

Four Blinks Version of Flash Treatment Guide

A rapid traumatic memory reconsolidation guide (version 3.3). May 12, 2024

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Script updates, video tutorials, demos, and resources are available at:

FourBlinks.com

Description: This version of Flash moves individual difficult memories from traumatic memory storage into more normal memory storage by lightly activating a microslice of traumatic memory at a time, immediately containing each microslice, quickly transitioning to a disconfirming/calm scene for about 30 seconds at a time, and disrupting that 30-second calm scene using a series of rapid eye blinks every five seconds. The blinks while in the calm scene split the 30-second exposure to the calm scene into six individual five-second exposures. The large number of exposures to the calm scene appear to fully or partially reprocess each microslice of the memory as it sits out of direct awareness. This process allows complex clients with very little adaptive information, very few resources, and a tiny window of tolerance to resolve extremely painful memories with remarkably little distress and with minimal risk of decompensating.

What is different in version 3: New (simpler) language throughout more clearly linked with memory reconsolidation; reconceptualized as a treatment guide rather than a script; we do not ever check the SUDs (remaining distress); we explicitly work only with one microslice of the memory at a time and the memory as a whole is never referenced in the reprocessing steps; grounding exercises are included to help clients manage flashbacks; the Shop-Vac resource is included; Step Six walks through the video of the memory differently than in prior versions (fully clearing out each “blip” of distress in the video before playing the video forward); a Flash future template is included in an optional Step Seven; guidance resources for self-administered Flash are provided for client use between sessions once the client has resolved memories successfully in session.

This version of Flash relies on a specific understanding of memory reconsolidation as its working mechanism. Memory reconsolidation from this perspective requires two core components (Ecker):

- Activate a specific individual memory.
- Encourage the client to sit with an experience that disconfirms the expectation/schema in the bad memory.
- Repeat.

This script is conceptually and practically different from many other Flash scripts because of the following:

- It was developed specifically for complex trauma clients.
- It has an explicit container that is developed, tested, and practiced prior to use.
- It is composed of a set of six very simple steps (the first two of which are typically done once).
- The whole memory is never activated or contained, only small parts (a microslice) of it at a time.
- It is parts-centric and client parts are engaged in each step of the process.
- Alternatives to blinking are allowed.
- It approaches and conceptualizes Flash as a full approach to psychotherapy and not simply a technique.
- It is highly reliable and predictable. When this version does not work, it is likely breaking in one of four clearly identified and articulated places.
- You can get trained in this version for free or for an ultra-low cost. You do not need to be trained in any other specific form of psychotherapy or trauma modality.
- This version is not copyrighted. You can use it, share it, modify it, or train it without permission or consent.

[The Flash technique was developed by Philip Manfield. You can get formally trained in the “official” current version of the Flash technique by Dr. Manfield at: <http://FlashTechnique.com>.]

Individual therapists should assess all clients for safety and preparedness for trauma work. No guarantee, warranty, or liability is claimed or implied.

Step One: Develop a Container (Client Can Reuse Between Memories and Sessions)

Except for very brief periods, all memory content will be pushed out of direct focus. 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.

- It is helpful to confirm that the container works by imagining putting something neutral in it when you are developing it, like an imaginary business card. This allows us to test and troubleshoot the container safely. ***See the business card go in the container... does it feel like the business card is in the container? Yes. Imagine the container going far away until it is just a tiny dot on the horizon.***
- Let the client know that our goal is to process this memory with virtually no distress and that all distress will be immediately routed to the container.

Script: ***We are going to work one memory at a time and we are going to do 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 parts 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? [pause] Can you see the container close? [pause] Can you imagine pushing that container far away until it is just a tiny speck in the sky? 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 Four Blinks podcast episodes about problems visualizing for ways to outsource the visualization component of the container.
- You can always use an actual container that is in the therapy office or in the client’s room if working through telehealth.

Make a note of the type of container and where the client is choosing to send it, so you can guide the client to do this consistently when needed in the process. For example: Wooden crate -> client slides it into an imaginary elevator and pushes the “down” button and sees the elevator doors close.

Container Description:

How Client is Distancing the Container:

Step Two: Develop a Calm Scene (Client Can Reuse Between Memories and Sessions)

All reprocessing work in Flash is done while the client is experiencing a calming 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. 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 imagines cooking his favorite recipe (getting out the recipe, etc), or watches cooking videos.
- The client with piano training imagines playing their favorite piece of music on the piano.
- The client listens to a song that has a long history of inducing peace and relaxation.
- The client watches videos of food (hot pizza coming out of the oven, etc). Note: Assess client for disordered eating beforehand.

