

Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) Therapy

Overview

EMDR is a powerful therapeutic approach that addresses a range of psychological distress, including overwhelming emotions, ingrained negative beliefs about oneself, and physical discomfort tied to trauma. This modality has become increasingly popular among mental health professionals, especially for treating Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), but its applications can go beyond trauma. EMDR has specific protocols to address various psychological conditions such as anxiety disorders, depression, and even chronic pain, making it a versatile tool in psychotherapy.

How Does EMDR Work?

The core idea behind EMDR is that traumatic experiences are not processed properly in the brain, leaving memories stuck in a maladaptive state. The unprocessed memories are stored in the limbic system of the brain, in a 'raw' and emotional form, rather than in a verbal 'story' mode, as other day to day memories are stored. When these unprocessed memories are triggered, they bring about distressing emotions, distorted thinking, and physical discomfort. EMDR therapy works by guiding the client to access these stored memories and reprocess them in a way that leads to resolution.

This is done by using bilateral stimulation, most commonly through eye movements. While the client focuses on distressing memories, the therapist moves their fingers across the client's visual field, prompting the eyes to move back and forth. This eye movement is thought to mimic the brain's natural healing mechanisms that occur during Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep—the phase when emotional processing happens. Other forms of bilateral stimulation, like auditory tones or tapping, can also be used.

What Sets EMDR Apart?

One of the most compelling features of EMDR is its ability to bring about rapid improvements in a client's mental health. Many clients report significant shifts in their mood and relief from distress after one or just a few sessions. EMDR also reduces the need for clients to revisit traumatic memories in detail—a feature that can make traditional talk therapy overwhelming for some individuals. By focusing on reprocessing rather than reliving the trauma, EMDR offers a more accessible path to healing for those who may find verbalising their trauma too distressing.

EMDR therapy has a strong evidence base and has been found to be reliable and valid across many research studies.



Applications Beyond PTSD

While EMDR has become synonymous with trauma treatment, its effectiveness extends to many other conditions. Anxiety disorders, depression, and chronic pain can often be rooted in unresolved emotional experiences. By addressing these underlying issues, EMDR can offer relief from symptoms across a variety of mental health concerns. This adaptability makes it a valuable tool for therapists working with clients experiencing different forms of emotional and psychological distress.

Who Can Benefit from EMDR?

EMDR is suitable for individuals across the lifespan. Whether for children and adolescents dealing with early trauma or adults facing long standing emotional pain, EMDR offers a tailored approach. The versatility of EMDR allows therapists to adapt the treatment based on the individual's unique needs, making it a highly personalised therapeutic experience.

What can I expect from an EMDR session?

Your psychologist will ask you questions about your difficult experience, such as what image comes to mind when you remember it, what emotions you feel, what you feel in your body, and what you believe about yourself. Then the psychologist will ask you to hold all this in mind, and 'follow my fingers' as they move their hand back and forth across your visual field. A short while later, they will stop, ask you to take a deep breath, and ask you to give feedback about what you are experiencing at that moment. This might be another memory that popped up, a body sensation, an emotion, or an image. The psychologist will then continue to move their hand across your visual field, ask for feedback and guide the session in this manner. The reprocessing itself usually lasts between 10 and 30 minutes, and needn't take up the whole session.

You are always welcome to put your hand up to signal that you need a break from the reprocessing. The psychologist will work with you to keep you within your window of tolerance, if you are becoming too upset. You will remain awake and in control, EMDR is not hypnosis. At the end of the session, your psychologist will check in with you and highlight therapeutic gains as well as discuss any new insights or connections made during the reprocessing. A plan will be made for a follow up appointment to ensure continuity of care for you whilst you are having EMDR treatment.

Support at Hardwick Psychological Services

At Hardwick Psychological Services, we have psychologists who are trained in EMDR and are dedicated to helping individuals achieve their therapeutic goals. For more information or to schedule an appointment, please contact us:

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