**Dual Awareness**

It is not advisable to try to resolve PTSD through flashbacks as the experience of a flashback reinforces terror and feelings of helplessness. Psychological tools that were missing to meet the overwhelming trauma are also usually missing to meet the overwhelming flashback; otherwise it would not be a flashback. Integration under those circumstances was and is not possible.

A first step in helping many individuals with PTSD is to teach them to stop and prevent their flashbacks. When flashbacks are under control it is possible to equip clients with the resources necessary to meet traumatic memories on more stable ground. It is then feasible to approach digestible portions of traumatic memories, one at a time.

One problem with flashbacks is that they cannot be predicted until a thorough understanding of triggers is in place, (this may be done using a ‘flashback diary’). They are difficult to prepare for and can even be triggered by the therapy setting. When a client goes into flashback during the session… it is a sign that the client’s ***experiencing self*** (i.e. their behaviours and emotions) is having free rein, perceiving danger in the place where he is seeking help.… Under these circumstances, the client’s ***observing self*** (their cognitions) must be awakened and called back into the therapy room usually with a measure of authority (firm, but not angry) from the therapist:

***‘Look at where you are now. What colour is the wall here? What colour is the rug? What kind of shoes do you have on right now? What is today's date?’ etc.***

When the client’s ***observing self*** is again operational the following **flashback halting protocol** can be taught. It is based on the principles of ***dual awareness***, reconciling the ***experiencing self*** with the ***observing self***. The client has slowed down their associative emotional response from ‘quick and dirty’ (SPARS model) to allow the neocortex to catch up.

**Flashback Halting Protocol**

This usually will stop a traumatic flashback quite quickly. The client says, preferably aloud, the following sentences filling in the blanks and following the instructions.

• Right now I am feeling……..

*Insert name of the current emotion, usually fear*

• and I am sensing in my body………

*Describe your current bodily sensations – Name at least three*

• because I am remembering……….

*Name the trauma by title only – no details*

• At the same time, I am looking around where I am now in…..

*The actual current year*

• here……

*Name the place where you are*

• and I can see……

*Describe some of the things that you see right now in this place*

• and so I know…….

*Name the trauma by title only again*

• is not happening now/anymore.

**Nightmares**

If the client awakens with a flashback or a nightmare, the regular protocol can be used….until the client’s ***observing self*** wakes up. The flashback halting protocol can also be effectively *adapted* for use with nightmares that may be traumatic flashbacks….as a ritual before sleep to prepare for the expected nightmare:

• I am going to awaken in the night feeling……

*Insert name of the intact anticipated emotion, usually fear*

• and will be sensing in my body……

*Describe your anticipated bodily sensations – name at least three*

• because I will be remembering……

*Name the trauma by title only – no details*

• at the same time, I will look around where I am now in……

*The actual current year*

• here……

*Name the place where you will be*

• and I will see……

*Name describe some of the things that you see right now in this place*

• and so I will know……

*Name the trauma by title only again*

• is not happening now/anymore.