

EMDR

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing

EMDR is an adaptive information processing mechanism. When traumatic events occur, there is a physiologic component involved in the brain which locks in the original image, negative beliefs, and emotions connected with the event. Behavioral and psychological difficulties later in life are a consequence of this affective connection. EMDR breaks this connection. It is not yet understood why it works, although there are different theories. A known fact, however, is that bilateral stimulation of the right and left hemispheres of the brain can break this connection. The negative material of the original trauma is then adaptively processed. In the EMDR protocol, negative self-assessments are confronted and positive self-beliefs are installed. Consequently, EMDR addresses image, cognition, affect, and bodily sensation. Prior to beginning the bilateral stimulation, the client is taught coping strategies to aid them in handling intense emotional responses which may be evoked. It is reinforced at every session that they always have the option of stopping the procedure whenever they wish. An important element of this process is trust between the client and therapist.

Bi-lateral stimulation involves different methods of rapid shifting of attention between right and left hemispheres. It may be eye movements from left to right by following the therapists finger or specialized EMDR light equipment. Some therapists use alternate tapping on client's hands or knees. Another modality involves sounds on alternate sides of the head. Any, or all, of these means might be used by the EMDR therapist.

There have been multiple studies testifying to the efficacy of EMDR on patients suffering from traumatic events. Therapists have used EMDR on other problems with great success: pain management, addictions, phobias, anxiety, and excessive grief responses.