Developing a compassionate image resource for EMDR clients

Step 1:   Image (Actual or imaginary place)

Ask the client to choose either a compassionate other or an ideal compassionate self by asking what image comes to mind when they think about something that cares about them. It should be the client's own creation and not a real person they know well. Guide the client as this image needs to embody the qualities of wisdom, strength, warmth and non-judgement.

If they struggle, remind them to bring to their attention to a soothing breathing rhythm and gently return their attention to the physical sensations of safety, warmth and acceptance. Would, for instance, the image seem human or would it be a colour or animal? Would it be old/young, male or female? Can the client recall a memory when they experienced compassion?

Image

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Step 2:   Emotions and Sensations

Ask the client to focus on the image, to feel kindness and understanding and to identify the location in their body of the pleasing physical sensation. Ask them to gently smile and notice changes in their positiveness (ask the client to sit up and feel the ground beneath their feet)

Positive emotions reported …………………………………………………………….………

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Physical sensation in body …………………………………………………………………

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Step 3:   Enhancement

Using a soothing, supportive voice to enhance the image and affect, enhance sensations by asking: "Tell me what the image looks like; what is their tone of voice; how do they smell; what would they feel like to touch?"

Sensations ………………………………………………………………………………….

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Step 4:   Eye Movements (EMs)

Enhance the positive response by including a short and slow set of eye movements (6-12 EMs)

Read the following:

"Bring up your compassionate image. Concentrate on where you feel the pleasant sensations in your body and allow yourself to enjoy them. As you notice those sensations follow my fingers with your eyes."

At the end of the set ask the client: "How do you feel now?" If the client feels safe and relaxed, do further sets of 6-12 EMs. Continue to do short sets of EMs as long as the positive affect enhances. If the client's positive emotions have not increased, try alternative directions of eye movements until improvement reported – making sure that EMs remain slow.

Step 5:   Cue word

The client is then asked to identify a single word or phrase that fits the image. The client is then asked to repeat Step 4, but this, while repeating to him/herself the cue word/phrase. This procedure is repeated 4-6 times with EMs.

Cue word/phrase …………………………………………………………………………..

Step 6: Self-cueing

The client is then instructed to repeat the procedure on his/her own, bringing up the image and the cue word, and experiencing the positive feelings (emotionally and physically) *without* any EMs.

Self cueing achieved? ……………………………………………………………………

NB: if at any time during this process the client experiences negative emotion, ask the client to return their attention to their soothing rhythm breath and reconnect with internal sensations of well being.

Steps 7 & 8 are only used once the client had demonstrated that they can bring up their compassionate image with ease. The next two steps are important as they test the client's readiness to proceed with EMDR. If your client is unable to complete these final steps, it indicates that you need to spend more time with preparation

Step 7: Cueing with disturbance

Ask the client to bring up a minor concern or problem and notice the accompanying negative feelings. The client is guided through the compassionate image work until they can reconnect with positive feelings and cueing with disturbance is achieved. (Do not use EMs at this stage). Facilitate this by specifically asking "What do you need from your compassionate image to help you deal with this issue or the distress associated with it?"

Cueing achieved? …………………………………………………………………….

Step 8: Self-cueing with disturbance

The client brings up another minor disturbance or concern and reconnects with the compassionate image and cue word, this time *without* the clinician's assistance, until the client can re-experience compassion as expressed through resilience, acceptance, warmth and understanding.

Self-cueing independently achieved? …………………………………………………..

(It may be helpful to spend some time on this next questions.)

What have I learnt from this exercise? ....

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