If the client has complex trauma or a client comes to a session already flooded, 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.

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.

Description of Client's Calm Place: _____

Step Three: Quickly Identify the Memory and Immediately Push it Out of Awareness

This step requires a little caution. We need to identify the memory that the client wants to work with, however, we do not want to activate it. This is kind of like 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 (weight or identity issues), or a large 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, see Troubleshooting for further explanation**).

Step Three should last a maximum of 15-20 seconds. If you are taking longer than 15-20 seconds, you are probably overactivating the memory and 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.

Here are some script examples for this part of the process depending on the circumstances, adjust as needed:

- If the memory was identified in the prior session, you might say the following: ***Is that memory that we discussed at the end of last session still the one that you want to work on, or is there another one? ... Good. Now, see the general idea of that memory (don't play it) go out of your awareness. Just push the idea of it farther and farther away until all of awareness is blank.***
- To quickly select a memory that has been recently triggering, you might use the following script: ***We have talked about using this Flash therapy 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. See the general idea of that memory (without playing it) go out of your awareness. Send it miles and miles away. Let me know when it is gone.***

If the general idea of the memory feels like it is out of awareness, go to Step Four. If it keeps seeping into awareness, then too much was probably activated in identifying it. Instruct the client not to engage the memory. If the memory was activated, you may need to put that distress in the container and push the container out of awareness (again, be careful to not activate the memory in Step Three). You may need to use the Shop-Vac resource to get distress out of the body if identifying the memory caused body activation.

Record brief keywords about the memory for your notes. Do not ask the client for details! If the client is talking about the memory at all, Flash may already be crashing because of overactivation. We do not want to activate at all in Step Three, we only want to select the memory:

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 micro-slices 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.

When you arrive at Step Four for the first time in a session, instruct the client on how to do the blinks: **Bring up the positive scene and let me know when you are there. I will say blink every five seconds and when I do, you just blink your eyes several times quickly. After blinking, go right back into the calm scene. We will do this for about 30 seconds at a time.** [Give the client a moment to load the positive scene].

When you subsequently return to Step Four you do not need to remind the client how to blink, use one of the following examples instead:

- ***Return to your calm scene, let me know when you are there.***
- ***Load up your calm scene and just notice the details of it. Nod or indicate when you are there.***

While the client is in the calm scene, the therapist says ***blink*** every five seconds for a total of five times (about 30 seconds for the whole set). Verify that the client is blinking several times rapidly. If the client blinks more than several times quickly or blinks 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 seven 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 video that the client can watch. Also, ensure that the client knows it is normal for it to take multiple rounds of practice to quickly load up and go in and out of the calm scene.

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 the Microslice that Comes Out, and Return to Step Four Until the Client Can't Find Distress

The goal in this step is to microactivate a tiny, tiny, piece of the memory content. 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:

- A part of the video of the memory plays (we want a single frame only from the bad memory... 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 containering are usually problems of overactivation.

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

- ***Very quickly, open the door on the bad memory and immediately close it. Whatever you notice in this millisecond, catch it, container it, and push it out of your awareness. Let me know when it is gone.***
- ***Check the memory for one millisecond and the instant that you find something, immediately container it and push the container out of your awareness. Let me know when it is gone.***

When the client indicates that the next microslice of the the distressing memory is containered and sent out of awareness, 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.

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

Important safety considerations:

- Therapists should be comfortable using sensory grounding for clients who have flashbacks or other intrusive symptoms when glancing at the memory. **It is essential that all Flash clients be taught sensory grounding exercises prior to engaging in direct trauma work.** See the sensory ground resource available in this packet.
- Carefully review the Troubleshooting and FAQ sections before working with clients in this version of Flash.

Step Six: When the Client Glances at the Memory and Cannot Find Any Distress, Play the Video of the Memory Slowly Looking for Any Residual Microslice of Distress

After the client cannot identify any distress in the memory in Step Five, say something like one of the following:

- ***Now just flip through each frame of the memory one at a time looking for any left-over pieces of distress, even if it's a tiny bit. Let me know when you find the first piece of distress.***
- ***Now that you can't find distress from looking outside in, let's walk through the memory slowly like it's a video you are playing from the beginning. Let me know the instant you find any distress, even if it's a tiny bit.***

If there is any distress, say the following: ***See whatever is distressing in this millisecond go into your container, see the container close, and push the container far out of your awareness. 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 heat 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, keep doing loops between Step Four (the calm scene with blinks) and checking the distress of just this piece until the 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 very distressing. This is common. They are likely to be metabolized quickly after several rounds in the calm scene with blinks.

