



EMDR Therapy: Level 1 Evidence-Based Treatment for PTSD

EMDR Therapy is a psychotherapy treatment that may help people heal from the symptoms and emotional distress that are consequences of adverse life experiences or traumatic memories. EMDR Therapy was developed by the US psychologist, Dr Francine Shapiro, in 1989 to alleviate the distress associated with traumatic memories.

The EMDR Therapy process entails eight phases of treatment. After thorough assessment and stabilisation phases, the person focuses on emotionally disturbing memories in brief, sequential amounts, while simultaneously focusing on an external stimulus. The external stimulus is usually lateral eye movements that are produced as the person focuses on the therapist's hand as it moves left and right across the person's field of vision. Other forms of external stimuli include hand-tapping and audio stimulation. A light bar machine can also be used as an alternative method of stimulating lateral eye movements. It is hypothesised that EMDR Therapy allows the person to access traumatic memory networks in order to facilitate information processing, so that new associations can be created between the traumatic memory and more adaptive memories or information.

Successful treatment with EMDR Therapy may result in alleviation of emotional distress, positive restructuring of previously-negative beliefs, and reduction in physiological arousal. EMDR Therapy has been *empirically validated as a treatment approach for trauma in over 24 randomised studies*. Another 24 studies have demonstrated the positive effects of the eye movement component.

EMDR Therapy now has *Level 1 evidence as a treatment for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder*. It is recommended as a treatment for PTSD by the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (2000), the American Psychiatric Association (2004), the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (2007), the Australian Psychological Society (2012), the World Health Organisation (2013), Phoenix Australia (2013), and the US Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense (2017), as well as others.

Research is also starting to show that EMDR Therapy may be effective in assisting with other mental health challenges.

References:

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