



American Foundation of Counseling Services, Inc.

What is EMDR?

The mind can often heal itself naturally, in the same way as the body does. Much of this natural coping mechanism occurs during sleep, particularly during rapid eye movement (REM) sleep. Francine Shapiro developed Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) in 1987, utilizing this natural process in order to successfully treat Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

What happens when you are traumatized?

Most of the time your body routinely manages new information and experiences without you being aware of it. However, when something out of the ordinary occurs and you are traumatized by an overwhelming event (e.g. a car accident) or by being repeatedly subjected to distress (e.g. childhood neglect), your natural coping mechanism can become overloaded. This overloading can result in disturbing experiences remaining frozen in your brain or being "unprocessed". Such unprocessed memories and feelings are stored in the limbic system of your brain in a "raw" and emotional form, rather than in a verbal "story" mode. Often the memory itself is long forgotten, but the painful feelings such as anxiety, panic, anger or despair are continually triggered in the present. Your ability to live in the present and learn from new experiences can therefore become inhibited. EMDR helps create the connections between your brain's memory networks, enabling your brain to process the traumatic memory in a very natural way.

What can EMDR be used for?

In addition to its use for the treatment of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, EMDR has been successfully used to treat:

- Anxiety and panic attacks
- Depression
- Stress
- Phobias
- Sleep problems
- Complicated grief
- Addictions
- Pain relief, phantom limb pain
- Self-esteem and performance anxiety

Can anyone benefit from EMDR?

EMDR can accelerate therapy by resolving the impact of your past traumas and allowing you to live more fully in the present. It is not, however, appropriate for everyone. The process is rapid, and any disturbing experiences, if they occur at all, last for a comparatively short period of time. Nevertheless, you need to be aware of, and willing to experience, the strong feelings and disturbing thoughts, which sometimes occur during sessions.

What evidence is there that EMDR is a successful treatment?

EMDR is an innovative clinical treatment which has successfully helped over a million individuals. The validity and reliability of EMDR has been established by rigorous research. There are now nineteen controlled studies into EMDR making it the most thoroughly researched method used in the treatment of trauma, (Details on www.emdr-europe.org and www.emdr.org) and is recommended by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) as an effective treatment for PTSD.

Adapted from: www.thetraumacentre.com