

EMDR Explained

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Friday, 21 August 2009
Last Updated Friday, 21 August 2009

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing is a psychotherapy technique that utilizes the latest research in brain science to heal trauma at a very deep level. It is recognized as one of the most effective treatments for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD.) It integrates elements of many effective psychotherapies in structured protocols that are designed to maximize treatment effects. These include psychodynamic, cognitive behavioral, interpersonal, experiential, and body-centered therapies. EMDR is an information processing therapy and uses an eight-phase approach (Shapiro, 2001).

When we experience trauma it can sometimes get stuck in our body and mind, keeping us from fully living. EMDR utilizes powerful techniques, which help the body process the trauma so that you can get on with living your life instead of being troubled by traumatic events of the past. Bilateral stimulation (meaning alternating from one side of the body to the other with touch, sound or eye movements) is a technique that has been proven to enhance your internal strengths and resources to better prepare you for releasing the trauma during an EMDR session (Shapiro, 2001). Bilateral stimulation is also used to help process and release disturbing feelings and memories associated with trauma. The focuses on past and present experiences in brief sequential doses while simultaneously focusing on an external stimulus (Shapiro, 2002). Then the client is instructed to let new material become the focus of the next set of dual attention. This sequence of dual attention and personal association is repeated many times in the session until the client reports a neutral response to the experience upon which he or she is focusing.

After EMDR processing, clients generally report that the emotional distress related to the memory has been eliminated, or greatly decreased, and that they have gained important cognitive insights (Shapiro, 2002). Importantly, these emotional and cognitive changes usually result in spontaneous behavioral and personal change, which are further enhanced with standard EMDR procedures.

Resources:

Shapiro, F. (2001). *Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing: Basic Principles, Protocols and Procedures* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.

Shapiro, F. (2002). *EMDR as an Integrative Psychotherapy Approach: Experts of Diverse Orientations Explore the Paradigm Prism*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association Books.