*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- **Microslice.** The small fragment of the memory that emerges when the client glances at the memory for a fraction of a second. That memory content and any associated distress are routed to the container. This is how memory content is processed in this version. We never work with the whole memory--only tiny pieces of it.
- **Parts.** One of the components of the client's internal system. We are all composed of a system of parts. Some may be rational, some may be emotional, and some may be terrified or frozen. The degree to which client parts may be able to inform and help guide all aspects of this work will vary. There is a great deal of wisdom in inviting all parts to participate in all aspects of this work. Engaging a system is not harder than dealing with what happens when we pretend that we are not working with one.
- **Round**. A round is a single loop through Steps Four and Five. In Step Four, clients will quickly blink several times every time you say "blink." You will say "blink" in Step Four every five seconds for a duration of about 30 seconds. "A round of blinking only" references Step Four without activating the memory in Step Five.
- **Shop-Vac Resource**. A Shop-Vac™ is the brand name of a specific type of hand-held vacuum cleaner. It is a useful imaginary resource to help quickly remove body-based activation. Body activation is a problem because it will contaminate the experience of the calm scene and produce an intersection of the calm scene and the bad memory.

Troubleshooting Tips

- **Do not check the SUDs in this version of Flash.** Checking the SUDs (assessment of distress on 0-10 scale) is an activation strategy to assess for how much distress remains in the memory. Do not do it. You are likely to cause unnecessary activation of parts of the memory that the client has not yet brought into awareness (remember we are working only one microslice at a time). If you would like to know the SUDs for the client's note, ask after the memory has been fully reprocessed (the client will remember how "hot" that memory was, but now it is safe to check it). For this version of Flash to work, there is no reason why you need to know the SUDs. You simply need to know whether or not the client can find a microslice of distress remaining in the memory and container it. There is no need to ever know how much distress remains in that memory. Don't overactivate it and whatever remains is likely to clear if you keep reprocessing.
- **Let the client know that the memory content that they are handling is like a hot potato.** Touch it only as long as needed to very quickly toss it into the container. Slowing down containment can cause distress to seep into awareness and the body.
- **Enter an agreement with the client not to overly activate the memory.** It's like Catholic teen dating. We have an agreement not to "fully go-there go-there, but just ish or kinda." Parts of the system typically like this agreement not to overly activate the memory and to work only a tiny microslice at a time.
- **Be aware of your pacing.** Metaphorically, the loops that occur between Phases Four and Five act as a kind of pump for tiny pieces of distress and traumatic memory content at a time. Keep the pump going and keep it going quickly. Practice the loop between Steps Four and Five so that you can quickly move the client from one to the other without pauses between your instructions. Too much empty time can cause connections to form with other memory content or distress may start to seep and both of these are problems in Flash.
- **If the memory does not appear to be reprocessing or not reprocessing down to no distress.** Check for overactivation and for body activation particularly. We do not want body activation. If the body is activated from the memory, Flash is not working optimally. All distress, including body activation, should be immediately containered like it is a hot potato. Using "metaphorical hands" or an imaginary vacuum cleaner, get the sensations out of the body and in the container as quickly as possible. See the Shop-Vac resource script.
- **Clearly instruct clients that we are working on one memory at a time.** Allowing many memories to connect is a recipe for disaster. The free association of EMDR is not permitted here, nor is noticing distress (any distress needs to be immediately containered regardless of where or why it appears). You can instruct the client not to allow other memories into awareness and to let you know if other memories are trying to intrude and you can help the client container the assorted memories. Adjacent memories coming into awareness is also an indicator of overactivation and body distress, check for body distress and container or vacuum it out immediately. Body activation may act like a "magnet" for memories of similar times the body felt that way.

