

WHAT IS EMDR?

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, or EMDR, is a therapy for people who as a result of traumatic events experience psychological difficulties, such as an accident, sexual violence or other acts of violence. EMDR is a relatively new therapy. The first version of EMDR has been described by the American psychologist, Francine Shapiro in 1989. In the following years the procedure has been further developed and elaborated to an effective and acknowledged therapeutic method.

WHEN IS EMDR USED?

Certain events can leave a distinctive mark on people's lives. A large part of people affected by negative events process on their own accord using their own resources. Others develop psychological problems, usually whereby the traumatic event is being re-experienced, for example in fearful images (flashbacks, intrusive images) and nightmares. Other symptoms that often occur are fear and avoidance responses. This is generally referred to as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other anxiety based disorders. These are problems caused by a specific, horrific event, whereby thinking of this event still gives a strong emotional reaction.

IS EMDR EFFECTIVE?

There has been a lot of scientific research done to establish the effectiveness of EMDR. The results show that clients respond well to EMDR. EMDR is a brief therapy. Especially when people have experienced one single traumatic event, after a few EMDR sessions they are able to continue with

their daily activities such as work and study. People who have endured longer lasting traumatic events or when the problems are more complex the treatment obviously requires more time.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF EMDR IS AN OPTION?

During the assessment the focus lies with the possible causes and background to your problems. Your specific circumstances will be assessed with special attention to your strengths and the level of difficulties you are experiencing as a result of your psychological problems. Only then the decision is made whether trauma treatment and more specifically EMDR is the treatment of choice.

WHAT KIND OF PREPARATIONS ARE REQUIRED?

EMDR works fast, but then again it is an intensive form of treatment. This is why your therapist will inform you exactly of what steps will be taken in EMDR and how to manage your emotions and your therapist will teach you other stress management techniques.



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EMDR



INFORMATION
FOR CLIENTS

WHAT STEPS ARE TAKEN IN EMDR?

The therapist will ask you to recall the traumatic event, in particular the associated images, thoughts, feelings. At first this is required to gain more information about the traumatic event. Subsequently the processing will get started as your therapist will ask you again to recall the traumatic event but now in combination with a distracting stimulus by following the therapists' hand or by listening to alternating left and right sounds via the headphones. These distracting hand movements or sounds are called a 'set'. After each set there is a little break during which the therapist will ask the client what comes up. The EMDR

procedure usually brings about a stream of thoughts and images but also feelings and bodily sensations. Often something changes. After each set the client is asked to concentrate on the most obvious change and once again another set is applied.

WHAT CHANGES CAN YOU EXPECT?

The sets will eventually lead to a decrease in emotion and power of the memory thereby making it easier to think about the event. In many cases the memories itself become more faded or diminished. But it is also possible for less unpleasant aspects of the memory to come forward. Another possibility is that new insights or thoughts arise give a less threatening implication or meaning of the actual event. These effects contribute to the traumatic event being more integrated into one's life.

ARE THERE ANY AVERSIVE EFFECTS?

After an EMDR session the effects can carry on for a little while and this is a good sign. However, it could give the client the idea of losing some control, for example when new images or feelings arise. It is often comforting to know that this usually does not last for more than three days. After this a new balance occurs. It is recommended that the client notes these changes in a brief diary as these can be discussed in the next session.

HOW DOES EMDR WORK?

It is certain that EMDR works, but exactly how is still uncertain. In any case it appears that the natural and normal processing is being stimulated by EMDR. There is a lot of scientific research which shows that bilateral stimulation (concentrating on the distracting stimulus) increases the access to memories. Research also shows that the bilateral stimulation in EMDR automatically leads to physical relaxation. This combination probably directly effects the implications for memories: as a result these change and will be stored differently in long term memory but in a less emotional way.

WHAT ELSE IS EMDR USED FOR?

There is more and more evidence that emotionally charged memories and images also play an important role in other psychological problems and disorders, such as chronic pain, eating disorders, depression, addictions and psychosis. For this reason EMDR is used more frequently but usually as part of a broader treatment programme.

AND NOW?

If you still have questions about EMDR or if you want to know if EMDR could be used in decreasing your problems, ask your therapist.

Further information can be found at www.emdr.nl

To ensure good quality, always check if your therapist is registered with Vereniging EMDR Nederland (VEN).

The aim of VEN is quality control when EMDR is used.

