

What is EMDR?

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, abbreviated as EMDR, is a therapy for those who continue to be troubled by traumatic experiences. This could be a shocking experience, such as a traffic accident or a violent crime, but it can also be applied for other experiences that have had a strong impact on how a person's life has developed, such as bullying or offences that took place during a person's childhood. EMDR can be practiced for all experiences that continue to have an impact on the present. EMDR is a relatively new form of therapy. The first version of EMDR was described in 1989 by its developer, the American psychologist Francine Shapiro. In the years that followed, the procedure was further developed and EMDR grew to become a valuable therapeutic method.

For which situations is EMDR intended?

Certain events can deeply impact peoples' lives. Many people that are affected 'deal with' these experiences on their own. Others develop psychological issues. Occasionally, multiple psychological issues are involved, such as fears, mood disorders, eating disorders, relational problems and addictions. And often, there are intruding memories of the shocking event, such as terrifying images (reliving the event: 'flashbacks') and nightmares. Other complaints that often occur are fright and avoidance. If certain criteria are met these situations are referred to as 'post traumatic stress syndrome' (PTSS). Although PTSS is still considered to be the primary indication for EMDR, during the past few years, experience gained by applying the treatment has shown that it is possible to treat a large number of psychological disorders and complaints involving avoidance, gloominess and/or feelings of fear, shame, sadness, guilt or anger.

How does EMDR work?

The therapist will ask to go back to the event, and also to think about related images, thoughts and feelings. This is what happens first in order to collect more information on the traumatic experience.

Then the processing starts.

The therapist will ask to call to mind the event/incident again. But this time this happens in combination with a stimulus. This will most often be the hand of the therapist. The therapist will ask to focus on it and will then, at about 30 centimetres distance, move the hand in reciprocating motion in front of the face. Another method is to use a headphone through which sounds are alternately emitted in the right and left side of the headphone.

After each set, there is a short break. The therapist will ask the client what comes to mind. The EMDR procedure usually creates a flow of thoughts and images, but sometimes also feelings and physical sensations. Often something changes. After each set of eye movements, the client is

asked to concentrate on the most remarkable change, after which a new set follows.

EMDR can also be considered for the treatment of children. For example, when the child or the adolescent struggles with problems, of which is suspected that they have to do with a past traumatic experience. EMDR can be applied with children starting at the age of 2. Moreover, traumatic events which occurred even before language development, can be processed using EMDR. In the case of very young children, the parents or caretakers get an important involvement in the treatment.