- **Keeping the memory out of direct attention/awareness is critical.** Briefly bringing microslices of the memory into awareness, containering it, pushing it out of direct attention, and loading up a calm scene that we interrupt with blinks are the central elements in this process. It is important that the calm scene and the memory not interact with each other. It is important that the container be pushed far enough away (and the client feels that the memory is far enough away that it won't intrude into the scene). If the memory keeps intruding into the calm scene, strengthen the container and push it farther away. Changing the calming scene to something even more compelling can also help. If the client is struggling to visualize their own calm place, you can play a beach scene from YouTube or another video that the client finds relaxing. Many clients with trauma struggle to visualize in compelling ways. Outsourcing the visualization part to simply actively watching a video will often result in much faster reprocessing. Problems with containering are often problems of overactivation.
- **If the client activates too much and is having a flashback of the memory, immediately use sensory grounding.** See the sensory grounding script in this guide. It will walk you through how to handle a flashback and how to resume reprocessing after a flashback.
- **Don't be surprised if substantial "blips" of distress show up in Step Six**. This may require a few more rounds of blinks, but typically these peaks of distress processes quickly back down to no distress (one or two rounds through Step Six).
- **When you are first in Step Four, do two rounds in the calm scene**. The first time you are in Step Four (just after you completed Step Three, do several rounds in Step Four before getting the first microslice out of the memory. This can help verify that the client can easily access the calm scene with the blinks (which is the active ingredient in this approach). Do not do two rounds in Step Four in subsequent visits to Step Four (only the first time or this will slow reprocessing).
- **Be careful not to start Step Three before you finish Step One and Two.** Also, if you are starting a new session after the client has already done Flash reprocessing in a prior session, make sure that the container and the calm scene are accessible before starting Step Three; since Steps Four and Five will require immediate access to these assets.

Frequently Asked Questions

- **How do clients blink if their eyes are closed in their calm scene?** If the client selects to process with eyes closed using an imaginary calm scene, simply inform the client to open the eyes for the blinking part and close them when the blinks are done.
- **Wait, why do you call it "Four Blinks" and then ask the client to blink only a couple of times?** Oops. The client can blink once, twice, three times, or four times. Most blink twice. Twice is ideal because it is likely to disrupt concentration on the calm scene (and require that the client reenter the calm scene, thus producing another exposure to the calm scene), but also short enough not to take time out of the client's next five second exposure.
- **Why does this version not include bilateral stimulation, counting, or the client narrating their positive scene to you?** Everything in this version of Flash is centered in a specific understanding of memory reconsolidation, which posits that we heal when we sit with experiences that disconfirm the expectation in the target memory. Everything that doesn't make sense from a memory reconsolidation perspective has been removed from this version of Flash, including bilateral stimulation, deep breathing, counting, the client narrating about the calm scene, etc. Everything that distracts the client from the core task of repeatedly and efficiently finding their way into the disconfirming experience of the calm scene is removed. Active ingredients are strengthened. Other versions of Flash may be built upon a different understanding of the active ingredients in Flash and they may work well under those conceptualizations. This version is designed to be conceptually and practically tight, clear, itemized, reliable, and easily consultable when things go wrong.
- **But, I like bilateral stimulation. Can I do it?** Of course you can, but the entire purpose of developing this version of Flash is to develop a single conceptual and practical framework for one way to do Flash well, built around a clear understanding of memory reconsolidation. Anything that might distract from the client easily entering and having a microexperience in the calm scene is a potential distraction. I would invite you to consider if you like bilateral stimulation primarily because you are accustomed to using it as an EMDR therapist. Flash is completely different from EMDR therapy (as different as an apple is from an orange cat).
- **What to do if blinking is not possible because of eye irritation or other problems?** The purpose of the blinks is to split a 30-second calm scene into six separate five-second calm scenes, nothing more. There are many ways to accomplish the same goal other than blinking. Substitutes for blinking are simply looking at a fixed place on a wall for about 1/3 of a second and then returning to your calm scene or looking at and clapping your hands together several times quickly and returning to your calm scene.
- **If we do not check the SUDSs, how will I know when the client can't find distress and we should move to Step Six?** Remember that in each step of the process we are giving the client very clear instructions about what to do. In Step Five, we are asking them to check the memory, catch the distress, and container it. If the client can't find what is distressing in the memory they are likely to tell us, since they cannot do the task we are asking them to do. Also, you can simply say once (not repeatedly) in Step Five,

"Simply let me know when you check the memory and you cannot find distress in the memory."

