

# **THE FOUR BLINKS VERSION OF FLASH: AS AN APPROACH TO HEALING (INCLUDING FOLLOWING COMMUNITY VIOLENCE)**

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Full Detailed Script, Tutorials, and Demonstrations:  
<http://FourBlinks.com>

# Agenda

- Introduction to this approach and teach all required resources (1 hour, 45 min)
- Short break (10 minutes)
- Group practice (35-40 minutes)
- Questions (in the time remaining).

# About Me

- Thomas Zimmerman, Ms.Ed., LPCC (Ohio).
- EMDRIA Approved Consultant and provide EMDR Therapy training through the Institute for Creative Mindfulness. Consult or train with me: <http://EmdrTom.com>
- I created and manage the EMDR Therapist Resources group on Facebook, a networking group of over 25,000 EMDR therapists globally.
- I maintain the EMDR blog: <http://GoWithThat.wordpress.com>
- I create and manage the EMDR Therapist Podcast: <http://EMDRPodcast.com>, which focuses on the intersection of EMDR Therapy and complex trauma.
- Therapist networking group to explore and experiment with memory reconsolidation approaches: Search Facebook for “Flash Sandbox” group.

# Background to this Training

- Developed by Phil Manfield about six years ago, understood initially as an EMDR resource to lower distress in memories prior to clearing the memory in EMDR. We have since learned that we can completely resolve memories using this approach.
- Why it's helpful to approach this training with a beginner's mind and forget many of the things you think you know about Flash.
- What this training should allow you to do:
  - Help clients reliably, predictably, and "safely" process memories to zero distress and resolve them using every metric that a memory would be considered resolved in any other transformative psychotherapy.
  - Understand how to do the six steps of the Four Blinks Version of Flash well.
  - Understand how, where, and why intervention may be necessary.

# Quick View of the Six Steps

- **1. Develop a container** to hold the bad memory (the bad memory will be working memory when we recall it, but not in direct awareness).
- **2. Develop a calm scene.** The calm scene can be a YouTube video, a pleasant memory, or an imagined or actual process (making a sandwich, watching fish in an aquarium, etc).
- **3. Identify the memory** (quickly and lightly) and push it out of awareness. Mouse trap analogy or file on a desktop analogy.
- **4. Focus fully 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 it (don't touch the mouse trap). Return to the calm scene and do guided blinks until the distress is zero or as low as it will go.
- 6. When the distress is zero, **walk through the video of the memory** looking for distress. If distress is found, container it and return to Step 4. If no distress is found, the memory is okay.

# Memory Reconsolidation (In a Nutshell)

- 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.
- Process:
  - Activate an individual difficult or traumatic memory. The memory will appear in a labile/plastic state for several hours, during which modifications can be made to it before it is (automatically) reconsolidated.
  - Have an experience that challenges the expectation or prediction stored in the memory/schema. This looks different depending on the psychotherapy used. [In Flash-like approaches, this is different because we visually disrupt the calm scene and this seems to speed up the transformation of the memory.]
  - Continue to cycle between activation/challenging experience until the memory loses its distress.
- To read more about Memory Reconsolidation, start with Bruce Ecker (2012). *Unlocking the Emotional Brain*.

# What a Reprocessed Memory 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.

# Step One: Developing, Using, and Understanding the Container (1)

- Step One and Step Two form the “hardware” of the Four Blinks Version of Flash. You often only need to do Step One once for each client and many clients will keep the same calm scene that they developed in Step Two throughout their work on multiple memories.
- Understanding the Container (Information for the Therapist)
  - The memory (as a whole) will stay in the limbic brain and will not be put into the container. We are processing the memory a small “slice” at a time.
  - When we open the door on the memory, we container the slice of distress that comes out.
  - The container is where all distress will be routed into: that distress might come on the sensory channel, emotion channel, thought channel, or body sensation channel.
  - We do not “bring the container back” and check the container in this version of Flash.
  - A completely new and empty container shows up each time we need it... if clients complain that this is wasteful, assure them that it is only imaginary.



