

EMDR Report

Healing Trauma Memories

ISSUE 1



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EMDR – Processing Trauma Memories

What is EMDR?

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) is a method of psychotherapy that has been extensively researched and proven effective for the treatment of trauma. EMDR is a set of standardized protocols that incorporates elements from many different treatment approaches. To date, EMDR has helped an estimated two million people of all ages relieve many types of psychological stress. No one knows how any form of psychotherapy works neuro-biologically or in the brain. However, we do know that when a person is very upset, their brain cannot process information as it does ordinarily. One moment becomes "frozen in time," and remembering a trauma may feel as bad as going through it the first time because the images, sounds, smells, and feelings haven't changed. Such memories have a lasting negative effect that interferes with the way a person sees the world and the way they relate to other people.

EMDR seems to have a direct effect on the way that the brain processes information. Normal information processing is resumed, so following a successful EMDR session, a person no longer relives the images, sounds, and feelings when the event is brought to mind. You still remember what happened, but it is less upsetting. Many types of therapy have similar goals. However, EMDR appears to be similar to what occurs naturally during dreaming or REM (rapid eye movement) sleep. Therefore, EMDR can be thought of as a physiologically based therapy that helps a person see disturbing material in a new and less distressing way.

What Kind of Problems can EMDR treat?

Personality Disorders

Panic Attacks

Complicated Grief

Dissociative Disorders

Disturbing Memories

Phobias

Pain Disorders

Eating Disorders

Performance Anxiety

Stress Reduction

Addictions

Sexual and/or Physical Abuse

Body Dysmorphic Disorders

What is an EMDR Session Like

Processing Trauma and other Issues

In 1987, psychologist Dr. Francine Shapiro made the chance observation that eye movements can reduce the intensity of disturbing thoughts, under certain conditions. Dr. Shapiro studies this effect scientifically, and in a 1989 issue of the *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, she reported success using EMDR to treat victims of trauma. Since then, EMDR has developed and evolved through the contributions of therapists and researchers all over the world. Today, EMDR is a set of standardized protocols that incorporates elements from many different treatment approaches.

During EMDR, the therapist works with the client to identify a specific problem as the focus of the treatment session. The client calls to mind the disturbing issue or event, what was seen, felt, heard, thought, etc., and what thoughts and beliefs are currently held about that event. The therapist facilitates the directional movement of the eyes or other dual attention stimulation of the brain, while the client focuses on the disturbing material, and the client just notices whatever comes to mind without making any effort to control direction or content. Each person will process information uniquely, based on personal experiences and values. Sets of eye movements are continued until the memory becomes less disturbing and is associated with positive thoughts and beliefs about one's self; for example, "I did the best I could." During EMDR, the client may experience intense emotions, but by the end of the session, most people report a great reduction in the level of disturbance.

One or more sessions are required for the therapist to understand the nature of the problem and to decide whether EMDR is an appropriate treatment. The therapist will also discuss EMDR more fully and provide an opportunity to answer questions about the method. Once therapist and client have

agreed that EMDR is appropriate for a specific problem, the actual EMDR therapy may begin.

A typical EMDR session lasts from 60 to 90 minutes. The type of problem, life circumstances, and the amount of previous trauma will determine how many treatment sessions are necessary. EMDR may be used within a standard "talking" therapy, as an adjunctive therapy with a separate therapist, or as a treatment all by itself.

Approximately 20 controlled studies have investigated the effects of EMDR. These studies have consistently found that EMDR effectively decreases/eliminates the symptoms of posttraumatic stress for the majority of clients. Clients often report improvement in other associated symptoms such as anxiety.

The current treatment guidelines of the American Psychiatric Association and the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies designate EMDR as an effective treatment for posttraumatic 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. Research has also shown that EMDR can be an efficient and rapid treatment. For further references, a bibliography of research may be found through EMDR International Association's website, www.emdria.org.



Symptoms of Trauma & Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Before we get into the clinical symptoms – there is a side effect of trauma that can be devastating in someone's life. Some people who abuse illegal substances or who are addicted to those illegal drugs do so because the pain of the trauma in their life is too much to face. Therefore, rather than face it they use drugs to numb the pain of life and their trauma. This is why when we talk to someone who is drug addicted they tell us about all the things that are bad in their life. They are stuck in the trauma of life and rather than look for a way out they have turned to drugs to escape. This usually makes them less able to overcome the trauma because they are stuck in what has gone wrong and they have stacked addiction on top of the trauma.

Symptoms:

Persistent re-experiencing of one or more traumatic events:

This can take the form of flashbacks, memories, recurring distressing dreams, or intense negative psychological or physiological response to something that reminds the person of the traumatic event.

Persistent avoidance or emotional numbing:

This can take the form of avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma, such as certain thoughts or feelings, or talking about the event(s); avoidance of behaviors, places, or people that might lead to distressing memories; inability to recall major parts of the trauma(s) or decreased involvement in significant life activities; decreased capacity to feel certain feelings; an expectation that one's future will be somehow constrained in ways not normal to other people.