- **What can I do to understand this approach better?** Read this guide carefully. It contains a lot. Watch the Flash-related videos on the FourBlinks.com website… there are dozens of hours of training content to learn how to do this well. Participate in a three-hour training, which is currently offered nearly weekly for free or nearly free. Retake the training if needed. Trainings are announced on EMDR's Third Weekend.
- **What types of memories should we start with in Flash?** Where to start depends on your and your client's goals. My preference with many new clients is to start with the intrusive memories or presenting issues that have been most contributing to current or recent instability. Typically, starting to treat the presenting issue the first few sessions gives me a healthier client to resource and decreases the time that it takes to prepare the client for EMDR therapy, parts work, or Flash targeting of larger memories.
- **How do we do a more comprehensive target selection?** See Strategies for Target Memory Selection in FourBlinks.com.
- Where can I get consultation on this version of Flash? A free or nearly free consultation is offered almost weekly, see FourBlinks.com for the schedule.
- **Are there clients with particular diagnoses that do not make good candidates for Flash?** There are not particular diagnoses that remove Flash as an option. Clients who do not make good candidates for Flash will struggle to develop and use the core resources of the container and calm scene. Note that there are many ways to do these resources and you can learn about helpful accommodations for them on the EMDR Third Weekend site. Also, if clients struggle to microactivate the memory and they keep overactivating, you will need to practice opening and closing awareness. See Managing Problems with Activation videos on EMDRThirdWeekend.com.
- **If Flash is so good, why not just only use Flash for everything?** First, clients need to heal. If you have one highly effective trauma psychotherapy in your toolkit, then you have a resource that 90% of other therapists do not have. If you have Flash Therapy, EMDR therapy, and a way of effectively working with parts, then you have an amazing toolbox. Everything in your toolbox is helpful. Use it all. However, therapists who know how to do Flash approaches well typically start with Flash.
- **Flash is so easy and effortless for some clients that it can't really be resolving trauma. Am I wrong to be skeptical?** It's expected that you would be skeptical. However, if your skepticism comes from the fact that you somehow need your clients to experience more distress in their healing processes, I'd invite you to explore that. Carrying trauma is horrible enough. We need healing strategies that are noneventful… and we have had one, in our genes, that has been with us perhaps for as long as we have been human. What we can learn from Flash challenges many of the assumptions of the last 130 years since Freud and Breuer told us that we had to have a catharsis in order to heal.
- **What is meant by "process the traumatic memory as information, rather than as distress?"** Since we are able to route most of the distress away from awareness and away from the body, many clients are able to process the distress of the traumatic memory with nearly the ease of catching and tossing aside a ball. A lot of the distress that comes

from trauma work comes from our parts reacting to too much traumatic information coming into awareness too quickly. For more see the "Walking the Prisoner Out Metaphor" on the EMDR Third Weekend site.

- **Why is this version so insistent on starting with a video calm scene with clients with complex trauma?** Many of your clients with complex trauma have remarkably active minds. The system is doing many tasks to ensure safety in the present. Suppose that we ask them to create a beach scene. Imagine the difficulty of creating the ocean, waves, sky, clouds, warmth, seagulls, and sand. Imagine the difficulty of doing that in less than five seconds. My clients who outsource the calm scene to a video process their memories about 40% faster than those who use imaginary scenes and process larger trauma with less distress.

Steps You Can Take to Learn More

Get trained in other versions of this approach. Philip Manfield (developer): https://flashtechnique.com/, Ricky Greenwald's Child Trauma Institute (Recommended): https://www.childtrauma.com/training/Flash. Both trainings are inexpensive and teach you many things you need to know to use Flash effectively with clients immediately.

- Access the resources found at: http://FourBlinks.com (a non-copyright/open-source approach to one way to do Flash-like approaches well).
- **Read the script.** It can save you a lot of meandering. The latest script is always available on the Four Blinks website.
- You can join the Flash Sandbox on Facebook and coordinate with other therapists to practice Flash-like approaches with each other: https://www.facebook.com/groups/flashsandbox
- Attend subsequent trainings anytime and for free as a refresher and join the free Flash consult groups when they are offered. Free on-demand trainings are available at the Four Blinks website.
- Schedule consultation if needed, you can do so at: http://EmdrTom.com
- Consultation groups are at: https://emdrcleveland.as.me/flashconsult

Weekly Flash processing groups for therapists: https://emdrcleveland.as.me/flashgroup

Safety Sheet

THE MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION

In order to engage in this version of Flash safely, the core resources of **container, calm scene, grounding, and Shop-Vac** (or workable accommodations) must be in place.

This version of Flash has several absolutely core rules:

- **If distress comes, even a little bit, stop.** Use one of the four resources to move the distress away from the body and away from awareness. Do not push forward or harm may occur, including the risk of making the calm scene a trauma trigger.
- **You can change the calm scene at any time.** It must shift how you feel in a positive direction when you engage with it.
- **If the bad memory intrudes in the calm scene, stop.** Catch it and send it out of the solar system.
- **The calm scene and the bad memory cannot intersect in any way.** If they intersect, you should immediately change the calm scene to something that does not intersect.
- **We work one memory at a time.** One memory only. If other memories really want to come, that is a sign of overactivation. Check for body-based distress, manage it, and be careful not to overactivate the memory in the next rounds.

