

EMDR: HEALING WITH A JUMP START

Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing



Go With That

Janelle Reid
Licensed Associate Counselling Psychologist



Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR) is a psychotherapy approach for working with disturbing or distressful memories. Our brain is similar to a filing cabinet storing information including memories in a specific order. When we have traumatic experiences or distressing life events, the filing system becomes disrupted resulting in memories stored inaccurately. This leads to unprocessed or blocked memories with an outcome of faulty or flawed thinking. EMDR helps the brain to process traumatic experiences. It is like giving the brain a jumpstart to continue its normal functions.

Distressing Memories

Traumatic events and distressing life events such as abuse, neglect, violence, disasters or accidents may impair the memory center of the brain known as the Hippocampus. Trauma may cause the hippocampus to become under activated and distressing memories are distorted or not stored at all. In a nut shell, positive memories can easily be recalled from the hippocampus, but this is not the same for negative or traumatic memories. Without the jumpstart, unprocessed memories can be easily triggered and create the distress repeatedly. It's like constantly hitting the replay button on a recording.





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Eye movement desensitization reprocessing is an eight phase approach. The significant phases require identifying a snapshot of the worst part of the traumatic experience while pairing a negative belief about yourself due to the experience. The feelings and body sensations associated with the traumatic memories are brought into your awareness and then you “go with that” or “notice that” while engaging in bilateral stimulation. This process allows the mind to notice anything that comes up during processing. The bilateral stimulation will be repeated several times throughout a session until the snapshot, emotions and body sensations are no longer disturbing or causing distress. This process may be completed in one or more sessions.

Bilateral stimulation (BLS) is referred to as the alternating right-left tracking that may be created using eye movements, sound, vibrations, or tapping controlled by the therapist. Research indicates that BLS provides a jump start for the brain to restore your instinctive function of processing memories including the traumatic ones. In EMDR, you are asked to pay attention from one side to another (left to right) using BLS while thinking about your memory. The most important aspect is finding the method of BLS suitable for your comfort level.



EMDR Timeline

Who benefits from EMDR?

EMDR is one of the most researched therapies, especially known for its effectiveness in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for children, adolescents and adults. People experiencing anxiety, dissociative disorders, substance abuse and addiction, grief and loss may also benefit from EMDR treatment especially if there is trauma or other distressing memories.

EMDR sessions are 90-minute sessions but the number of sessions are dependent upon the type of trauma which may be a single traumatic experience or multiple traumatic experiences resulting in complex trauma. Providing a slight prediction, it may take 8-12 sessions to treat simple trauma and more than 12 sessions for complex trauma.

For more information visit <https://www.emdria.org/about-emdr-therapy/>