Persistent symptoms of increased arousal not present before:

These are all physiological response issues, such as difficulty falling or staying asleep or problems with anger, concentration or hypervigilance.



Case Studies in EMDR

EMDR can be used with both single incident trauma and complex trauma. Complex trauma can be similar traumas like war trauma or long-term sexual abuse; or it can be different traumas. Either way the traumas stack up and therefore, they are referred to as complex trauma. EMDR can be an amazing tool when working with complex trauma.

In one case a young woman had two similar traffic accidents in a short period of time and she could not drive anymore. After just two EMDR sessions she was able to drive again and relax – rather than be constantly hyper-vigilant when she was behind the wheel.

Another woman had many years of incest abuse in her past and was deeply affected by it. She was always on guard with people, especially men and she constantly had thoughts and dreams of the trauma. She had five EMDR sessions and her intrusive thoughts and dreams stopped and she began to relax in life in general.

Another woman had adult sexual trauma and she was affected to the point where she had flashbacks of the event constantly. After less than 10 sessions she no longer had flashbacks or other intrusive thoughts and was able to become functional in her life. Prior to that she was not able to hold a job or manage her life without the support of her parents or someone else.

In one case a man's girlfriend ended the relationship and he could not seem to get over the loss of the relationship. He found he had lost interest in most activities and could not seem to get any work done. After several EMDR sessions he was able to let go of the loss and move forward in his life with renewed energy to handle projects in his life.

Several war veterans with multiple PTSD symptoms have processed traumas from early life and the war they fought in. Each one has had relief from the traumas they have processed with EMDR. With this complex trauma it takes many sessions to process all the traumas they have experienced.

It is not necessary to process each trauma individually but traumas can be grouped together. A person with long-term sexual abuse does not need to process each incident of abuse but in EMDR similar incidents seem to get grouped together. With war trauma maybe all firefights can be group together or all mortar attacks.

EMDR is also effective with other issues such as anxiety, phobias, and stress reduction. See the sidebar on page 1 for more issues that may be addressed through EMDR.

EMDR is a good starting place for many issues that may be holding a person back in life.

EMDR with Children

I have had the opportunity to use EMDR with several children over the past few years.

In EMDR there is a protocol that adults go through to process whatever issues they are working through with the process.

With children an adult who knows the trauma needs to be present. Say a child was in an auto accident and has symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder after the accident. A parent who knows the entire incident would say to the child "Remember when you were in that accident?" And then would follow up by telling the child the story of the accident. Then the therapist might ask the child if that was right and to tell the therapist the story. Then the therapist might tell the child the story. The idea is to go over the story as many times as possible (while doing bilateral stimulation) and through that process the child is processing the trauma.

This technique has been very successful for children. It has worked with children with separation anxiety, a child who saw his father taken away by the police, a child who was molested, another who was physically abused, and one who was often locked in their room.

Often with a child there are not numerous traumatic incidents and the traumas are usually processed in one or two sessions. One of the benefits of processing those early traumas while the child is young is that they have not begun to repress them or used other coping strategies that do not work for us. Many adults learn unhealthy coping strategies as a child to manage life after a traumatic event and those strategies carry on into adult life. Another benefit of working with childhood trauma is that we are getting to the trauma early in life so when other traumatic things happen as they grow up they are not stacking up over other trauma. This mitigates the effects of later traumas. Many of the war veterans deeply affected by their war experience were previously traumatized in childhood. The more severe the trauma in childhood the more deeply affected they seem to be by their war trauma. This is because those trauma's stack up. Once there is a Trauma Memory Network created in the mind a person is more likely to have traumas stack up in that Memory Network.

Processing traumas early is of great benefit to the child and for how they react to traumas in later life.



Weekend Workshops

Our Weekend workshops are designed to help people grow and expand in the areas of body, mind, emotions and spiritually.

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Upcoming Events

Dyad Nights

These nights are an introduction to the Enlightenment Intensive and a way for those who have attended Intensives to continue their practice.

Enlightenment Intensives

The Enlightenment Intensive is a modern answer to the question, "Where can I go to directly experience the true nature of life, others and myself?" With one foot rooted in the ancient tradition of Rinzai Zen and the other in the modern dyad process of communication, the Enlightenment Intensive is a three-day retreat capable of producing deep spiritual awakenings at the core. Tell Me Who You Are?

Life Transformation Intensives

This is an EXPERIENTIAL WORKSHOP designed to give you the answers you have been looking for. It meets for six weekends over a six-month period, providing a loving and accepting environment for the challenge of profound personal growth.

The Life Transformation Intensive supports you in your spiritual path, whatever that is. Through the use of a variety of Heart-Centered trance techniques, you will learn to open up to Soul Work and to discover a much broader aspect of who you really are and what your purpose is at this time on earth.

Meditation Nights

An evening with a like-minded group of people in pursuit of Self-Mastery through a variety of guided meditation techniques.

Robert Keller, M.A., LMFT,
LMHC

Advanced Clinical
Hypnotherapist

PO Box 12015
Olympia, Washington 98503

360-754-4607
Fax: 360-867-1328

www.healingthepast.com

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