PROBLEMS WITH ACTIVATION

I'm having trouble only activating a tiny piece of the memory at a time. I am feeling a lot of distress. In the next few rounds when I am talking, try to tune me out (or turn down the volume if you need to). If the memory feels really vivid, use sensory grounding. Then, use Shop-Vac to get the distress out of your body (you do not have to get all of it out). Once you feel more connected to the present, you can join the next round of calm scene with blinks. To avoid this continuing to happen, it is important that you glance at the memory even faster and catch the first bit of distress even sooner. If this keeps happening, try focusing on a different part of the memory and come back to the distressing part later. If that does not work, stop checking the memory when I'm directing you to, but just be in your calm scene with blinks for a while.

I'm feeling a lot of distress. Do I just push forward? No. Stop and manage the distress using sensory grounding or Shop-Vac. Do not push into distress. If distress is present, Flash isn't working.

Other memories want to come. Other memories coming into awareness may be an indicator of overactivation. Send the memories that want to come into a large vault and let them know that you can get to them at another time. Use sensory grounding or Shop-Vac if you notice distress in them. In this group, we are working only one memory at a time.

The bad memory intrudes into my calm scene. Stop. Immediately stop and container whatever content intruded. Push it 1,000 miles farther away than you pushed it last time. The calm scene and the memory cannot exist in the same mental space, or problems will occur (thus the need to push the memory content out of awareness so that we can make all of awareness available to the calm scene). If you continue to struggle with the memory intruding into the calm scene, use your resources and stop. Take a break. Pick a more tolerable memory from a different part of your life and rejoin.

THE CALM SCENE ITSELF IS DISTRESSSING ME

The calm scene is distressing me because there is something in it that reminds me of the bad memory. The calm scene and the bad memory cannot intersect in any way. If they are, you need to change the calm scene to something else immediately. Use grounding or Shop-Vac during the transition if you need to. If you need help from facilitators, contact them.

If the calm scene itself is distressing because it is getting paired with the bad memory. It is essential that you **stop immediately**. You have probably been pushing into the distress, rather than trying to manage and contain the distress before continuing to the calm scene. Use grounding and Shop-Vac immediately. Do not continue reprocessing. Go take care of yourself. Pet a dog. Go for a walk. Or, let a facilitator know that you need some help.

I CAN NO LONGER FIND DISTRESS, WHAT DO I DO?

I can glance quickly at the memory and I cannot find any distress. Now that you can't find distress, when the group leader sends you back to the memory, try to walk through each frame of the memory from the beginning, like walking through a piece of videotape. As soon as any distress appears (even a little bit), catch it, contain it, and push it out of awareness and continue the process until you can play the whole video of the memory and there is no distress.

I can play the memory without any distress, but there is still time. If we have at least 15 minutes left to go, feel free to start another memory. If not, feel free to just be in your calm scene without activating anything until the group is done. Or, you can turn off your video and come back in time for feedback or working on future targets.

PROBLEMS WITH THE CALM SCENE

Can I change the calm scene? Yes. Calm scenes may get boring or stale and it is important to change them as needed. Yes, you can change them mid-process.

The bad memory intrudes into my calm scene. Stop. Immediately stop and container whatever content intruded. Push it 1,000 miles farther away than you pushed it last time. The calm scene and the memory cannot exist in the same mental space, or problems will occur (thus the need to push the memory content out of awareness so that we can make all of awareness available to the calm scene). If you continue to struggle with the memory intruding into the calm scene, use your resources and stop. Take a break. Pick a more tolerable memory from a different part of your life and rejoin.

IT'S NOT WORKING

I've been doing this for 20+ minutes and nothing is changing as I look at the memory. Are you sure that the calm scene is causing you to feel relaxed, distracted, safe, or amused? Your calm scene needs to shift positively how you feel in the present. If not, try switching your calm scene. If your calm scene is engaging, scan you body. If you are having distress, Shop-Vac it. Keep an eye on any distress, since distress will junk up your calm scene.

THIS IS MAKING ME TIRED

If the calm scene is making you tired, are you using an imaginary calm scene? If so, try switching to a YouTube video that may feel relaxing or distracting. Imaginary calm scenes can be exhausting to recreate many, many times in a session.

If the calm scene is a video and you are feeling tired? Is is possible that the calm scene is relaxing you and it's the relaxation response you are noticing? Try stopping for a few rounds, get up, and move around. Get a warm or cool drink before trying to continue.

MY EYES ARE IRRITATED OR I'M HAVING TROUBLE WITH THE BLINKS

Eye problems. It is not essential that you purposefully blink. If you are watching a video, look at an object in your current room for about half of a second when the facilitator says "blink" then look back at the video. If your calm scene isn't a video, simply tap your legs quickly and focus on the sensation of the tap (or engage in another quick motor movement that briefly distracts you from the calm scene).