

About EMDR Therapy

What is EMDR Therapy?

EMDR stands for Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing. It is a form of therapy that helps people heal from trauma and/or other distressing life experiences.



How EMDR Helps

Our brains have a natural way to recover from traumatic memories and events. While many times traumatic experiences can be managed and resolved spontaneously, sometimes help is needed to process blocks caused by stress responses. Stress responses are part of our natural fight, flight, or freeze instincts. When distress remains, upsetting images, thoughts, and emotions may create sensations of overwhelm, of being back in that moment, or of being frozen in time. EMDR therapy helps the brain and body process these memories and allows normal healing to resume. The experience is still remembered, but the fight, flight, or freeze response from the original event is resolved, and the memory feels farther away. The memory moves from maladaptive to adaptive resolution.

Recognition

EMDR therapy has been extensively researched and is recognized as an effective treatment for trauma by many organizations including:

- American Psychiatric Association
- American Psychological Association
- International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS)
- U.K. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs/ Department of Defense
- U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- World Health Organization

What EMDR is Like

After you and your therapist agree that EMDR therapy is a good fit, and begin to work together, you will be asked to focus on a specific event. Attention will be given to an image, belief, feelings, and body sensations related to this event. While you bring up the upsetting event, the therapist will begin sets of side-to-side eye movements, sounds, or taps. Between sets, you will be asked to briefly report any changes without judgement, just noticing. You may experience shifts of insight or changes in images, feelings, or beliefs regarding the event. The sets of eye movements, sounds, or taps are repeated in silence until the event becomes less disturbing. Your job during EMDR is to simply pay attention to what is happening 'on the inside' and tell the therapist. You are in control of the treatment process. Watch a video Introduction to EMDR Therapy here: <https://www.emdria.org/about-emdr-therapy/>.



EMDR Therapy and Chronic Pain

Chronic pain can create feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. One main feature of chronic pain and illness is the never ending and repeated aspect of the experience. Chronic pain can create a feeling of wanting to disconnect from our awareness of our physical body and experience. Chronic pain can have physical or unknown causes, and can send signals of ongoing threat through the brain and body. EMDR therapy can ease chronic pain symptoms, create clarity around the body sensations of embodied trauma, reframe negative beliefs, improve energy and mood, and help clients to create a different relationship with pain so it does not define them.

Trauma Symptoms

- Depression, sadness, isolation
- Difficulty functioning in daily life
- Exaggerated startle response, feeling on edge
- Anger/Difficulty controlling aggressive impulses
- Hyperarousal/hypervigilance
- Sense of numbness toward life
- Difficulty staying present with life or other dissociative responses
- Shame, guilt, intense worry
- Substance abuse
- Difficulties being in public places/crowds
- Involvement in high risk behaviors
- Avoiding community activities
- Marital/Family issues
- Chronic illness, headaches, medically unexplained symptoms
- Low energy
- Negative self talk
- Thoughts of 'I'm a burden' or 'I am hopeless/Nothing will work for me'

***"Studies show that processing these pain memories using the standard EMDR protocol can lead to a clinically relevant reduction in the physical and psychological symptoms of pain, such as subjective distress."**