

Brighter Sky Counseling

12 Avanta Way, Suite 2 ~ Billings, Mt 59102

EMDR Therapy: A Guide for Clients

What is EMDR Therapy?

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy is an 8 Phase, integrative trauma treatment therapy that helps people heal from traumatic events, as well as life disturbing experiences. The EMDR treatment approach focuses on the individual's present concerns. The EMDR approach believes that emotionally charged experiences are overly influencing your present emotions, sensations, and thoughts about yourself (e.g., Do you ever *feel* worthless even though you *know* you are a worthwhile person?). EMDR therapy is evidence-based and is considered a recommended treatment of choice by several international mental health organizations for healing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from traumatic events, such as sexual assault, childhood abuse, car accidents, and combat. EMDR processing can help you break through the emotional blocks that are keeping you from living an adaptive and emotionally healthy life.

As research continues to grow in the efficacy of EMDR therapy, the psychotherapeutic modality has been shown to be helpful with clients experiencing addiction, anxiety, depression, chronic pain, anger, grief/loss, feelings of worthlessness/low self-esteem and much more. EMDR therapy is designed to help a person identify events that feel stuck and cause distress in their current life. These events can become unprocessed memories that get stored in the brain with disturbing images, thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations that without treatment may lead to distressing symptoms and behaviors.

What happens when a person is traumatized?

Most of the time, your body routinely manages new information and experiences without you being aware of it. However, when something out of the ordinary occurs and you are traumatized by an overwhelming event (e.g., a car accident) or by being repeatedly subjected to distress (e.g., childhood sexual abuse), your natural coping mechanism can become overwhelmed. This overloading can result in disturbing experiences remaining frozen in your brain or being 'unprocessed'. Such unprocessed memories and feelings are stored in the limbic system of your brain in a 'raw' and emotional form, rather than in a verbal 'story' mode. The limbic system maintains traumatic memories in an isolated memory network that is associated with emotions and physical sensations, which are disconnected from the brain's cortex where we use language to store memories. The limbic system's traumatic memories can be continually triggered when you experience events like the difficult experiences you have been through. Often the memory itself is long forgotten, but the painful feelings such as anxiety, panic, anger, or despair are continually triggered in the present. Your ability to live in the present and learn from new experiences can therefore become inhibited. EMDR helps create the connections between your brain's memory networks, enabling the brain to process the traumatic memory in a very natural way.

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What does an EMDR therapy session look like?

EMDR utilizes the natural healing ability of your body. After a thorough assessment and development of a treatment plan, you will be asked specific questions (e.g., the picture/image that represents the worst part, negative belief, emotions, and sensations) about a particular disturbing memory. Eye movements, similar to those during REM sleep, will be recreated simply by asking you to watch a bar of moving light backwards and forwards across your visual field. Sometimes, headphones or handheld paddles are used instead. The eye movements will last 30-45 seconds and then you will be asked to report back on the experiences you had during each of these sets of eye movements. Experiences during a session usually include changes in thoughts, images, feelings, and sensations.

With repeated sets of eye movements, the memory tends to change in such a way that it loses its painful intensity and simply becomes a neutral memory of an event in the past. Other associated memories may also heal at the same time. This linking of related memories can lead to a dramatic and rapid improvement in many aspects of your life.

Who can benefit from EMDR?

EMDR can accelerate therapy by resolving the impact of your past traumas and allowing you to live more fully in the present. It is not, however, appropriate for everyone. The process is rapid and any disturbing experiences, if they occur at all, last for a comparatively short period of time. Nevertheless, you need to be aware of and willing to experience the strong feelings and disturbing thoughts that can occur during session. As a trained EMDR therapist, I will assess and determine if you are an appropriate candidate for EMDR.

Frequently asked questions

Is it necessary to tell my therapist all the details about my problems/memories for them to be processed? No, it is not necessary to talk about all the details of your experiences for them to be processed.

Will I get emotional? Yes, you may. Emotions and sensations may come up during processing; although you will be prepared, I will help you safely manage any big emotions. Once the problems/memories are processed, they rarely come back.

Is EMDR like hypnosis? No, during EMDR therapy, you are present and fully in control. EMDR is not a form of hypnosis, and you can stop the process at any time. Throughout the session, I will support and facilitate your own self-healing and intervene as little as possible. Reprocessing is something that

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happens spontaneously and new connections/insights are felt to arise quite naturally from within. As a result, most people experience EMDR as being a natural and empowering therapy.

Is EMDR a brief treatment? EMDR, as with all treatment approaches, will help you accomplish your treatment goals. The length of time it takes is dependent upon the complexity of your problems/memories. Frequently, EMDR is only one of several treatment approaches that will be used to help you reach your treatment goals.

What is different about EMDR from other treatment modalities? EMDR focuses on the brain's ability to constantly learn, taking past experiences, and updating them with present information. Adaptive learning is constantly updating memory network systems. Past emotionally charged experiences often interfere with your updating process. EMDR breaks through that interference and helps you let go of the past and update your experiences to a healthier, present perspective. EMDR uses a set of procedures to organize your negative and positive feelings, emotions, thoughts, and body sensations. Then, EMDR uses bilateral stimulation as the way to help you effectively work through those disturbing memories.

For further information about EMDR, please visit <https://www.emdria.org>