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WHAT IS EYE MOVEMENT DESENSITIZATION AND REPROCESSING (EMDR) THERAPY?

EMDR therapy is an integrative technique that can be used to help individuals heal from the effects of traumatic events and disturbing experiences in their lives. Since its introduction by Dr. Francine Shapiro in 1987, this method has gained worldwide acceptance as a protocol that trained therapists can utilize to help people reprocess and thus desensitize the emotional impact of trauma or ongoing distress in their lives.

In most situations, the left and right sides of our brain integrate the information we see, feel, hear and sense. Some individuals may experience a traumatic incident in a way that the memory gets "stuck" and is not processed efficiently in the brain. Perhaps the event is one where the individual was so frightened that the body's natural "fight, flight or freeze" response was triggered. In other instances, experiences or emotions will feel so intense at the time that the memory or series of memories are frozen. When memories get stuck in this way, some people may find themselves responding or reacting to current situations in ways that feel uncomfortable, scary, out of control, compulsive or produce a general sense of uneasiness.

Through EMDR therapy, both sides of the brain are stimulated to process these emotions, body sensations, thoughts and images in a safe environment. A key component of EMDR therapy is the use of dual attention stimulation (DAS). DAS is done by gentle use of alternating stimulation through tactile (handheld) buzzers, audible sounds in each ear, tapping on either side of the body, or by regular eye movements. DAS--which may act similar to REM sleep--works to unlock the nervous system and allows the brain to integrate these memories. The client remains awake, aware and able to communicate throughout the sessions.

Working with the therapist throughout this process, the client develops a different and less distressing relationship to the previously upsetting memories. Recollections are not erased or lost, but lose their power over the client.

Research studies have shown that EMDR therapy can be highly effective for treating symptoms of PTSD, panic attacks, phobias, addictions, complicated grief, and sexual or physical abuse. It can also be a method of choice for reducing distress caused by emotional upheavals. EMDR therapy is effective with children, teens and adults. To find out more, go to www.maibergerinstitute.com.

Tia Amdurer, MA, LPC, was trained in EMDR therapy at the Maiberger Institute in Boulder, CO, in the Fall and Winter of 2014-15.