

## **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)**

EMDR is a psychotherapy technique we use to heal the effects of trauma – be it a little “t” trauma or a big “T” trauma.

A breakdown of the technique’s name:

1. The eye movement is a back and forth movement of your eyes (usually by tracking my fingers as they move back and forth in front of your eyes). It looks like the Rapid Eye Movement you see under someone’s eyelids when they are dreaming–known as REM sleep.
2. Desensitization is about reducing the intensity of emotions when recalling a traumatic event, so it no longer feels like a nightmare, but more like a distant black and white movie without much emotional impact.
3. Reprocessing is about removing the negative beliefs associated with the trauma—we almost always incorrectly believe the event to be our fault.

The best way I know of to describe why it works is not a scientific one, or based in fact, but is one that most people understand:

When we experience trauma, we are in shock and tend not to feel. Later, we can recall traumatic events as if we would remember a movie, but often we are not connected to the feelings that occurred at the time of the incident. We have two brain hemispheres – almost totally separate. Our left-brain is mainly for thoughts/intellect, and our right-brain is mainly for emotion. When we move our eyes back and forth, then we bi-laterally stimulate the brain and reconnect the left and right brain and reprocess a traumatic experience. In this way, we experience the emotions that were being “locked in the body.” It seems to be the “locked-in” and unresolved feelings that cause symptoms such as: sleep difficulties, having a heightened startle response, anxiety, emotional numbing and flashbacks of the experience. Reprocessing the traumatic event as a combined thought/memory/feeling experience seems to create the healing.

Note: For some people eye movement is difficult, or not very effective, so we can also bi-laterally stimulate our body by rhythmic tapped on our thighs as an alternative. You can put your feet on the floor, place your hands on your thighs and tap left right, left right.

From the EMDR Website: “After EMDR processing, clients generally report that the emotional distress related to the memory has been eliminated, or greatly decreased, and that they have gained important cognitive insights. Importantly, these emotional and cognitive changes usually result in spontaneous behavioral and personal change, which are further enhanced with standard EMDR procedures.”

The negative reports I occasionally hear from people seem to be caused by improper use of EMDR procedures. I have been personally trained by the creator of EMDR, Francine Shapiro, Ph.D., and have not had negative effects other than some reports of grogginess. So, it’s a good idea to have a ride home from the first session or two. The result I see in my clients seems “magical” – admittedly, not a very scientific description, but, honestly, it comes closest to the

actual experience many have. The claims that you hear from people about its amazing success really do occur.

For more information, here is a link to the EMDR Institute: <http://www.emdr.com/>

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