Step Seven (Optional): A 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.

Examples of scenarios where a Flash future template may be helpful:

- Relationship conflict (of any type) that the client just resolved is likely to continue. Target a future incident of this person doing or saying something that is triggering and similar to the memory you just resolved.
- The memory that you resolved involves an auto accident. Target a future scene where the client is driving by the accident site sometime soon with the goal of not feeling panic.
- Sexual assault memory that the client just resolved involves a particularly triggering aspect that affects the client’s current intimate relationship AND the client would like to desensitize that trigger further. Target a future scene where the client is engaging in consensual sexual activity in which that trigger occurs.
- Memory involving a family holiday was just resolved. Thanksgiving gatherings (United States) are highly triggering for many clients. Christmas happens 30 days later. Same people, same racist uncle, different foods. After resolving the memory of Thanksgiving, target the scene of Christmas.

In general, Flash Future Templates work better when past work has been resolved and you simply change the orientation to the future prong. Again, the future scene should not be catastrophic (i.e. if you processed aspects of the loss of a child, you would not say “now imagine your other child dies...,” etc).

Script: *Since we have time, would you like to leverage the work that you just completed toward a potential future scene? The future scene should be one that is likely to happen in the next few weeks and it shouldn’t be catastrophic. Can you think of something that is related to the memory that you just completed that might happen in the next few weeks that would be helpful to try to calm down before it happens?*

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
<i>“Think very quickly about that future scene and see whatever is distressing about it in this millisecond go into your container. Push your container out of your awareness. Let me know when it is gone.”</i> 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.	<i>Load up your calm scene and let me know when you are there.</i> 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.

Overview and Expedited Guide to the Steps (Once You Are Familiar with the Details and Flow Above)

Step One: Develop the Container (Typically Done Once per Client)
Step Two: Develop the Calm Scene (Typically Done Once Per Client, but Is Often Revised or Changed by Client)
Step Three: Quickly Identify the Memory and Immediately Container the General Idea of It (Don't Play It, Talk About It, or Engage Directly With It in this Step! We Are Simply Selecting It.)
Step Four: Calm Scene with Blinks <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Load up your calm scene, let me know when you are there.</i>• <i>Blink [wait five seconds] Blink [wait five seconds] Blink [wait five seconds] Blink [wait five seconds] Blink [wait five seconds]</i>• <i>Good, how did that go?</i> If well, go to Step Five to microactivate the next tiny piece of the memory. If some distress intruded in the calm scene, immediately container that specific distress and repeat Step Four.
Step Five: Lightly Activate/Container (Then Return to Step Four) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Very quickly, in only a fraction of a second, open the door on the memory and immediately catch and container the first thing that comes out...</i>• <i>Good, see it go into your container, see the lid close, push the container out of your awareness.</i>• <i>Let me know when it is gone.</i>• Return to Step Four
Step Six: When No Distress is Found, Walk Through the Video of the Memory from the Beginning Containering Any Instances of Residual Distress Until the Client Can Play the Whole Memory with No Distress on Any Channel <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Now that you can't find distress from looking outside in, let's walk through the memory slowly from the beginning like it's a video and immediately container the first piece of distress that you notice. Let me know the moment you find any distress, even if it's a tiny bit.</i>• When distress is found, Container it and go to Step Four for a round in the calm scene, then return here to check for any residual distress in the microslice of the memory you just containered: Does that piece of the memory that just had distress have any distress in it in this moment? If that microslice still has distress, container it again and keep returning to Step Four until that microslice has no distress.• If the last place of activation currently has no distress, play the memory forward until the client gets to the next piece of distress. Repeat with cycles to Step Four with each piece of distress until the client can play the whole memory with no distress.
Step Seven: Optional Future Template

Critical Trauma Resource: Using Sensory Grounding to Connect to the “Safety” of the Present if the Client Has Flashbacks in Session

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 right here, right now.

If you already do 5-4-3-2-1 grounding, you do a version of what I’m about to walk you through. However, I want to show you a way to do this that includes several things that may be different from many common approaches. You will notice several things:

- Ask permission of parts to engage in this (or any other) exercise. Asking permission gives parts the chance to consent. Absent that, parts know how to communicate discontent and they may communicate it in ways that look like what we used to call “resistance.”
- Let the client know how long this exercise will last (and it should be really quick).
- Teach the exercise quickly.
- I’m not asking for verbal feedback in the middle of the exercise, but I am keeping my eyes on the client and reading nonverbals. I don’t want to slow the exercise down when I’m first teaching it. I’ll ask at the end, which is okay because this exercise is only going to take 60-70 seconds total the first time we do it.
- I’m adding additional “tasks” to the client’s noticing to promote more active engagement with the senses. For instance, it’s possible for the client to touch an object without much actual engagement. It’s also possible to visually observe objects in a disconnected or dissociated way.
- 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.

