

What is EMDR?

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Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) has been used effectively for over 30 years with many different types of psychological distress including anxiety, depression, stress, panic, grief, nightmares, pain, addiction, phobias, abuse, trauma, amongst many others. EMDR is one of the world's most well-researched and empirically validated psychological treatments.

EMDR is a modern psychological treatment that defuses past toxic memory fragments (e.g. pictures, thoughts, sounds, feelings, and body sensations) that are causing distress in the present – moments that have unnaturally become 'frozen in time', and which, if not treated, can have a lasting negative effect that interferes with the way a person copes with the present.

EMDR uses bilateral stimulation (most commonly through eye movement that mimics REM) to kick start the brain's natural memory processing, to re-process stuck toxic memory fragments. The memory doesn't get erased but reduces in intensity and lowers the disturbance of these memories, so the memory feels less significant, quieter, not as draining - turning down the volume on your symptoms. You will still recall what has happened, but it no longer feels so upsetting.

During EMDR, the therapist works with the client to identify a specific memory for treatment. The client then "calls to mind" the disturbing issue or event, what was seen, felt, heard, thought, etc. The therapist then begins bilateral stimulation - commonly eye movements. Stimulation is continued until the memory becomes less disturbing and gets linked to other positive thoughts and beliefs.

EMDR not only resolves toxic memories, but in so doing, most often changes the perspective a person has about themselves, including installing new positive self-beliefs. EMDR doesn't require you to have a vivid recollection or to talk at length about what happened. Talking about an experience doesn't help your brain understand and reprocess it – in fact, that can be retraumatizing. Instead, your job during EMDR is to observe what you're noticing, without needing it to be accurate or even make logical sense, so that your brain's natural healing process can start piecing together the fragments to help you regain a normal and healthy perspective.

The expected course of treatment time depends on individual circumstances. It is common to get some immediate improvement after just one processing session, with gains increasing with each subsequent session. And it's also common that a single traumatic event will take fewer treatment sessions than childhood trauma. A rule of thumb? Studies have shown that 77% to 90% of clients with PTSD eliminate symptoms after 3 to 7 sessions.

Other cool benefits of EMDR include:

- During EMDR you are fully awake and in control at all times,
- Memory accuracy is not critical - a vague sense of what happened is sufficient,
- EMDR is not dangerous when administered by a qualified and registered mental health professional.

Brief On-line Videos That Introduce EMDR:

1. EMDR International Association: <https://www.emdria.org/about-emdr-therapy/> (10min)
2. EMDR Association UK: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bIJZQAr9nQo&t=12s> (4 mins)