



EMDR Therapy (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)

The following information is taken from

- **EMDR Association for Australia FAQs** (www.emdraa.org/emdr/faq/) and
- **EMDR Institute, Inc.** (www.emdr.com).

What is EMDR?

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) is a psychotherapy that enables people to heal from the symptoms and emotional distress that are the result of disturbing life experiences.

EMDR is a structured therapy that encourages you to briefly focus on a trauma memory while simultaneously experiencing bilateral stimulation (typically eye movements), which is associated with a reduction in the vividness and emotion associated with the trauma memories.

EMDR therapy involves attention to three time periods: the past, present, and future. Focus is given to past disturbing memories and related events. Also, it is given to current situations that cause distress, and to developing the skills and attitudes needed for positive future actions. With EMDR therapy, these items are addressed using an eight-phase treatment approach.

Empirical Evidence

EMDR is one of the most researched psychotherapeutic approaches for PTSD, trauma and disturbing life events. The impacts of painful experiences, normal life transitions and trauma can affect our most important relationships, sometimes across generations. Whether it is 'big T' or 'small t' trauma, or struggling with adjusting to life's challenges, with the right support children, young people and adults of any age can recover and enjoy the life and relationships they deserve.

Since 1989 over 20 controlled clinical studies have found EMDR to effectively decrease or eliminate the symptoms of PTSD for the majority of clients and it is more efficient. EMDR has been used effectively for over 30 years in a variety of international settings and cultures with many different types of psychological distress.

How is EMDR therapy different from other therapies?

EMDR therapy does not require talking in detail about the distressing issue or completing homework between sessions. EMDR therapy, rather than focusing on changing the emotions, thoughts, or behaviours resulting from the distressing issue, allows the brain to resume its natural healing process. EMDR therapy is designed to resolve unprocessed traumatic memories in the brain. For many clients, EMDR therapy can be completed in fewer sessions than other psychotherapies.

What Happens in EMDR session

Often disturbing events happen in our lives that stay with us. The brain cannot process information as it ordinarily does. One moment can become 'frozen in time' and remembering the trauma may feel as bad as going through it for the first time. This is because the images, sounds, smells and feelings still seem to be there – they haven't changed. Such memories have a lasting negative effect that interferes with the way a person sees the world and the way that they relate to other people.

During EMDR, Elizabeth will work with you to identify a specific problem as a focus for the treatment session. She will ask you to recall the disturbing issue or event, what was seen, felt, heard and thought. Elizabeth will then begin eye movements or other bilateral stimulation. Attention will be given to a negative image, belief, emotion and body sensation related to this event, and then to a positive belief that would indicate the issue was resolved. These eye movements are used until the memory becomes less disturbing and is associated with a positive thought and belief about yourself.

You have full control to stop the therapy at any point if needed. The sets of eye movements, sounds, or taps are repeated until the event becomes less disturbing.

How long does EMDR treatment take?

A typical EMDR therapy session lasts from 60-90 minutes. EMDR therapy may be used within a standard talking therapy session or as a treatment all by itself.

One or more sessions are required for the therapist to understand the nature of the problem and to decide whether EMDR is an appropriate treatment. The therapist will also discuss EMDR with you more fully and give you an opportunity to ask questions. The typical EMDR session lasts from 60-90 minutes. The type of problem, life circumstances and the amount of previous trauma will determine how many treatment sessions are necessary.

What kind of problems can EMDR treat?

Scientific research has established EMDR as effective for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Clinicians have also successfully used EMDR as a treatment component in the management of:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Panic attacks
- Personality disorders
- Complicated grief
- Dissociative disorders
- Pain disorders
- Body dysmorphic disorders
- Eating disorders
- Sexual or Physical abuse
- Performance anxiety
- Stress reduction
- Disturbing memories
- Phobias

<https://psychology.org.au/for-members/publications/inpsych/2019/june/demystifying-emdr>

<https://www.emdr.com/what-is-emdr/>

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