

**ALTERNATIVES FOR  
FAMILY CRISIS**

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**WHAT**

**IS**

**EMDR?**

"It is already considered a treatment of choice by many.....A number of recent, rather convincing studies have established EMDR as a legitimate and powerful treatment."

*Professional Psychology*

**EMDR** (Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing) is a powerful new method used in psychotherapy to help a person work on the present-day impact of experiences from the past that intrude into one's life. It is based on the discovery that the body's natural process of rapid eye movement sleep patterns seems to somehow be connected with the brain's ability to process negative material. It was discovered by Dr. Francine Shapiro in 1987 as she began to make a connection between eye movement under certain conditions and the reduction of disturbing thoughts. Dr. Shapiro continued her studies around this phenomenon and in 1989 reported significant success in treating victims of trauma in the *Journal of Traumatic Stress*. Since then, EMDR has developed and evolved into a set of protocols that are used worldwide by over 27,000 trained EMDR therapists.

Even though it is not understood exactly how EMDR physiologically works, we do know that when a person is very upset, their brain cannot process information as it does ordinarily. A disturbing experience or the perception of a negative experience can be recorded in the body and brain, but left unprocessed. Typically, we develop negative beliefs about ourselves in relation to these disturbing events and perceptions. Such memories have a lasting negative effect on the way a person sees the world and relates to other people that interferes with his or her life. The results of using EMDR consistently demonstrate that the negative energy surrounding stressful or traumatic events in a person's life becomes less disturbing, allowing one to become "unstuck" and move on in a more positive way with their life.

It seems that following a successful EMDR session, the images, sounds, and feelings of a disturbing event or belief are still remembered; however, the degree of distressful emotions have significantly lessened. Follow-up studies confirm that the results of EMDR are highly effective and long lasting.

It has been established by substantial scientific research that EMDR is effective for treating posttraumatic stress. It has also been reported by clinicians to be very effective in treating:

- |                         |                               |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ?Panic attacks          | ?Phobias                      |
| ?Addictions             | ?Performance anxiety          |
| ?Dissociative disorders | ?Stress reduction             |
| ?Disturbing memories    | ?Complicated grief            |
| ?Anxiety disorder       | ?Sexual and/or physical abuse |

EMDR has had more published case reports and controlled outcome research to support it than any other method used in the treatment of post traumatic stress disorder. Since the initial efficacy study (Shapiro, 1989a), positive therapeutic results with EMDR have been reported and studied with a wide range of populations.

The EMDR Institute in California can be visited on their website at: [www.emdr.com](http://www.emdr.com) to review a multitude of studies and ongoing work in EMDR. References and a bibliography of research on EMDR may be obtained through the institute, as well as a list of EMDR trained therapists in your area.

Recommended reading: [EMDR, The Breakthrough Therapy](#) by Francine Shapiro, Ph.D. & Margot Silk Forrest