



Best Life Counseling

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11807 Allisonville Road, Suite 164  
Fishers, IN 46038-1084  
317-741-7334

## What is EMDR?

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) is a structured therapy that encourages the client to briefly focus on a trauma memory while simultaneously experiencing bilateral stimulation (typically eye movement left to right or tapping on the body right to left) resulting in a reduction of vividness, emotion, and intrusion of traumatic memories. It has been extensively researched and shown to help people with PTSD, anxiety, depression, various phobias, and panic disorder. The American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the US Veterans Affairs Administration, (VA), and the World Health Organization (WHO) all recognize EMDR as an effective treatment for trauma.

### How Does EMDR Work?

EMDR is believed to work by utilizing the brain's natural method of processing traumatic events which involves communication between three important parts of the brain:

- Amygdala (the emotion center signaling stress and alarm)
- Hippocampus (the physiological reaction center that sends out the signal to produce fight-flight chemicals such as cortisol)
- Prefrontal cortex (the analysis center that makes decisions about behavioral responses and lessons learned)

The communication between these brain centers causes events to be “adaptively processed” meaning events become stories with a clear beginning, middle, end, and lesson (i.e., moral of the story).

While most experiences are resolved through this adaptive processing, some events are so emotional or shocking that they overwhelm the brain and interrupt processing. When processing is interrupted, traumatic events become “stuck” in their raw, emotional form. The unprocessed form signals its need to be processed by showing up as recurring nightmares, hyper-reactivity to triggers, racing thoughts, and anxiety-type feelings. Because most people fear the nightmares and hyper-reactivity, and want to avoid feeling the negativity of the original experience, unprocessed stuck memories can remain in raw form for many years.

What EMDR does through bilateral stimulation (eye movement from left to right or by tapping right to left on the body) is to activate both parts of the brain – the emotional part and the analytical part. Combining the bilateral stimulation with focus (on the stuck memory) causes the brain to process that stuck memory and change it from raw emotions stored as “sound bites”, to a story with a moral. Once the traumatic memory becomes a story and the lesson is internalized, the brain then labels the story “done” and moves it to long-term memory.

### **Who Can Benefit From EMDR?**

EMDR can be used with children, adolescents, as well as adults of all ages. Therapists use it to address a wide range of mental health issues such as:

- Anxiety, panic attacks, and phobias
- Chronic Illness and medical issues
- Depression and bipolar disorders
- Dissociative disorders
- Eating disorders
- Grief and loss
- Pain
- Performance anxiety
- Personality disorders
- PTSD and other trauma and stress-related issues