

FOR EMDR PRACTITIONERS



How Does EMDR Treat Trauma?

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy is a specialized approach that helps people heal from trauma by changing how traumatic memories are stored in the brain. When trauma occurs, the memory often becomes "stuck," which means it doesn't fully process like other memories. As a result, it can continue to cause distress and emotional reactions long after the event.

Here's how EMDR helps treat trauma:

1. Reprocessing Stuck Memories

- Trauma memories can stay active in the brain, leading to strong emotional responses, flashbacks, or distress when something reminds the person of the event.
- EMDR helps "reprocess" these memories, so they are no longer intensely distressing. It helps the brain "unstick" them and store them as regular memories, making them feel more distant and manageable.

2. Using Bilateral Stimulation to Calm the Brain

- EMDR uses bilateral stimulation, such as eye movements (moving your eyes from side to side), tapping, or sounds that alternate between the left and right sides of the body.
- Bilateral stimulation seems to mimic the natural processing that occurs during REM (rapid eye movement) sleep. This helps the brain make sense of the traumatic memory and shift it into a form where it no longer causes such a strong emotional reaction.

3. Targeting and Replacing Negative Beliefs

- Trauma often creates negative beliefs about oneself, such as "I am unsafe," "I am powerless," or "I am unworthy."
- In EMDR, the therapist helps the client identify these beliefs and replace them with positive ones (e.g., "I am safe now," "I have control," or "I am worthy"). This shift in beliefs helps the client feel more in control and resilient.

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4. Reducing Physical Responses to Trauma

- Traumatic memories can cause physical reactions, such as increased heart rate, muscle tension, or sweating.
- EMDR includes a body scan step, where clients identify any physical tension or discomfort related to the memory and continue processing it until the body is relaxed. This helps reduce the automatic physical response to the memory.

5. Building Emotional Resilience

- By desensitizing traumatic memories and helping clients build more positive beliefs, EMDR fosters a sense of control, confidence, and emotional resilience.
- This resilience makes it easier to respond calmly in situations that might have previously triggered a trauma response, allowing clients to feel safer and more grounded.

The 8 Phases of EMDR and Trauma Treatment

EMDR follows an 8-phase approach to ensure trauma is processed safely and effectively:

1. History-Taking: Identifying trauma-related memories that need processing.
2. Preparation: Teaching coping skills and grounding techniques to manage intense emotions.
3. Assessment: Focusing on the specific memory and identifying associated thoughts, images, and feelings.
4. Desensitization: Using bilateral stimulation while the client focuses on the memory, allowing the brain to process and reduce the memory's emotional intensity.
5. Installation: Reinforcing positive beliefs to replace old, negative ones.
6. Body Scan: Ensuring no lingering physical tension is associated with the memory.
7. Closure: Grounding techniques to leave the session feeling calm.
8. Re-evaluation: Checking on progress and any remaining issues related to the trauma.

How Does This Help with Trauma Recovery?

After EMDR, clients often report that traumatic memories no longer feel as vivid or distressing. They can recall the memory without intense emotional reactions, flashbacks, or physical symptoms. This “reprocessing” enables them to move forward without feeling held back by their past trauma.