



Cancer Psychological Service

Eye Movement Desensitisation Reprocessing (EMDR)

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 Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) in 1987, utilising this natural process in order to successfully treat Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Since then, EMDR has been used to effectively treat a wide range of mental health problems.

What happens when you are traumatised?

Most of the time our bodies can manage new information and experiences without the need for us to do anything.

When something out of the ordinary occurs and you are traumatised 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 can lead to the memory of the event getting 'locked' in the brain with the original picture, sounds, thoughts, feeling etc... Since the experience is locked there it continues to be triggered whenever a reminder comes up. It can be the basis for a lot of discomfort and sometimes a lot of negative emotions, such as fear and helplessness that we can't seem to control. These are really the emotions connected with the old experience that is being triggered.

The eye movements in EMDR seem to unlock this system and allow your brain to process your traumatic experience.

The important thing to remember is that it is your own brain that will be doing the healing and that you are the one in control.

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.

How long does treatment take?

EMDR can be brief focused treatment or part of a longer psychotherapy programme. EMDR sessions can be for 60 to 90 minutes.

Will I will remain in control and empowered?

During EMDR treatment, you will remain in control, fully alert and wide-awake. This is not a form of hypnosis and you can stop the process at any time. Throughout the session, the therapist will support and facilitate your own self-healing and intervene as little as possible. Reprocessing is usually experienced as something that happens spontaneously, and new connections and insights are felt to arise quite naturally from within. As a result, most people experience EMDR as being a natural and very empowering therapy.

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.

Useful Resources and Videos

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJJZQAr9nQo>

Adapted from www.thetraumacentre.com