



Break Away from Emotional Pain and Unhealthy Addictive Behaviors With **EMDR**

Do you sometimes feel like you logically know that you need to move forward but cannot do so because you continue to feel distressed?

EMDR, is a breakthrough short-term therapy that can help you move from “just coping” to healing and getting on with your life.

What is **EMDR**?

EMDR stands for Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing developed by Dr. Francine Shapiro in 1987. **EMDR** alleviates disturbing thoughts and feelings associated with trauma and addiction.

Our bodies have the necessary mechanism to heal wounds; if there is a cut, the body begins to heal the wound. Similarly, the brain has the ability to heal emotional wounds. Just as physical bruises can heal in a matter of weeks, the brain can also heal emotional traumas at that same rate. However, in most circumstances, conditions are not ideal for healing and can leave the person stuck. If there is a block like a piece of glass or a splinter, the body needs help treating the wound before it can begin to heal. EMDR is like a booster that can jump-start the healing process.

EMDR continues to be validated as a ground-breaking therapy by the scientific community and it has helped an estimated 2 million people worldwide.

Who does **EMDR** treat?

EMDR effectively treats children, teenagers and adults.

What does **EMDR** treat?

EMDR has shown to be effective in treating Post traumatic stress, anxiety and depression associated with trauma, and addiction.

What is Trauma?

Trauma refers to any emotional wound caused by distressing events that leave the person with a lasting negative affect. These effects include anxiety, panic attacks, PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder), and depression.

Traumas can take many forms. Some are events that are life threatening. These include war combat, rape, kidnapping, assault, and natural disasters such as earthquakes, tornadoes, fires and floods. These experiences leave the person with intense fear, helplessness, and loss of control.

Other traumas are events that may not be life threatening but are very disturbing and upsetting because of personal significance. These events include physical, verbal, and sexual abuse, relocation, death of a loved one, losing a job, hearing negative remarks from parents and/or teachers, failing grades, and bullying. These experiences can cause the person to experience ongoing stress and anxiety, affecting the person's sense of worth and self esteem.

What is Addictive Behavior?

Addictive behaviors are the only sources of escape, comfort, and self-soothing for a person. These may include staying in an abusive relationship, pornography, gambling, smoking, alcohol, video gaming, shopping and food. As a result of addictive behaviors, a person faces many negative consequences like problems at work or school, distress in relationships, financial loss, legal issues and most importantly declining physical and emotional health.

What Causes Addictive Behavior?

Have you noticed that your efforts to abstain from your addiction have not helped? According to Dr. Robert Miller, addiction is caused by "feeling state". Feeling State is a state of mind in which the person remembers a positive feeling that is associated with the addiction. It is created when a person experiences a positive event so intense that the memory of the event becomes fixated in the mind. Whenever the Feeling State is triggered, the person feels an urge or craving to do the addictive behavior. EMDR has been shown to eliminate urges and cravings by eliminating the Feeling State.

How does EMDR work?

Even though no one fully understands how EMDR works on a biochemical level, neuroscientists do know that it helps to process unprocessed memories of distressing experiences and events. The unprocessed memories do not allow the person to make sense of those events and remember them without pain. Such memories can have lasting negative effect, affecting the way the person sees the world and the way they relate to other people.

What is an EMDR session like?

I will take a thorough history and assessment and help you identify and focus on a specific event and the associated painful memories. You will then be guided to focus on the memory; specifically what you saw, heard, and felt and what thoughts and beliefs you presently hold in relation to the event. I incorporate sand tray and puppet play to help children explore their inner world and express negative thoughts and feelings. I facilitate EMDR by using a back-and-forth stimulus, such as tapping hands and knees rhythmically or listening to a sound that alternates between the ears; for children, I may use finger puppets that they can follow with their eyes. You focus on the memory; simply noticing whatever comes to mind without analyzing the content.

Sets of eye movements are continued until the memory becomes less disturbing and is replaced with positive thoughts and beliefs about yourself.

In case of addiction, I will help you identify specific positive feelings underlying your behavior and uses EMDR to eliminate the intensity of those feelings. Once the addictive behavior is eliminated, further therapy will be required because feeling states are created out of a psychological need to feel worthy, loved, needed, comforted and not to feel alone and depressed.

Here are two real life examples illustrating how EMDR helped clients overcome addiction

John's gambling addiction. The therapist helps John identify the feeling state related to his gambling (he played poker with this father). The feeling state was "I am a winner", "I am close to my father". John's compulsion for poker was really a desire to feel connected with his father. He kept chasing that feeling of being a winner even though he had lost a lot of money along the way. After the FS was gone, John was able to identify his need to be connected with his father and the negative belief about himself "I'm a loser". Following processing, John was able to replace the negative belief with a more positive one "I am good enough". John now continues to enjoy life and does not have the urge to gamble like before.

Debbie's shopping addiction: The feeling state had created the urge to buy items that made her feel good and successful. EMDR was used to eliminate the urge to buy. Once the FS was gone, Debbie was able to identify her negative belief that "I can't control myself", "I am not good enough". Upon further treatment Debbie's shopping was no longer a problem.

Mary's abusive relationship: Mary struggled to get out of a 7 year on/off abusive relationship. She had the urge to connect with her partner when she was alone. Her feeling state was associated with hope that her partner would change and love her and a memory of a close connection she once had with him. Once hope and positive memory were eliminated, she was able to identify her negative beliefs "I am alone, I cannot cope without him", "I am bad". Upon further treatment, Mary was able to believe in her self and began to pursue a healthy relationship.

How long does EMDR therapy take?

Single trauma can be treated anywhere from 3 to 4 sessions. However, the number of EMDR sessions will depend upon the number and severity of trauma. Most addictive behaviors are eliminated in 5 or 6 sessions. However, more or fewer sessions will be required depending on the number of positive feeling states associated with the addictive behavior.

References

EMDR, The Breakthrough Therapy for Overcoming Anxiety, Stress, and Trauma
Bibliography of research www.emdria.org

FSAP: The Feeling State Addiction Protocol by Robert Miller: www.fsaprotocol.com

If you have questions or would like to schedule an appointment, please contact

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