

What is EMDR?

Eye Movement Desensitisation Reprocessing or EMDR is a form of therapy that is used to help reduce the symptoms of traumatic life experiences.

Broken down, the elements of EMDR are:

- **Eye Movement** – Moving eyes from side to side which engages the right and left sides of the brain.
- **Desensitisation** – experiencing the ability to think about memories without feeling overwhelmed by them
- **Reprocessing** –helping your brain make sense of and file away fragmented (split up) or upsetting memories, this helps to store memories differently in the brain.

EMDR was developed by Francine Shapiro

Francine Shapiro (1948 –2019) was an American psychologist who founded and developed EMDR.

In 1987, Francine Shapiro was walking through a park and was able to observe that moving her eyes from side to side seemed to reduce the disturbance of negative images and thoughts. Francine realised that we as humans have an inbuilt way of reducing emotional disturbance and the eye movements help our natural way of healing after distressing events and developed EMDR as a result of this experience.

How does EMDR work?

Just as the body can heal itself naturally the mind can heal itself naturally as well. EMDR requires you and your therapist to identify a particular ‘target’ memory to work on, this is usually a specific traumatic event or group of events which will likely be the time where your difficulties began. This may be as early as when you were a small child and you may not be able to put language to your experience. EMDR can work with identifying body sensations, emotions and meaning you made about yourself in relation to this event.

What can EMDR help with?

EMDR helps to remove the blockages in your brain and nervous system by use of eye movements or any right and left hand exercises such as tapping your legs or listening to a noise in each ear.

Your EMDR therapist will help you work through the initial event which allows the brain to make sense of things differently and enable you to recover and grow from past experiences rather than feeling held back by them.

It is helpful if you are able to identify specific moments in your life that were traumatising (you don’t have to talk about them), this is usually when the brain was overwhelmed and not able to store memories properly leading to flashbacks, nightmares, panic attacks or other trauma symptoms.

Can I be in control of the EMDR?

Absolutely yes! Your EMDR therapist will explain further but you will work together in collaboration and you will not be asked to do something you don’t want to do. You are in full control.

EMDR is NOT like hypnosis, in all EMDR sessions you stay fully awake and conscious and you are able to stop the EMDR at any time. The eye movements (right and left movements) can help you have one foot in the here and now and one foot in the trauma memory, this means the front of your brain stays ‘online’ which means you can make sense and store memories in a different way. This is called ‘processing’ and you can experience this happening at a pace that suits you. Your EMDR therapist can explain further about the brain science and EMDR.

EMDR is an empowering therapy helping you to unlock ways of your brain body and nervous system to self-heal following traumatising experiences.

What is having EMDR like?

A helpful way to think about EMDR is as if you and your EMDR therapist are on a train, you are in the window seat and your therapist next to you. Your EMDR therapist is with you all the way, but you have a better view out of the window.

When you are doing the eye movements your only job is to notice what is going on inside you, as if you are looking out of the window of a train. There will be regular pauses for your EMDR therapist to check that you are ok and help safely guide your experience so you are not alone.

Before beginning EMDR your therapist will talk through all the information and give an opportunity for you to ask any questions, you can also ask questions as you go along. There is a set process to follow to make sure that EMDR sessions end safely.

How helpful is EMDR?

EMDR is recommended by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) as an effective treatment for PTSD.

There is an ever-growing body of evidence that EMDR is successful in the treatment of trauma. Details about research can be found on these websites: <https://emdr-europe.org/> and <https://www.emdr.com/>

If you would like to know more about EMDR you can look at the following link:

<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/media/opnb55uw/emdr.pdf>

(Our CLEAR EMDR document has taken inspiration from the above fact sheet)

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