Flash Technique
Instructions

Basic steps of the Flash Technique:

1. Identify and test a Positive Engaging Focus.
2. Choose a target.
3. Begin Bilateral Stimulation (BLS), either eye movement or leg tapping.
4. Have the client try a rapid triple blink.
5. Complete 5 consecutive triple blinks during which client is completely engaged.
6. Ask the client to check lightly into of the trauma memory and notice if there are any differences.
7. Repeat the sequence of five triple flashes until sets of the Flash Technique do not continue to be effective.

1. Positive Engaging Focus (PEF): Have the client bring up a positive engaging memory. Clients have used beach scenes, other landscapes, pets, family members, walks in the woods, skiing, dancing, memories of being with a doting grandmother, a favorite sports team or sports figure, or even just remembering a time when they laughed or played really hard. Positive scenes from movies may also work. Sometimes, just a favorite piece of music, which the therapist can play on a cell phone to strengthen its impact, is helpful.

2. Choose A Target: The target should be disturbing with a SUDs of 6 or greater. “How disturbing would it be if you were to think about it?” Avoid a memory where the disturbance is being generated from an earlier event (“feeder memory”). If it is, you should consider using the Flash Technique on the earlier memory. It is usually beneficial to ask the client not to tell you about the memory in any detail. If the client describes a highly disturbing memory in detail, they can get activated and may need time and effort to get settled enough to utilize the Flash Technique. The Flash Technique can be extremely effective even without the therapist knowing the nature or details of the target, other than the age at which the event occurred and that there is no feeder memory. This is useful when the target generates high levels of shame or terror.

3. Begin Bilateral Stimulation (BLS): Strengthen this positive memory or image with a couple of short slow sets of eye movements or leg taps. Tell the client to again connect with their positive engaging focus in exactly the same way as just done, but with one added piece:

4. Triple Eye Blink: After several passes of very slow eye movements or leg taps, you will ask them to blink rapidly three times without thinking of the memory. When asking the client to blink, ask them to make "triple blinks," three blinks in rapid succession, while maintaining the PEF. These should be "easy," although the client may find blinking and BLS to be difficult to do simultaneously, in which case they can stop BLS while blinking.

Before beginning the first round of tapping and blinking focusing on the PEF, tell the client that when they are engaged with the PEF, they should not be intentionally thinking of the disturbance at all. If they feel any of the disturbance while focusing on the PEF, the PEF is not strong enough or is somehow related to the disturbing memory. Either enhance the PEF by having the client focus on the sensations and sights related to the memory or ask the client to choose a different PEF. If the client still reports feeling any degree of activation, remind them that they are only blinking their eyes and doing that should not be at all disturbing. If they still feel activated, they must have been connected ever so slightly to the trauma memory even before they began tapping.
and blinking. If they start out doing the Flash Technique with any connection to the trauma, the Positive Engaging Focus is clearly not strong enough to entirely distract them from the trauma. If these steps are not working, see the attached Troubleshooting Handout for more ideas.

**Using Flash Technique remotely:** Remote use of Flash Technique is very similar to face-to-face use with a few exceptions. Eye movements are more difficult logistically, so typically clients are asked to tap their own thighs, mirroring the therapist. Therapists use exaggerated motions tapping their own thighs, so that as their hands come up from having tapped, they can be seen in the client’s view. Use of flash remotely is not recommended unless the therapist is convinced that the client is stable enough and has sufficient local resources to be able to tolerate the therapy process and will have a place to turn if feeling unstable.

5. **Checking The Target After Successive Flash Processing:** After 5 triple flashes have been completed without difficulty, ask the client to “touch lightly on the target memory,” acknowledging that previously you have been asking them to avoid thinking of the memory. Ask the client, “Does the memory seems different in any way?” If they were Flashing correctly, they should report that the target memory seems further away, or the image seems less vivid, or the memory just seems less upsetting. They may state that they still remember it, but the emotions don’t seem connected to it. Some clients even report that they are having difficulty even “finding” the image. These are all indications that the Flash Technique is working as it should and the target is no longer overwhelming. At this point the therapist is free to ask the SUD rating.

Note: If no changes are reported after the first set of five flashes and the client reports a good connection with the PEF, repeat the process of tapping, blinking and focusing on the PEF once more. Occasionally it takes 2 sets for the Flash technique to take hold and begin working.

If the SUD rating has not dropped during the most recent set of five triples, try to clarify the problem. Is there a disturbing aspect of the memory that the client has not considered. Is the PEF engaging enough or has there been intrusion of negative material from the traumatic memory during the flashing? Is there an earlier related memory (feeder) that is causing the target to be disturbing? Is there a blocking belief? Is there a sticky cognitive distortion that is not giving way to adult perspective? Correct for any problems you identify, and try another set of five triple flashes.

6. **Repeat The Sequences Of Five Triple Flashes Until Sets Of The Flash Technique Appear To Be Only Marginally Effective:** Once the disturbance has dropped significantly, the therapist can either begin the Assessment Phase of EMDR or do another set of five triple flashes. Non-EMDR trauma therapists might start cognitive processing at this point or whatever technique they are accustomed to using for processing trauma memories. If, at any point after the completion of two sets of five triple flashes, the client reports less than a two-point drop on the SUD scale, ask what aspect of the memory is causing most of the current disturbance, and immediately, upon hearing the answer, begin another set of flash triples. If that doesn’t unblock the processing, shift into the EMDR Assessment Phase or another method of processing trauma. If flash seem to be proceeding smoothly and disturbance is going down, continue until the target is completely processed to a “0” or ecological “1” SUD level. If SUDs reaches “0” or ecological “1,” it is still advisable to check for unprocessed channels before moving on to Installation.

**What’s Wrong With This Picture?** If the Flash Technique does not appear to be working, there should be a reason. If it is not producing the desired result, consulting the troubleshooting sheet will often allow you to correct the problem. Also, check if there is question on the flash listserv that addresses this issue. If not, you can ask for help on the listserv.