

- To allow your mind to 'go with' whatever comes up and just notice what happens.
- This process will be repeated until the memory causes less distress (this may happen in one session, or may take more than one session).

Why do I need to make eye movements?

In EMDR you are asked to pay attention from one side to another while thinking about your memory. One way to pay attention from left to right is to follow the therapist's finger as they move it from side-to-side in your line of vision. Alternative versions of EMDR ask you to pay attention to sounds or tapping sensations which occur in sequence from left to right.

This side-to-side motion is called bilateral stimulation. It has been found to enhance memory processing and there are a number of theories explaining how it might do this. The important thing is to be able to find a form of bilateral stimulation that you are comfortable with.

What is EMDR used to treat?

There is very good evidence that EMDR is an effective treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and it is recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) for PTSD. The evidence for using EMDR to treat other disorders is less clear. EMDR may be an effective treatment for other conditions, particularly if they involve trauma memories or other distressing memories, but more research is needed.

How long does treatment take?

EMDR sessions are sometimes slightly longer than typical therapy sessions (up to 90 minutes). The number of sessions needed will depend on the type and severity of trauma which you experienced. NICE estimate that 8-12 sessions may be necessary to treat simpler traumas, with more sessions necessary for multiple traumas.

How to get help

Some people recover from a trauma with no or little additional support, especially if symptoms are mild. However, many people can develop chronic symptoms that can be long lasting. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is the name given to describe these symptoms. Psychological support and Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) can be very effective in helping people with PTSD.

If you feel EMDR is something you would like to try, please contact us to find out more. We know that it can be difficult to make this first contact, so one of our EMDR therapists will respond to you quickly.

Contact Us



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Understanding Trauma & EMDR

(Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)

BCC offers a confidential, ethical and affordable counselling, psychotherapy and EMDR service for people living in Bedfordshire.

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What is Psychological Trauma?

A psychological trauma can occur when you have experienced either a single event or long lasting or repeated events that are so overwhelming it affects your ability to cope or make sense of what happened. Examples of traumatic events include serious accidents, i.e. road traffic collision; loss and grief; being told you have a life threatening (terminal) illness; physical, emotional or sexual abuse; neglect; natural or man-made disasters; being taken hostage; and, bullying.

Everyone has different ways of responding to events. What one individual finds traumatic another person may not find distressing.

How You May React

Typical reactions that you may feel after a traumatic event include:

- Constantly thinking about the event.
- Images of the events keep coming into your mind.
- Difficulty sleeping and/or nightmares.
- Changes in how you feel emotionally, i.e. frightened, sad, anxious, angry.
- Avoiding certain situations that remind you of the event.
- Feeling numb, stunned, shocked or dazed and have difficulties connecting with life around you.
- Denial that the event actually happened.

How You May Feel

It is very common to experience distress following a traumatic event. In most cases, the emotional reactions get better over the days and weeks that follow a trauma. You may feel a wide range of emotions, including:

- Anger – in relation to what happened to you and with other people involved.
- Guilty – that you think you could or should have done something to prevent what happened (that you may feel you were to blame), or that you survived when others suffered or died.

- Frightened – that the same event may happen again or that you feel you are unable to cope with your feelings, or you may feel that you are not in control of what is going on in your life.
- Helpless – that you were unable to do something about what happened.
- Sad – that the trauma happened or that someone was injured or killed, especially if you knew them.
- Ashamed or embarrassed – by what had happened and that you feel you cannot tell anyone about it.

However, in some cases the effects of a trauma can be longer lasting and continue for months and even years after the event. Receiving the appropriate type of support can help you come to terms with the traumatic experience so that it does not continue to affect you for the rest of your life.

What You Can Do

- At the beginning it is a good idea to allow yourself time to adjust and come to terms with what has happened. You may need to grieve for someone who died and process what has happened to you.
- It can help to find out more details of what happened and where relevant, to talk through the event with other survivors and discuss the feelings you have.
- When you are ready, talking through the event with a therapist or someone you trust.
- Try and get back into a routine with your sleep and eating.
- It is not advisable to use drugs or alcohol as a way to cope, as this can make symptoms worse.

If you identify particular times in the day that are more distressing, it could help to try and distract yourself at these times. Ideas include: mindfulness and breathing techniques; listening to music; doing exercise; playing a game or doing a hobby; writing down what you are thinking or feeling.

You don't have to suffer in silence.

What is EMDR?

(Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)

Introduction

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) is a therapy technique designed for working with distressing or traumatic memories. The theory behind EMDR is that many psychological difficulties are the result of distressing life experiences which have not been stored in memory properly and are said to be unprocessed or blocked. These traumatic memories may need some help to become processed, and EMDR is one way to do this.

What is special about trauma memories?

Normal memories are stored by a part of the brain called the hippocampus. You can think of the hippocampus as a sort of librarian which catalogues (processes) events and stores them in the right place. However, some traumatic events (such as accidents, abuse, disasters, or violence) are so overwhelming that the hippocampus doesn't do its job properly. When this happens memories are stored in their raw, unprocessed, form. These trauma memories are easily triggered, leading them to replay and cause distress over and over again.

What will I be asked to do in an EMDR session?

There are a number of steps to EMDR treatment, but some of the key stages are to:

- Think of a troubling memory, then identify an image of the worst moment of that memory.
- Identify a negative belief about that worst moment (the therapist may ask "what is the worst thing that moment says about you?")
- Identify emotions and bodily feelings linked to that moment.
- Think about the image & belief while at the same time making left-to-right eye movements (or while paying attention to tapping sensations or sounds that are alternately given from left-to-right).