

EMDR: Eye-Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing

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An adverse or traumatic experience has the potential of impacting us long after the event is over. It seems that the nervous system is frozen or that the traumatic material is locked in the nervous system with the original picture, sounds, thoughts, feelings, etc. The trauma is triggered whenever a reminder of it presents itself, which is the basis for a lot of discomfort and negative emotions, such as fear, helplessness, and anger. These are really the emotions related to the old experience which are resurfacing in the present moment.

What is EMDR?

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), is a highly effective trauma therapy with the potential to fully resolve PTSD. It was developed in the late 1980's by Francine Shapiro and currently has a large body of scientific research demonstrating its effectiveness as a treatment for trauma and other related issues. Based on empirical evidence as well as thousands of client and clinician testimonials, EMDR has proven an effective and efficient method of reprocessing traumatic memory.

EMDR appears to assist in the processing of traumatic information, resulting in enhanced integration - and a more adaptive perspective of the traumatic material. The utilization of EMDR has been shown to be effective with a variety of conditions including panic attacks, PTSD symptoms (such as intrusive thoughts, nightmares, and flashbacks), anxiety disorders, phobias, dissociative disorders, mood disorders and other traumatic experiences. EMDR is about integration - bilateral hemispheric (right/left brain) integration; triune brain (brain stem, limbic system and cerebral cortex) integration; and mind/body integration, but practically, it's about convincing the mind and body that the traumatic event is in the past, not the present moment. EMDR helps to put the past in the past, where it belongs, instead of staying stuck in it (feeling like it is happened all over again in the present-with the same thoughts, emotions and body sensations- that accompanied the event in the past).

The eye movements (or other bilateral stimulation) we use in EMDR seem to unlock the nervous system and allow your brain to process the experience. The EMDR process seems to tap into the memory processing mechanisms active during Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep. The bilateral stimulation in the EMDR process provides a form of desensitization for the nervous system, often resulting in the traumatic images no longer feeling disturbing. Basically, EMDR helps you access your brain and body's inherent capacity to heal and process memory so you can heal yourself.

The EMDR Process

- EMDR starts with building a relationship with your therapist and providing a thorough history. This provides safety and allows your therapist to determine the best course of action – which memories might need to be targeted with EMDR.
- In the EMDR Resourcing Stage, your therapist will begin by activating your own internal resources or positive memories. They will guide you in an imaginal, multisensory exercise designed to tap into pictures, emotions, and body sensations of safety, protection, nurturing, and comfort. These become resources that you can use in-between sessions to cope with difficulty feelings.
- After resourcing is completed, your therapist will reassess if EMDR processing is appropriate to continue with. In some cases, we may need to continue focus on resourcing, stability, and coping skills before it is safe to move into processing. Your therapist will provide guidance on which memory is best to begin with. They will ask a series of questions regarding the memory with the purpose of activating the traumatic memory network.
- After the memory is activated, one of these forms of bilateral stimulation will be used - a) buzzing in your hands by turning on the Theratapper; b) alternating auditory tones via headphones or ear buds; or c) back and forth eye-movements, following the therapist's hand.
- The therapist will guide you in and out of the memory. This back-and-forth process, from the memory to the office, from the past to the present, helps your nervous system process the memory and keep the trauma in the past.
- Before the session is over, your therapist will ensure that you are grounded, oriented and calm. This is often a natural result of the EMDR processing experience, though it is not uncommon for the processing of one memory to take multiple sessions. Before completing a session, your therapist will help you use your EMDR resources or other techniques to ground yourself prior to leaving the office.
- The EMDR process begins with processing past memories, then present day triggers, and ends with the installation of future templates to face previously triggering situations in a new way.

The current treatment guidelines of the American Psychiatric Association and the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies designate EMDR as an effective treatment for post traumatic stress. EMDR was also found effective by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense, the United Kingdom Department of Health, the Israeli National Council for Mental Health, and many other international health and governmental agencies.

For more information, or to find an EMDR therapist, visit www.EMDRIA.org