

## General advice on behavioural avoidance for clients due to receive EMDR

**Instructions to therapists:** Please read carefully:

1. Give the second page of this handout to clients who are being prepared for EMDR, but are struggling with avoidance behaviours (covert and/or overt).
2. Explain how EMDR is likely to proceed more quickly if avoidance is reduced.
3. Check out the DES scores (HANDOUTS 33 and 34) you have obtained for more information on avoidance. Add further preparatory homework if needed.
4. Please note the attached is not a substitute for complete preparation for EMDR (i.e. installing resources, addressing clients fears, setting expectations etc. – see Shapiro (2001) pp121-143.
5. The information on the following sheet attempts to directly address the items on the avoidance subscale of the Impact of Event Scale –revised.
6. **When asking clients to confront avoidance outside of therapy, it goes without saying that you must never place your client in danger.**

### REFERENCE

- Shapiro, F. (2001).  
*Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing: Basic principles, protocols, and procedures* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed).  
New York: Guilford Press

SEE NEXT PAGE FOR INSTRUCTIONS

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**Instructions to clients:** Every day read through all 8 items, their 'explanations' and each 'try to' section. Try to do the 'try to' part at least once every day and write how you got on in your diary. The more times you do the 'try to' exercises the better - until they become a habit.

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### **1 Avoiding getting upset when reminded about the event**

**Explanation:** Bottling up emotions will merely mean that I am storing up emotions. It is like a snowball the emotions will get bigger and bigger until they start to run away out of control.

**Try to:** When you are alone, think about the traumatic event(s). This won't be easy and emotions will build up. Don't worry about this, have a cry, punch a pillow in anger – in other words vent your emotions - safely. Vented emotions can't build up into a destructive snowball.

### **2 Events that somehow seem unbelievable**

**Explanation:** Your brain is trying to protect you from the hurt of what has happened by making the events seem unbelievable and therefore not as scary as they really are.

**Try to:** Remind yourself that the events did take place, but be aware that the events although scary cannot harm you. Do this regularly and the events will slowly move into the past and seem less scary.

### **3 Staying away from reminders of the event**

**Explanation:** Staying away from reminders will make the events and their reminders even more scary than they were. Remember that the brain works the opposite way around. The more you confront reminders the less events will be scary.

**Try to:** Although you are off work at present and most reminders are at work, your memories are also reminders. 'Reminders' never actually harmed anyone. That includes conversations, items on TV, people, places and so on. Every day try and think about as many reminders as you possible can.

### **4 Trying not to think about the event**

**Explanation:** It is inevitable that upsetting events will come to mind – it is part of our survival mechanism. Don't fall into the trap of trying not to think of pink elephants. It is hopeless to try. Remember that the brain works the opposite way around. The more you confront thoughts the less events will be scary.

**Try to:** Think about the traumatic event(s) in detail every day. Keep at it! The upset and wish to avoid will slowly fade.

### **5 Avoiding emotions about the event**

**Explanation:** This is just the same as for all the items above. Avoiding emotions will only help in the very short term. Long term help needs you to confront you emotions.

**Try to:** Repeat the exercise for No1 above.

### **6 Feeling emotionally numb about the event**

**Explanation:** Re-read the explanation for No.1 above

**Try to:** Ask yourself whether you can feel upset without avoiding your emotions? Tell yourself it is normal to feel numb about such upsetting events, but that phase will pass if you let it.

### **7 Trying to remove memories from my mind**

**Explanation:** Re-read No.4 above.

**Try to:** Keep the memories in mind for a full minute. This will be difficult to do and you will tend to distract yourself at first. Keep at it! When you reach a minute of thinking you will find that it isn't as scary as you once thought.

### **8 Trying not to talk about the event**

**Explanation:** You will tend to avoid others who directly ask about traumatic events. This is because they act as reminders to the events, the events are upsetting so those asking the questions will also make you upset. Like all the other items above the strategy to adopt is to talk about it!

**Try to:** Have at least one conversation every day with someone about both events. It will become less and less scary. People will talk to you less about it anyway if you initiate the conversation.