

E M D R

(Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy)

At the time of a traumatic or disturbing event, strong emotions interfere with our ability to completely process the experience and one moment becomes “frozen in time.” Recalling the event may feel as though the person is reliving the event all over again because the images, smells, sounds and feelings are still there and can be triggered in the present. When activated, these memories cause a negative impact on our daily functioning and interfere with the way we see ourselves, our world and how we relate to others. EMDR therapy appears to directly affect the brain, allowing the individual to resume normal functioning while no longer reliving the images, sounds, and feelings associated with the trauma. The memory is still there, but it is less upsetting.

Unlike many forms of talk therapy, an EMDR therapist helps trauma survivors by linking what was seen, felt, heard and believed at the time of the trauma with a unique, additional element: a pattern of rapid directional eye movements induced by the therapist waving one or two fingers back and forth in front of the client’s eyes. Typically this is done at a distance of 12” or more. There are other forms of dual processing, such as tactile sensations or audio processing. The client is gently guided to just notice what comes up without trying to control the content, while processing the information until it is less and less disturbing. Over time the disturbing memory and associated beliefs, feelings and sensations become “digested” or worked through until it is associated with a positive belief about the self. For example, “I am a failure” becomes “I can succeed.”

Similar to many forms of psychotherapy, the exact mechanism for the effectiveness of EMDR is yet unknown. It appears that using rapid eye movements relieves the anxiety associated with the trauma or disturbing event so that the original event can be examined from a more detached perspective, somewhat like watching a movie of what happened.

Some experts have noted that the eye movements involved in EMDR might be similar to what occurs naturally during dreaming or REM (rapid eye movement) sleep. It may be thought of as a physiologically based therapy that allows a person to see material in a new and less disturbing way. Others believe it reactivates parts of the brain that were “shut down” as a coping mechanism. In this way *cognitive reorganizing* takes place, allowing the negative, painful emotions to give way to more resolved, empowered feelings.

EMDR is a highly specialized form of therapy involving specialized training approved by the EMDR Institute. Given the specialized nature of this form of therapy, it may not be an indicated form of treatment for particular circumstances or pre-existing conditions. Your EMDR therapist will be able to cover these in greater detail should you have an interest in pursuing this form of treatment.

**For more information about EMDR
please visit:
www.emdr.com
www.emdria.org
www.helpguide.org/mental/emdr_therapy.htm**