Script: *When we have difficult experiences, those experiences may be stored in the part 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, full 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.

Using Grounding to Manage Flashbacks

In Flash Therapies, flashbacks are most likely to happen in the first few times that the client attempts to microactivate the memory in Step Five. A flashback may also occur if the therapist moves too slowly in Step Three. Once the client has developed and practiced this session, we can quickly pivot to it. If you suspect that a client is having an intrusive memory, simply ask: ***"How present are you in this room right now?"***

If the client indicates that they are not very present, pivot to this exercise by simply saying, ***"Ok, look around this room right now and notice several things you see and the color attached to them. If you touched these objects, would they be hard, soft, or some other texture?"*** [wait about five seconds]

"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."***

I'm going to be very quiet, notice whatever you hear in order of loudest first. [Wait 5-8 seconds] Good."

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

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 present do you feel right now in this room?

If the client reports feeling reasonably present, do multiple rounds in Step Four in the calm scene with blinks. Do not ask the client to container anything. The grounding exercise was the container. When you return to Step Five after multiple rounds (3-6 ideally) in the calm scene with blinks, invite the client to resume processing. If the client agrees, say: ***"In a moment, you will hear me say the word 'open' and immediately after that, you will hear me say the word 'close.' Whatever you are seeing, hearing, thinking, or feeling when you hear me say the word 'close,' simply see the door on the memory close... Now, think about the bad memory for just a millisecond. Open. Close. Whatever comes out simply see it go in your container, see the container door close, and push it out of your awareness. Let me know when it is gone."*** Resume reprocessing in Step Four as usual, but in Step Five continue to tell the client "open" and "close" to help them from engaging with the memory too long.

Shop-Vac Resource to Container Body Distress when it Appears

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 memory reconsolidation as its working mechanism, which has its focus 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 feel 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?

A Client Guide to Self-Administered Four Blinks Version of Flash: Checklist

Self-administered Flash should be done only with well-resourced clients, only after successful reprocessing with the Four Blinks Version of Flash in session, and only after both sensory grounding and Shop-Vac resources have been taught to the client. It is the responsibility of the individual therapist to determine the readiness for any individual client to engage in Flash reprocessing between sessions. Targets should be memories that are seeping into awareness or events that occur between sessions. It should be used between sessions only as a first-aid tool and in conjunction with therapist oversight and guidance.

Pre-Flight Checklist		
Question:	Yes	No
Have you been able to successfully resolve memories with your therapist in session using this Flash approach and do you generally understand the process including sensory grounding and the Shop-Vac resource?	Continue	Do not attempt this until your therapist has given you the OK to try it. Please actively engage in the resources that your therapist has reviewed with you. They should help.
Are you already really stressed and activated?	If so, you will need to use resources first to calm and center yourself as much as possible. Flash approaches will not work well if you start and you are already significantly activated. It is highly recommended that you use a video for your calm scene instead of using an imaginary one. Continue only after you have used resources and are no longer in an emotionally flooded state.	Continue.
Is what you would like to work on an individual memory or incident that happened at a particular place and a particular time? Did the incident last between several moments to several hours?	Continue	Flash does not work well when you target an issue, a symptom, or a group of memories. You will need to identify a specific individual memory. An individual memory typically does not last longer than a few hours. If what you want to target is longer than a few hours, you can try to focus on the single part of the incident that most stands out and revisits you the most often.
Is what you would like to work on from a single trigger (recent event or memory), or from multiple things?	Continue	Flash will not work well if multiple triggers are already in awareness. Use your container. You may need to use it repeatedly. Visit your calm scene without blinks for as long as needed. If your mood is settling, does one particular memory/incident stand out?
Is what you would like to work on a future event?	Future events in Flash are more complicated than events in the past or recent events. Use your container and container both the future event and your thoughts and worries about it in this moment if there is nothing you can do about the future event. If there is some positive action you can take right now related to the future event, do that. Also, use your calm scene without blinks. If your worries settle, engage in distractions or other resources.	Continue
Is the event you would like to work on one of the worst things that has ever happened to you?	This is best handled with your therapist who can help guide you. If this trigger is coming up persistently, start with your container, use grounding exercises, and use your calm scene without blinks as much as needed.	Continue

A Client Guide to Self-Administered Four Blinks Version of Flash: How To Do It

Step One: Run through the Pre-Flight Checklist on the previous page to make sure your plan is a good match for self-administered Flash.

