

# Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)

Kathleen Wellbrock, Ph.D.

The Counseling Team International (TCTI)

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) is typically used for treating individuals who have experienced a traumatic event. When faced with a traumatic or negative event we do not process information in the same way we do when we are in a safe environment. Information processing may in fact be incomplete due to the need to keep oneself safe. In essence the “fight” or “flight” response is activated which may interfere with information processing, leaving the individual with a memory of the event that is not stored properly with appropriate connections. As a result, when the individual thinks about the trauma, or when the memory of the event is triggered, the individual may feel that it is happening all over again complete with emotions and physical reactions which can be quite disturbing (EMDR Institute, Inc.).

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) is an accelerated form of information processing that helps to unblock negative life experiences or traumas that upset the balance of the brain’s information processing system.

The treatment has been shown to be quite effective in the treatment of traumas and negative life experiences and has been noted to be the standard of treatment for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) by the American Psychiatric Association. In essence, the EMDR process taps into the traumatic memory and allows processing to take place in order to form more adaptive memories in relation to the trauma. When the treatment is completed new learning occurs, emotional distress is eliminated, and the individual has formed new cognitive insights (EMDR Institute, Inc.).

One of the most attractive benefits of EMDR is it works relatively quickly (in therapy terms) in relieving anxiety; however, each case is different and the number of sessions needed depends on the specific problem and the individuals’ history. There is a standard eight session phase approach that clinicians trained in EMDR should follow, but again each case is unique (EMDR Institute, Inc.). The treatment includes the use of dual stimulation (eye movement, tapping, tones) while the individual focuses on various parts of the trauma. Between sets of eye movements the individual is asked to describe what is being experienced. In addition, the individual is taught techniques for self-soothing so that they can leave the session feeling in control. EMDR is guided by the individuals desire to get a sense of control or intrusive thoughts or images that are creating anxiety and turmoil in their life. Other benefits include the individuals’ ability to cope with the memories without trying to avoid troubling thoughts, conversations, people or places, feeling less tense, stress, irritable or angry, or on guard. Individuals also report being more emotionally involved in relationships and activities.

The mental health professionals that help Law Enforcement after traumatic events are trained in EMDR. For more detailed information regarding EMDR, please refer to the [www.EMDRinstitute.com](http://www.EMDRinstitute.com).