

La Perla Counseling & Trauma Response Services, Inc.

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What is EMDR?

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) is an innovative clinical treatment for victims of trauma, panic attacks, phobias, grief, anxiety, eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorders, and survivors of abuse. The basic theory of EMDR is that the brain will automatically and rapidly process information in an awakened state (when it is given the opportunity) much like it does when it is in the Rapid Eye Movement (REM) stage of sleep.

Where did EMDR come from?

Dr. Francine Shapiro, the developer of EMDR is a senior research fellow at the Mental Health Research Institute in Palo Alto, California and author of several professional books and articles. In addition she has presented at most major psychology conferences over the past 10 years and was the 1993 recipient of the Distinguished Scientific Achievement in Psychology Award by the California Psychological Association.

What if I decide to try EMDR?

You will be asked to develop a treatment plan together with your therapist to target what issue(s) you are having difficulties with. This would include an intake and brief history of the presenting problem. Your therapist will provide you with recommended steps of the treatment protocol and explain their importance. After the treatment plan is established and you have your questions answered, the EMDR can begin. Some cases are more complex than others so in these situations you will discuss this in detail before EMDR can begin.

Once the initial assessments have been completed and you have decided how you want to proceed, you will then be asked to follow a moving stream of light on a panel or a therapist's fingers as they move them from side to side or up and down. In other cases, clients prefer to listen to audio sounds or receive a light rhythm of bilateral tapping on their knees as an alternative to the light stream. You will be instructed on how to advise the therapist what you are experiencing or deciding to do as the reprocessing progresses. You are able to stop or start as you wish, and there is not such thing as "doing it right or wrong". EMDR is not hypnosis. In this treatment you will be able to sit comfortably while maintaining control over how you would like the session to go. You will provide feedback to the therapist about what is different for you (if anything) as you move through each "set" of desensitization.

What can I expect will happen?

Your brain will begin accessing normal problem solving ideas and processing the information which you and your therapist have jointly decided to work on. At times

clients have reported initially experiencing confusion, fear, or panic as the brain begins working on finding resolution. Negative beliefs (I am unlovable, I am a bad person, I cannot protect myself) are exchanged for positive beliefs (I am lovable, I am safe, I did the best I could). The difference between this treatment and others is that it allows the brain to work in a highly accelerated manner and is frequently described as watching scenery go by while sitting on a train. If you engage in treatment your brain can quickly begin dealing with the presenting issue and you will notice a sudden awareness about what you believe to be true for you. If after this point where many clients have reported feelings of relief, a sense of resolution about what happened to them, or a sudden warmth and feeling of safety in their body. Sometimes they think of something humorous, but what they also suddenly notice is the absence of feeling troubled; their feelings of panic or fear have become unusually dulled or have actually disappeared.

Can you describe why this works?

The theory most widely proposed is that the brain becomes neuro-chemically frozen on an event that has caused severe trauma and it is stuck in this groove like a needle when it gets stuck on a record scratch. Until the brain processes all information pertaining to the event it will “keep playing the same thing over and over like a stuck record player.” EMDR has the ability to jumpstart the brain and cause it to push past the groove it has been “stuck in.” If the trauma event was significant, the brain has perhaps gone on to more workable issues in problem solving and has “shelved the hard stuff”, thereby leaving an islet in the brain where the traumatic memories are stored. The theory behind EMDR is that it accesses these islets to intentionally and safely help the brain move towards resolution and peace.

What if I'm not sure about EMDR?

EMDR has been known to be effective in treating other life-altering events such as adoption, divorce, infidelity, and life-threatening or chronic illnesses. It is currently the most extensively researched treatment for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and many other applications are currently being explored.* Please continue to do your own research about what you feel will be best suited for your particular needs. Ask your therapist any questions you may have.

Where can I obtain more information about EMDR?

Becker, L.A., Wilson, S.A. & Tinker, Robert H., (1995). EMDR Treatment *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 63, No. 6. 928-937.

Grant, Mark, M.A., *Pain Control with EMDR*

Harvard Medical School, The Harvard Mental Health Letter, (11-1995) 7.

Shapiro, F. & Forrest, M.S. EMDR: The Breakthrough Therapy for Overcoming Anxiety, Stress & Trauma.

Tinker, Dr. Robert, Through the Eyes of a Child

*At this printing, EMDR has been used broadly including with clients who suffer from Dissociative Disorders. It has also been used in other benign cases such as improving a client's ability to perform in sports (EMDR: Breakthrough Therapy) Other research lists are too extensive but may be available on-line at The EMDR institute, Inc. <http://www.emdr.com>