Step Two: Before thinking about the memory, make sure that your container can be brought to your awareness quickly and that your calm scene is ready to go. Using a YouTube video for the calm scene is highly recommended for self-administered Flash.

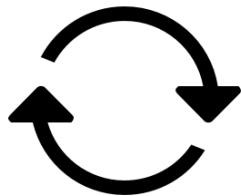
Step Three: Test the calm scene before starting. Without thinking about the memory, do several 30-second rounds in the calm scene and blink (twice very quickly) every five seconds to make sure that you can quickly find your way into the calm scene. After each blink, go right back into your calm scene. Nothing magical happens at five seconds. If some blinks occur after four seconds and some after seven seconds, Flash will still work.

Blink [wait five seconds] **Blink** [wait five seconds] **Blink** [wait five seconds] **Blink** [wait five seconds] **Blink** [wait five seconds]

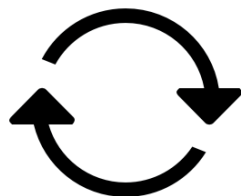
Step Four: Review the table below, so you know what to do if something isn't working well. If you cannot fix the problem, stop. Do not keep going if distress is growing. This version of Flash should be largely painless. If it is painful, please stop and engage in other resources.

If This Happens	Do This	If This Happens	Do This
The memory content is coming in pieces bigger than microslices.	You are exposing yourself to the memory for too long. Container the current distress as well as you can. Do several rounds in the calm scene to reset (without checking the bad memory). Next time, glance at the memory for a much, much, shorter time. Try a duration of 1/16 th of a second.	Other memories want to come into awareness.	In order to work safely, you will need to work on <u>only one memory at a time</u> . If other memories come, route them to a very large empty vault. Other memories coming can be an indicator of distress in the body. Shop-Vac it if present.
The calm scene isn't calming me.	How activated are you? If you are overly activated, use the Shop-Vac resource. If you aren't very activated, change the calm scene to something more interesting.	What if too much of the memory comes into awareness and I have a flashback of the memory?	This sometimes happens. Immediately use your sensory grounding exercise to find your way back into the safety of the present. Engage in other resources. Strongly consider working on this memory with your therapist next session instead of at home.
The container isn't working.	If the distress is in the body, use the Shop-Vac resource. The container not working is usually caused by overactivation. Take a break, and engage in another resource. If you resume, make sure that you glance at the memory for much less time than you did last time.	What if this isn't working after about 20 minutes?	Make sure you aren't over-activating. You want a single frame of the video. If the video is playing, you are playing too much. Check your body. Shop-Vac any distress. If these suggestions don't work, stop and work with this memory next session with your therapist.

Step Five: Do this loop repeatedly until you can glance at the memory and you cannot find any distress in your mind or body.

Lightly Activate > Container Distress		Calm Scene > Blinks
Think about the memory for only a tiny fraction of a second. Whatever comes that is distressing, immediately catch it, contain it, and push it far out of your awareness. Glance very quickly, and handle the microslice of the memory like it is a hot potato.		Load up/play your calm scene and blink twice quickly every five seconds for 30 seconds total. [When no distress is found when glancing at the memory, go to Step Six.]

Step Six: Do this loop repeatedly until you can play the whole video of the memory with no distress on any channel:

Play the Video > Container Distress		Calm Scene > Blinks
Play the video, one frame at a time until you find a single piece of distress. Immediately container that piece. Do a calm scene and blinks. Return here and look for the next piece of distress in the video. Do this until you can play the whole video with no distress.		Load up/play your calm scene and blink twice quickly every five seconds for 30 seconds total.

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.** 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.

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 to the bad memory even faster. A flashback is also an overactivation. If this happens, use the grounding resources in this guide. Check for body activation. Body activation from the memory will contaminate your calm scene.
- 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 parts in Step Three (target memory selection).

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 microslivers 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, 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](https://www.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.

Get Additional Training:

- To be trained by Phil Manfield, who developed Flash and defines what the official current version of Flash is, see: <http://FlashTechnique.com>
- To be trained by Ricky Greenwald, see: <https://www.ticti.org/training/flash-technique/>
- To learn more about the Four Blinks Version of Flash from Thomas Zimmerman, see: <https://FourBlinks.com>