Slide 1

How I Use EMDR Online with Children and Young People

Dr Naomi Fisher
EMDR Consultant and Facilitator (EMDR-Europe)
Clinical Psychologist
naomicfisher@gmail.com

Slide 2

WHEN WE START TO WORK ONLINE, THINGS ARE DIFFERENT

Slide 3

RATHER THAN BRINGING CHILDREN INTO OUR SPACE

WE APPEAR IN THEIRS

Slide 4

THIS HAS ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Slide 5

Before the Session

- You'll probably be in contact with the child or young person's parents.
- Make your life easy. Use one platform.
- Always have a back up – phone number, Skype ID, What's App, whatever works.
- An extra complication with children is whose device they will use to talk to you.
- Reduce anxiety by reducing demands. Don't make this sound difficult and don't start sending them a list of things they need to do.

Slide 6

The First Session

- You may need to sort out technical issues. See this as part of the introductory work and establishing the space.
- Every first session I have had with a child online felt like a slightly unpredictable home visit. You may meet multiple members of the family and people may wander in and out. Get to know who everyone is, including the pets.
- Check what device they are using. If they are using a phone, they'll need to prop it up somewhere. Adolescents are usually on their own phone or iPad.
- Check their battery won't run out.
- Check who else is in the room.
- Ask them to collect any resources which might be helpful – this could be their own toys or pens and paper.

Risk

- You may not be able to create a safe space for processing in a child's home. They may not have a private space, they may not actually be safe.
- If you can't work with the parents, it is going to be very difficult to work with a child online in their own home.
- If a child's problem is their parents, then you need to start with practicalities. You can't process trauma that is ongoing.
- If parents are supportive, then risk management needs to be planned with them because they are on the ground.
- Do your usual risk assessment, and make a plan if necessary. Know what you would do if a child becomes very distressed and you couldn't help them calm down.

7

Ways to make it safer

- The best way to make a child safe is to improve the safety of their environment.
- I find that working online enables me to be more fluid about who I am working with in a family. We don't have to arrange special parent sessions, for example. It's easier to bring in other members of the family.
- You can even bring in a parent who is somewhere else relatively easily, by including them on the call.
- Make a plan with the young person and their family as to what you will do if you are concerned about the young person.
- Use the preparation phase to assess how a child will react when asked to think about what happened and how they will react to BLS.
- You can always say no. If you don't feel that EMDR would be safe, then don't do it. Use your clinical judgement.

8

How can we engage young children online?

9

Engaging children online

- If you're in their house, then it's full of distractions.
- Even if you get them to pay attention, they can always wander off.
- Talking into a computer isn't very interesting. So ask them to get toys, pens and paper and use them in your work.
- You can use this to your advantage by taking an interest in whatever they are doing and using that for resources and cognitive interweaves.
- Don't fight them, join them.
- Don't put their parents in the position of trying to make them sit in front of a computer if they keep moving off. Ask parents to follow the child instead.

10

Using games and drawing to introduce BLS and SUDS

11

Preparation phase

- I use whatever they have around them as resources.
- Their safe spaces are often more active.
- You can use art, plasticine and toys – but they will need to collect together resources. Ask what they have. You can do a lot with just pencil and paper.
- I have resources my side too so we can both participate.
- You can use the shared whiteboard but this might be more tricky on a phone or tablet.

12

2

Soren trains me in BLS

13

How do I do processing with children online?

- They usually can't follow your fingers online and you can't easily follow their eyes. You can't use buzzers.
- For younger children, parents can tap them on their shoulders (or they can tap their parents).
- For older children, tapping together works well, and you can vary the speed. You need to add some sort of ending.
- Butterfly tapping is another alternative. You can do it yourself and they will copy you.
- Adolescents can download an EMDR app onto their smartphones (but using it whilst they talk to you may be tricky).
- Keep it Simple.

14

Issue: fear of COVID-19
NC: I am not safe
PC: I can cope
VOC: 3
Emotions: worry, fear
SUDS: 8
Body: stomach and feet

Processing with an 11-year-old online

15

Therapeutic considerations

- Expect the unexpected. When the parrot arrives, say hello.
- Children's worlds have changed completely with COVID-19. All previous goals may not apply. Ask them about what is going on for them now.
- Problems at school may seem insignificant whilst problems at home may be magnified.
- Even if you were working individually with the child you may need to switch to working with the parents or parents and children together.
- Give children as much control as you can in the sessions, because they don't have much control in the rest of their life.

16

What will be different?

- Things will go wrong and you may well be interrupted.
- Online work is more intense. Children may say they've had enough after 15 or 30 minutes.
- Children may get up and wander off and not come back.
- If a parent is there you can ask them to follow the child with the phone but if the child is clearly saying they've had enough, then I wouldn't push it.
- If they don't come back and you're not sure what has happened, a parent's phone number can be useful in this situation (although the child may also be using this phone to talk to you).
- It's easier for people to be watching without being fully engaged online.
- You're in their space. You get to see what they do when they're not with you. Use what you learn!

