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What is EMDR Therapy?

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) is a psychotherapy that enables people to heal from the symptoms and emotional distress that are the result of disturbing life experiences.

EMDR Therapy and The Brain

Our brains have a natural way of recovering from traumatic memories and events. Moment by moment our brain's processing system allows us to take in new information received through our senses and integrate it with what was previously experienced so that our past informs the future.

However, if we experience a traumatic or disturbing experience that is overwhelming or life-threatening, this can disrupt the brain's processing system. The information from that experience can get "locked" in the nervous system and stored as an unprocessed *memory* with the original picture, sounds, thoughts, and feelings that were experienced at that time. This may create an overwhelming feeling of being back in that moment, or of being "frozen in time."

While many times traumatic experiences can be managed and resolved spontaneously, they may not be fully processed without help. EMDR therapy helps the brain process these memories and allows normal healing to resume (EMDRIA.org).

How does EMDR Therapy work?

EMDR therapy does not require talking in detail about the distressing issue but rather uses bilateral stimulation, such as eye movements, which seems to unlock the nervous system and allow the brain to process the experience. Once the experience has successfully been reprocessed into an adaptive memory, the experience is still remembered but without the distressing charge it once had.

What is an EMDR reprocessing session like?

"Reprocessing" does not mean talking about a traumatic experience. "Reprocessing" means setting up a learning state that will allow experiences causing problems to be "digested" and stored appropriately in your brain.

I will begin by asking you to focus on the specific memory. Attention will be given to a negative image, belief, emotion, and body feeling related to this memory and then to a positive belief indicating the issue was resolved.

While you focus on aspects of the memory, we will begin sets of side-to-side eye movements, sounds, or taps (BLS) for about 30-45 seconds. You will be guided to notice what comes to mind after each set.

You may experience images, emotions, and body sensations that can feel intense. This is normal and will generally pass like a wave. The BLS will continue until the memory is no longer disturbing.

What happens afterward?

On the day(s) of your reprocessing session(s), you will want to practice self-care since the processing of the material may continue. I generally recommend not returning to work; instead, plan for relaxing activities. Plan to refrain from drugs or alcohol as this can interfere with the continued processing.

In the few days following, it is not uncommon to experience new insights, vivid dreams, strong feelings, or memory recall. This may feel confusing but it is just a continuation of the healing process. Simply take note of the experience and use the skills taught in previous sessions. I will provide you with helpful worksheets that you can use to track your progress.

What can EMDR therapy be used for?

In addition to its use for the treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, EMDR helps treat:

- Anxiety and Panic
- Phobias
- Grief and Loss
- Addictive Behaviors
- Eating Disorders
- Chronic Pain / Medical Trauma
- Performance Anxiety
- Depression

Benefits of EMDR Therapy

- Accelerate the healing process
- Helps break negative thinking habits
- Distressing symptoms are eliminated or reduced
- Remember instead of reliving the experience
- Learn resources to manage distress
- Does not require talking about the details of the event