

EMDR: A BRIEF THERAPY FOR ANXIETY

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) is a psychotherapy treatment developed in 1989 by American psychologist Francine Shapiro. Originally used to soothe stress caused by traumatic memories, it has been tested through many clinical studies involving psychotherapists, mental health researchers and neurophysiologists.

Today it is considered the elective evidence-based treatment for PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), validated by more research and publications than any other therapy in the field of trauma. It is approved, among others, by the American Psychological Association (1998-2002), by the American Psychiatric Association (2004), by the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (2010), by the World Health Organization in 2013.

WHAT IS EMDR?

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) is a highly effective and rapid treatment and is suitable for all ages, including children. Particularly recommended for the treatment of trauma-related consequences, it is now applied as a treatment for the most diverse disorders, in particular anxiety disorder.

This therapy utilizes alternate bilateral stimulation of eye movements to enable the desensitization and reprocessing the memory of disturbing traumatic events.

HOW DOES EMDR WORK?

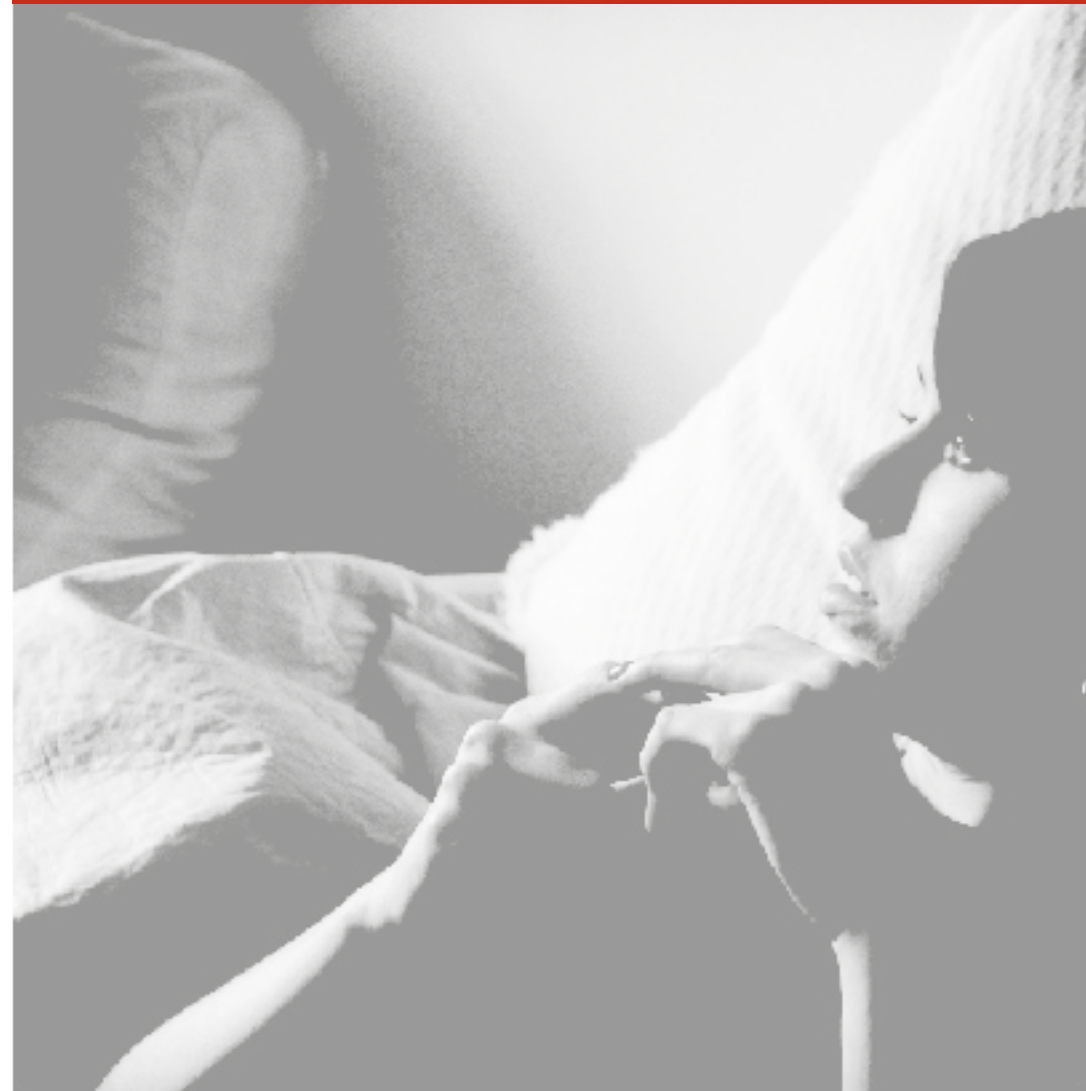
One major focus during an EMDR treatment, is identifying the client's specific problem. The client will be asked to think about a disturbing event, from a perceptive and cognitive level what he saw, heard, thought, and the present thoughts and beliefs he has about that situation.