# Step One: Developing, Using, and Understanding the Container (2)

- Developing the container
  - Enter an agreement/understanding with the client that we will be going out of our way to route all distress into the container. Explore the type of container that the client intuitively might be helpful for that task.
  - Container can be a box (actual or imaginary), a locker, a cookie jar, a safe, a vault, a small imaginary elevator with a door that opens into the wall of the client's current room, a mailbox, or anything else that the client intuitively feels that may be helpful.
  - Practice the container by imagining (or actually) putting a small slip of paper into the container. Ask, "does it feel like the paper is inside your container? If you are not sure, check." We do this to test the integrity of the container to make sure that it works.
  - Practice pushing the container out of awareness, "See your container get pushed far, far, away from you until it is just a tiny spot on the wall."
- **GROUP PRACTICE: Teach the container**

# Step One: Developing, Using, and Understanding the Container (3)

- **GROUP PRACTICE:** Teach ShopVac
- Developing the Shop Vac resource
  - This resource is an imaginary resource that vacuums any distress that hits the body out of the body. “Imagine seeing any distress as a kind of colored smoke going into the Shop Vac hose and into the canister... See the canister get pushed out of your awareness until it is just a tiny dot on the wall.”

# Step Two: Developing, Using, and Understanding the Calm Scene (1)

- The Calm Scene, or what Phil Manfield calls the Positive Engaging Focus is where the core of our work in this approach is done. The Calm Scene can be anything.
  - Examples drawing from memory: Memories of a beach vacation; somatic memory of rocking a baby or grandchild; memories of times of connection; memories of times where the client saw something beautiful; memories of a walk or run on client's favorite stretch of road; memories of a favorite trip or scenic drive; memories of a process (such as restoring an antique car, playing an instrument, or cooking a particularly enjoyable dish or desert).
  - Examples involving engaging in actual processes: Client playing an actual musical instrument, rocking an actual baby or grandbaby, petting an actual dog, deeply noticing a flower in a vase, deeply noticing a particular piece of colorful artwork on the wall (avoid photos of people... we want to be in the color part of the brain, not the facial recognition and associations parts).

# Step Two: Developing, Using, and Understanding the Calm Scene (2)

- If the client has difficulty with visualization or the client has severe trauma, I highly recommend that you outsource the visualization of the scene to YouTube. YouTube has over 17 billion videos, you can explore with the client in session or make that homework for the client to find a video that is calming, centering, compelling, or interesting.
  - Video examples: island beaches with waves, videos of dogs or cats playing, video of person petting a horse, videos of a hot bubbly pizza coming out of the oven (assess for disorder eating prior), videos of gourmet coffee being prepared.
- Verify that the calm scene/calm process induces an experience. From a memory reconsolidation perspective, it is essential that the client be able to quickly get into the affective state of the calm scene and that it induce an experience that generally disconfirms the expectation in the traumatic memory.
- If the calm scene is not inducing a positive experience, you will need to help the client change it to one that does. It is possible that a calm scene that worked well for several memories may become “stale” and need to be changed to something more salient.
- **GROUP PRACTICE: Teach Calm Scene**

# Teach Sensory Grounding to Manage Flashbacks

- Having developed the “hardware” in Steps One and Two, we want to review one key resource to make sure that if the client has a flashback-like experience during our work, we are able to quickly ground them and get them back into their current room and space-time.
- Grounding Exercise
  - Name to yourself five things you see and the colors attached to them (also notice if they are hard, soft, or have another texture).
  - Touch the table next to you. Is it warmer, cooler, or the same temperature as your hand? When you move your fingertips across it, is it completely smooth, or does it have a texture? Does the temperature change as you notice the texture?
  - Notice several things you hear, in order of loudest first.
  - Notice anything that you taste (or taste a mint if you have one).
  - Notice anything that you smell (or find something near you to smell).
  - Conversation about what may be additionally grounding (a cold or warm drink, a pet, rocks or other objects, etc).

# Step Three: Identify and Quickly Push the Memory out of Awareness

- In this version, we are always working on a specific individual memory.
- Our goal is to not overly activate this memory when we are identifying it. Strategies that help with this: do not let the client tell you the story of the memory, you might simply find a memory that has been contributing toward current distress, verify that it is a single **memory** and NOT a theme, a negative belief, or a symptom.
- Identify the memory and immediately push out of awareness whatever came up. Identifying and disconnecting from it are part of the same process. Treat the memory like a hot potato.
- Step Three should take less than 10-15 seconds from beginning to end.
- The FourBlinks.com web site has many resources that will let you do more comprehensive target selection.

