

EMDR: Eye Movement Desensitization & Reprocessing

A Simple Explanation of EMDR

Do you ever have present day experiences that trigger old, extremely distressing memories as if they were stuck in your brain? Do sights, sounds and smells that remind you of the original event leave you in an extreme state of anxiety, hypervigilance or panic? When a person experiences an event that is extremely distressing and overwhelming, it is stored in the brain with all the sights, sounds, thoughts, feelings and body sensations that accompanied the event when it happened. Think of your brain as a recorder that doesn't miss a thing, storing all aspects of an experience, whether we consciously remember it or not.

When a scary or extremely painful event happens, the brain is sometimes not able to process the experience as it normally does. The thoughts, feelings and sensations of the traumatic event can become frozen in the nervous system as if in a time warp. EMDR helps to activate the brain's natural processing abilities with efficiency, thereby helping to move the disturbing material through the nervous system, allowing the person to heal more completely.

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing is used to disconnect emotionally disruptive memories from current life experiences. Its focus is the resolution of emotional distress arising from traumatic events—which can be either "Big T" or "little t" experiences. No one knows for sure how EMDR works but through brain imaging techniques, we are seeing its effects. **EMDR helps move the storage of disturbing memories to a part of the brain that can more functionally acknowledge these as memories of the past, devoid of a present-moment charge.** It is important to know that there is a real physical change happening with EMDR. The events that used to trigger the brain into over-reaction no longer have that effect. The person can now react to the present without the past interfering.