17

Case study (all details have been changed)

- Matilda, aged 7.
- When she was four, she didn't get off the school bus at her stop and no one noticed. The bus driver drove back to the depot, got off the bus and left.
- Matilda waited for a while and no one came. She got off the bus and started trying to walk home. It was December, it was snowing and the roads were very busy.
- She was quickly noticed by people driving past who picked her up and took her to the police station. She was very upset and afraid and resisted being picked up.
- Her parents had already rung the police and were quickly there to collect her.

18

What's going on for Matilda?

- Separation anxiety, even when parents were just around a corner.
- Won't go out to play.
- Hasn't been near a bus since. Doesn't really like going in the car either.
- Has two younger brothers, family is supportive but doesn't know what to do to help. They've stopped doing anything which makes her anxious. They never leave her alone, even in the next room.
- Couldn't sleep alone.

19

What did I do?

- Matilda didn't want to talk to me. She played Minecraft on a tablet whilst I talked to her parents.
- After a while she came to show her parents what she had been building in Minecraft and I asked if I could see too.
- She and I talked about Minecraft for a while and I asked her if she had somewhere she felt safe in Minecraft. She did, her house. I asked her mother to tap her shoulders whilst she thought about how it felt to be in her Minecraft house.
- Then Matilda had had enough and we ended the session.

20

Minecraft Resources

- The next session Matilda came over quite quickly to show me her Minecraft world. I asked her how she felt when she was really having fun playing Minecraft, and she said she felt good.
- Mother tapped on her shoulders whilst she thought of how it felt when she was playing Minecraft.
- We imagined different positive situations in Minecraft, defeating the Enderdragon, building a house, farming and finding diamonds. Her mother tapped slowly on her shoulders as I asked her to focus on where she felt it in her body.

21

Minecraft

Where children are in charge and even if you die, you don't lose your stuff.

22

EMDR Processing

- Matilda and her family had never talked about what happened. When I asked her mother about it, she said she had never asked Matilda what it was like for her.
- Matilda was sitting playing on her tablet as her mother talked about this. She heard and she moved over and sat on her mother's lap.
- I asked Matilda's mother to tap her gently as she talked about what had happened. Matilda stopped playing on the tablet and listened.
- We didn't plan this, it happened spontaneously. I kept asking her mother what happened next, and moving her through the story. She told the whole story up to finding Matilda at the police station and bringing her home safely.
- When they got to the end, Matilda took a deep breath and hugged her mother tightly.
- Then she said 'and then I came home' and her mother repeated it to her 'and then you came home'.
- Matilda wanted to end then and so we did. I left them with her still sitting on her mother's lap hugging her.

23

Next sessions

- The next session we talked about what had happened to Matilda again. This time Matilda joined in the conversation and added some details. Her mother tapped her as we talked. Matilda sat on her mother's lap again. When we got to the end, she got up and walked off.
- We also used Flash on her current anxieties (fear of losing sight of her mother, fear of buses)
- When Matilda didn't want to talk, I talked to her mother and we gradually reduced how much the family was avoiding the situations which made Matilda anxious.
- Her anxieties reduced and she was able to cope with her mother being out of sight.
- We kept returning to Minecraft as her safe space and also as an important way for the two of us to connect.
- Matilda's mother then contacted me to say that they didn't need any more sessions because things had improved and she'd be in contact again if they needed any more help.

24

Online work with children means that can come to them

- **I have talked to children as they run around the garden, as they play on a tablet, as they hide under a duvet, or just face to face in their bedroom.**
- **Sometimes I just ask parents to follow their children with the phone so I can see what they are doing and see what I might be able to talk to them about.**
- **Working online with children means we can help them feel more in control.**
- **We might need to adapt, but the rewards are great.**

25

What's great about working online?

- **It can reduce barriers to therapy, particularly for highly anxious children and adolescents.**
- **Parents are often surprised at how their children engage online.**
- **For adolescents, we can combine text and talking.**
- **It enables us to be flexible about timings and about who is in the session.**
- **Young people feel more relaxed in their own homes or own environment.**
- **We can see the things that children do in their everyday lives, and be curious about those.**

26

Resources for Children

- Ana Gomez Oyster and the Caterpillar
- http://creativeplaytherapist.com/ana-gomez-book/?fbclid=IwAR1Wzu1gi-13xxrVSaBst2VCdniQ7hyUmvZcS1Gr5r4mnm_pxtV0tLoAM4

- Mission Stay At Home Colouring Book
- https://82cc3e96-d0ab-4e18-a0c0-5bd7c21b7244.filesusr.com/ugd/b17e7e_a7c7b7602de84faa966782d76e19b9a4.pdf

- Games to build rapport with children online
- http://www.lianalowenstein.com/artcileProfTeleplayLowenstein.pdf

27

THANK YOU AND GOOD LUCK

28

5