# Step Four: Load Up the Calm Scene and Blink Every Five Seconds for 30 Seconds

- Language to use the first round: “Load up your calm scene, let me know (or nod) when you are there. We are going to be in this calm scene for 30 seconds at a time. But, you will hear me say the word ‘Blink’ every five seconds. When you hear me say the word ‘Blink,’ open your eyes and blink quickly several times, then quickly find your way back into the calm scene.” The therapist says the word “Blink” every five seconds and does this five times (which will last a duration of 30 seconds).
- Language to use in subsequent rounds: “Load up your calm scene and let me know when you are there.” “Blink” wait five seconds, “Blink” wait five seconds, “Blink” wait five seconds, “Blink” wait five seconds, “Blink” wait five seconds.
- Ask “How did that go? [Were you able to keep finding your way back into the calm scene?]” If so, continue to Step Five.
- If distress showed up in the calm scene, container that distress (you may need to push that container farther away), then repeat this Step Four.

# Step Five: Quickly Look at the Bad Memory and Instantly Contain Whatever Comes Out

- We imagine that the memory is stored in a room. We very, very, quickly open the door on the room and immediately contain whatever content in the memory comes out of the room.
- Sample Language: "Very quickly open the door on the memory and immediately close it, whatever comes in just a few milliseconds, see it go into your container, see the container close, and see it go out of awareness. Push it further and further away until you can no longer see it or it's just a tiny dot on the wall. Let me know when it is gone."
- If you suspect or client reports body activation, use the Shop Vac resource.
- Once the client reports that the memory is gone, return to Step Four.
- Do this loop between Step Four and Step Five until the client reports difficulty finding distress when opening the door on the memory. When the distress is a zero, go to Step Six.



# Step Six: Check the Video of the Memory for any Residual Content

- Once the client cannot identify distress in the memory, ask the client to slowly play the memory from the beginning using language like: “Slowly play the memory from the beginning and let me know with one hand when you find the distress and immediately container it with the other hand.” Once the distress is containered and pushed out of awareness, go to Step Four for more calm scene/blinks.
- After a round of Step Four, the client can play the memory forward or check the distress in the slice that they put in the container in the previous round. If the prior slice has heat, recontainer it and do another round in the calm scene.
- The client is not done until the client can play the entire memory without distress on any channel. This is typically accomplished with most clients in 20-40 minutes.

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

- Problem: Overactivation. Solutions: Encourage the client to open and close the door even faster. A flashback is also an overactivation. If this happens, use the grounding resources that we practiced. Check for body activation. Body activation from the memory will contaminate your calm scene.
- Problem: Containering not working well. Solution: This is also 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.
- Problem: The problem is not overactivation and containering appears to be working, yet the distress is not falling after 10 minutes. Solution: Check to make sure that the experience of the calm scene is inducing an experience. The calm scene **must** induce an experience and the client needs to be able to find his way back into it quickly.
- 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. Target selection is key.

# Tips for Safe and Effective Group Practice

- **Stop if you encounter distress in your body or from the memory.** Use the vacuum resource that we practiced or use sensory grounding. Ignore the group while you manage the distress you are experiencing and come back in one the next round of Calm Scene after you have dissipated the distress. **Do not push into distress in Flash approaches, even if that distress is within your window of tolerance.**
- **Multiple memories want to come or future worries want to come.** It makes sense that they want to come, but we are working one memory at a time in these approaches. Put all of these into a larger separate container for now and you can get to them later. Check your body. If there is distress, use vacuum, grounding, or rounds in the calm scene (without thinking about the memory) until the distress is minimal. We can work in a future scene if there is time.
- **If you cannot find distress when looking quickly at the memory, start playing the memory like a video from the first frame and stop at the first piece of distress that you find.** Container that distress. Keep playing the memory like a video, catching and containing the first piece of distress you encounter. When you can play the memory like a video and there is no distress, feel free to turn off your video and we will know that you have completed the memory.
- **Can I change the calm scene.** Yes, and for any reason and at any time.
- The bad memory keeps showing up in my calm scene. Catch whatever intruded and push it far, far, away. One the next round of the calm scene after the memory is pushed away, rejoin the group in the calm scene.

# Flash Approaches 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.
- 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. Strong recommendation to make the calm scene a video and not imaginary.
- May not work if the client is unable to have brief **experiences** in the calm scene. Client may be numb per pervasively shut down currently.

# How I 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.
- 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.
- Send many clients home to do Flash approaches on themselves when moderately or severely activated with intrusive trauma symptoms between sessions.

# Tentative Research

- 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.
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- 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.
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- 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.

# Steps You Can Take to Learn More

- Get trained formally in 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 of the things you need to know to use Flash effectively with clients immediately.
  - Experiment with various scripts to find an approach that works for you.
  - The version of Flash introduced here can be found at: <http://FourBlinks.com> (a non-copyright/open-source approach to one way to do Flash-like approaches well).
  - 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/flashesandbox>