The therapist guides the client in moving their eyes or uses other types of alternate stimulation, while the client is concentrating on the disturbing material, just simply noticing what comes to mind (images, thoughts, sounds, smells, etc). These bilateral stimuli and the guidance of the therapist allow the survivor to tap into the biological mechanisms that come into play during Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep. It is believed that this allows the individual to naturally process their memories – effectively removing those “foreign objects” so their mind can heal.

EMDR therapy not only offers the chance to process trauma from the past, but it also enhances personal abilities and individual resources, in the face of every-day life challenges.

EMDR works both on memories, that might have contributed to the onset of anxiety disorder, as well as on the memories of the first, worst and last time the individual experienced anxiety, with the purpose of desensitizing these reactions. EMDR therapy helps the person to handle their emotional distress. This means that relief from pain is not only possible, but it can be obtained in a relatively short amount of time.

EMDR FOR ANXIETY TREATMENT



EMDR Europe

E-mail | info@emdr-europe.org
Website | www.emdr-europe.org

INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is a universal experience which has an important protective function in the face of danger. It is a normal response to threat or stressful events. If anxiety becomes so impeding to normal daily functioning and limiting the individual's adjustment abilities, it has become a psychiatric disorder. Pathological anxiety is a chronic anxiety condition that impairs people's functioning and interferes with their well-being. Anxiety is the felt component of a perceived threat to non-specific or generalized situation, and leads a person feeling overwhelmed and highly distressed. Many of those suffering from intense anxiety may also have this feeling of going crazy that comes from the extremely high emotions.

Abnormal anxiety involves:

- excessive fear in response to specific situations
- the anxiety response occurs in the absence of true danger

Anxiety disorders include Panic Attacks (with or without agoraphobia), phobias (fear of insects, public speaking, riding on public transport, blushing or throwing up in public situations), generalized anxiety and post-traumatic-stress disorder (following a traumatic or highly stressful events).

Anxiety can be:

Adaptive (physiological): it helps us cope effectively with a dangerous situation, potentially favouring personal growth.

Dysfunctional (pathological): an intense discomfort along with unbearable suffering which can lead to defensive behaviors, which limit an adaptive global psychic functioning, interfering with the individual's ability to carry out daily activities. It can occur without being apparently connected to any event or specific stimulus (ex: Panic Disorder) or to events that are neutral, not dangerous (ex: Phobias).

State Anxiety: an unpleasant emotional arousal in face of threatening demands or dangers.

Trait Anxiety: the existence of stable individual differences with the tendency to respond with state anxiety in the anticipation of threatening situations.

Anticipatory Anxiety: increased levels of anxiety by thinking about an event or situation in the future.

Generalized Anxiety: persistent and excessive worry about a number of different things, and can develop into a trait anxiety.

Panic Attack: sudden periods of intense fear that may include palpitations, sweating, shaking, shortness of breath, numbness, or a feeling that something bad is going to happen.

THE COGNITIVE COMPONENT OF ANXIETY

Is represented by a series of mental processes that have the purpose of evaluating oneself and the situation we are in. These processes include:

- self-effacing opinions and the belittling of one's potential or capacity, overestimating the external situation to the point of becoming convinced it is something we cannot control;
- concentrating exclusively on aspects perceived as being the most threatening; evaluating reality in an unrealistic and irrational manner.

Anxiety symptoms, represent a source of threat: they influence behavior and indicate a severe physical or psychological distress. These effects increase one's sense of vulnerability and, as a result, they reinforce the initial anxious response inducing a series of adverse responses, that, in turn, intensify the feeling of being in danger. Oftentimes, people with anxiety disorder have a catastrophic thinking, predicting and expecting worst-case scenarios.

The physical component of anxiety involves symptoms and sensations have a physiological basis that prepares the person for action. The main physiological modifications are:

an increase in muscular tension, with a consequent increase in blood flow to the muscles;

- tachycardia (rapid heartbeat), which has the purpose of pumping a greater quantity of blood to parts of the body that have been activated, and an increase in blood pressure;
- hyperventilation: an increase in respiratory frequency beyond our control;
- an increase in the organism's sensibility towards external agents: for example, increased dilation of the pupils and sensitivity to pain.

Emotions typically associated with anxiety are fear, dread, panic. Anxiety can also lead to other emotions such as frustration, anger, disappointment, sadness and depression.

The behavioral component of anxiety can involve a reduced performance due to the anxiety and avoidance of what one is anxious about.

If you're anxious about socializing, or flying, or public speaking, or leaving the house, then by avoiding those situations leads you to avoid feeling anxious for the time being. Avoidance winds up severely restricting an individual's day-to-day life. And when you do try to - or are forced to - face one of those situations, the anxiety returns stronger than ever.

SYMPTOMS RELIEF Self-care and relaxing techniques can be helpful in soothing anxiety symptoms:

A healthy diet: (gradually) reduce caffeine and sugar and improve eating habits.

Being aware of the body's physiological events.

Exercising helps reduce stress symptoms. If you suffer from anxiety, you may notice that your accelerated heartbeat during physical activity can trigger a panic attack: start training gradually.

Relaxation techniques like self-hypnosis with audiotapes, positive visualization, Jacobson's yoga progressive relaxation, meditation and other breathing techniques.

Self-help literature on how to manage anxiety.

Stress management can lead to changes in life style and time management.