

## WHAT IS EMDR?

If you are like one of the 6.8 million Americans who watch Grey's Anatomy you recently viewed an episode where Dr. Jo Wilson received mental health treatment utilizing a technique called EMDR. EMDR stands for Eye Movement Desensitization Processing and is gaining more and more popularity with counselors and clients. EMDR techniques were first studied back in 1989 and began being utilized as treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder. EMDR utilizes bilateral stimulation using either side-to-side eye movements with a light bar (as depicted in the Grey's Anatomy episode), bilateral vibrating pulsars held in the hands, watching an object moved by the therapist in front of the eyes, bilateral tactile tapping or use of auditory tones. EMDR is not hypnosis at all. The client is fully alert, and the bilateral stimulation produces a repetitive redirecting of attention leading to a neurobiological state that is paralleled to REM sleep. This helps the client to gain access to underlying associations and memories that have been recorded in the brain as traumatic.

Every person has had small traumatic experiences (Small-T traumas) and a lot of us have had horrific traumatic experiences (Big-T traumas). The way these memories have been stored and your beliefs about them filter the experiences in your life today. Memories with similar information are linked together and stored by their channels of association. Example, a woman is struggling with anxiety and having triggers of becoming increasingly anxious when she is unable to reach her children immediately and excessive worry that something bad will happen to a family member. Her childhood was normal and stable, although they moved a lot because her father was in the Army. In looking for a possible target memory, it is found that when she was 5, her father was expected home but didn't arrive because he was killed while on active duty. This memory would be used as her target memory.

So in the above example you can see that the client is having trouble coping in today's world with the origination of this being stored way back when she was 5 years old. Now with EMDR, the client can go back to that experience guided by the therapist and reorganize the way it is stored in the memory to a more adaptable and manageable way.

In a study in 2002 that is printed in the *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 58, 113-128, EMDR was compared with prolonged exposure therapy with both showing a "significant reduction in PTSD and depression symptoms. The study found that 70% of EMDR participants achieved a good outcome in three active treatment sessions, compared to 29% of persons in the prolonged exposure condition. EMDR also had fewer dropouts.

Researched populations successfully treated with EMDR therapy include phobias, panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, depression, attachment disorder, conduct problems and self-esteem, and grief; to name a few. EMDR is considered an "A" level treatment for trauma, recommended by the World health Organization for children, adolescents and adults.

For questions or further information please contact Tina Souder, M.Ed., LPC-S and EMDR trained at 806-930-9130 or visit the website at [tinasoudercounseling.com](http://tinasoudercounseling.com)