

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)

By Susan Lee Bady, CSW, BCD

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) is a powerful new technique in psychotherapy. It was discovered by chance in 1987 by Dr. Francine Shapiro, who found that moving her eyes while thinking of painful memories allowed the emotional distress to diminish.

As she began experimenting with these phenomena others joined her in finding ways to incorporate them into the psychotherapy process. Originally they named it EMDR because they felt that eye movements caused desensitization to and reprocessing of painful memories. Later they realized that moving the eyes causes bi-lateral stimulation and that they could achieve the same impact of reduced emotional distress by other methods of bi-lateral stimulation - i.e. alternately tapping one's hands or feet or listening to sounds in each ear. They kept the name EMDR since the public had become accustomed to it.

Over time clinicians and researchers found that EMDR helps resolve a wide variety of problems - trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, sexual problems, eating disorders, performance enhancement, relationship difficulties and just about any issue that brings a person to psychotherapy.

At this moment no one knows why EMDR works. Perhaps the bi-lateral stimulation creates neurological changes that lead to psychological change. Perhaps the concentration that occurs during EMDR induces a trance state, like hypnosis, which also speeds up the healing process. We only know that it works.

It is important to note that although EMDR is a powerful technique, it is always secondary to the therapist's ability to understand and relate to the client as he/she goes through the therapy process. Therefore an EMDR practitioner should always be well trained as a therapist, as well as in EMDR.

EMDR can be a short-term treatment to help with a specific problem or it can be part of a long-term therapy. The therapist may use cognitive behavioral, psychodynamic, gestalt or other methods of psychotherapy. He/she may also combine EMDR with hypnosis or other therapeutic methods. Whatever techniques are used, the therapist takes time to get to know the patient, targets problem areas to work on and helps the patient establish a sense of safety and comfort. Bi-lateral stimulation may occur in a variety of ways as mentioned earlier. The patient may follow the movement of the therapist's finger back and forth, alternately tap hands or feet, or listen to a tape that produces sound in each ear.

Whatever methods are used the bi-lateral stimulation produces a variety of different results, according to the person and the problem. Anxiety tends to diminish and the

person feels more relaxed. New insights and emotions come forth and negative beliefs start to change. The person starts to view himself/herself more positively. As a result, patients find they are better able to understand their difficulties and to change them and thus live a more powerful and enjoyable life.

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