

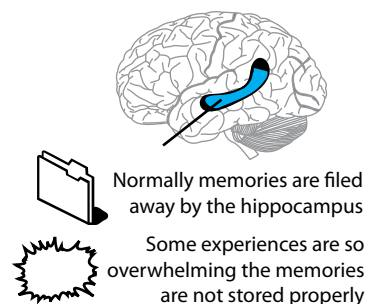
What Is Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)?

Introduction

Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) is a psychotherapy approach designed for working with distressing or traumatic memories. The theory behind EMDR is that many psychological difficulties are the result of distressing life experiences which have not been stored in memory properly and are said to be *unprocessed* or *blocked*. These traumatic memories may need some help to become processed, and EMDR is one way to do this.

What is special about trauma memories?

Normal memories are stored by a part of the brain called the hippocampus. You can think of the hippocampus as a sort of librarian which catalogues (processes) events and stores them in the right place. However, some traumatic events (such as accidents, abuse, disasters, or violence) are so overwhelming that the hippocampus doesn't do its job properly. When this happens memories are stored in their raw, unprocessed, form. These trauma memories are easily triggered, leading them to replay and cause distress over and over again.



What will I be asked to do in an EMDR session?

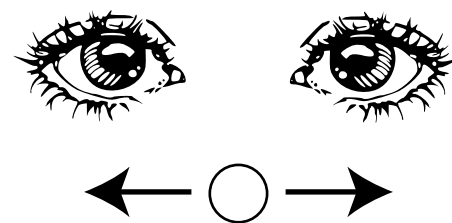
There are a number of steps to EMDR treatment, but some of the key stages are to:

- Preparation phase**
- Think of a troubling memory, then identify an image of the worst moment of that memory
 - Identify a negative belief about that worst moment (the therapist may ask *"what is the worst thing that moment says about you?"*)
 - Identify emotions and bodily feelings linked to that moment

- Processing phase**
- Think about the image & belief while at the same time making left-to-right eye movements (or while paying attention to tapping sensations or sounds that are alternately given from left-to-right)
 - To allow your mind to 'go with' whatever comes up and just notice what happens
 - This process will be repeated until the memory causes less distress (this may happen in one session, or may take more than one session)

Why do I need to make eye movements?

In EMDR you are asked to pay attention from one side to another while thinking about your memory. One way to pay attention from left to right is to follow the therapist's finger as they move it from side-to-side in your line of vision. Alternative versions of EMDR ask you to pay attention to sounds or tapping sensations which occur in sequence from left to right.



This side-to-side motion is called bilateral stimulation. It has been found to enhance memory processing and there are a number of theories explaining how it might do this. The important thing is to be able to find a form of bilateral stimulation that you are comfortable with.

What is EMDR used to treat?

This is very good evidence that EMDR is an effective treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and it is recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) for PTSD. The evidence for using EMDR to treat other disorders is less clear. EMDR may be an effective treatment for other conditions, particularly if they involve trauma memories or other distressing memories, but more research is needed.

How long does treatment take?

EMDR sessions are sometimes slightly longer than typical therapy sessions (up to 90 minutes). The number of sessions needed will depend on the type and severity of trauma which you experienced. NICE estimate that 8-12 sessions may be necessary to treat simpler traumas, with more sessions necessary for multiple traumas.

About EMDR

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), a contemporary approach to psychotherapy, accelerates the treatment of a wide range of psychosocial difficulties and self-esteem issues related both to past traumatic events and present life conditions. This interactive, standardized approach has been empirically tested with patients presenting with diverse issues, including loss of a loved one, rape, emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, vehicular, medical and other trauma, somatic disorders, relationship and performance difficulties.

Controlled studies of survivors of Vietnam combat, rape, molestation, accident, catastrophic loss and natural disaster indicate that EMDR is capable of a rapid desensitization of traumatic memories, including a cognitive restructuring and a significant reduction of client symptoms such as emotional distress, intrusive thoughts, flashbacks and nightmares. Substantial research supports application of EMDR to trauma-related disorders. The International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS), the Dept of Veterans Affairs and DOD, The American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association have listed EMDR as efficacious in the treatment of PTSD.

How EMDR Works

No one knows how any form of psychotherapy works neurobiologically or in the brain. However, we do know that when a person is very upset, their brain cannot process information as it does ordinarily. One moment becomes "frozen in time," and remembering a trauma may feel as bad as going through it the first time because the images, sounds, smells, and feelings haven't changed. Such memories have a lasting negative effect that interferes with the way a person sees the world and the way they relate to other people.

EMDR seems to have a direct effect on the way that the brain processes information. Normal information processing is resumed, so following a successful EMDR session, a person no longer relives the images, sounds, and feelings when the event is brought to mind. You still remember what happened, but it is less upsetting. Many types of therapy have similar goals. However, EMDR appears to be similar to what occurs naturally during dreaming or REM (rapid eye movement) sleep. Therefore, EMDR

can be thought of as a physiologically based therapy that helps a person see disturbing material in a new and less distressing way.

Treatment

The amount of time the complete treatment will take depends upon the history of the client. Complete treatment of the targets involves a three pronged protocol (1-past memories, 2-present disturbance, 3-future actions), and are needed to alleviate the symptoms and address the complete clinical picture. The goal of EMDR therapy is to process completely the experiences that are causing problems, and to include new ones that are needed for full health. "Processing" does not mean talking about it. "Processing" means setting up a learning state that will allow experiences that are causing problems to be "digested" and stored appropriately in your brain. That means that what is useful to you from an experience will be learned, and stored with appropriate emotions in your brain, and be able to guide you in positive ways in the future. The inappropriate emotions, beliefs, and body sensations will be discarded. Negative emotions, feelings and behaviors are generally caused by unresolved earlier experiences that are pushing you in the wrong directions. The goal of EMDR therapy is to leave you with the emotions, understanding, and perspectives that will lead to healthy and useful behaviors and interactions.