



TRAUMA, OUR BRAIN AND EMDR BRIEFLY EXPLAINED.

This information sheet is in two parts –

- 1) our brain's response to traumatic events and
- 2) why Eye Movement, Desensitisation and Reprocessing therapy (EMDR) can help.

Trauma and the Brain

Each day, our experiences turn into memories which then go into a special 'filing cabinet' part of the brain (we have lots of memories and so lots of filing cabinets!). Memories put in here feel like the past. Our brains go to these files in the filing cabinet to help us understand situations, predict what might happen next and how to act...

For example, someone offers to make you a cup of tea. Your brain gets a file and checks to see if tea has been a good experience before. This information helps you respond in an effective way, predict what will happen next and knows you are safe.



Our brains do this all day, every day with each situation without us even knowing about it. Brains are amazing! However, when we experience a traumatic event, SURVIVAL MODE kicks in before the memory can reach the filing cabinet. The memory gets stuck in the wrong part of the brain, it does not feel like the past.

Our survival mode is switched on by a very old, very simple part of our brain called the "Amygdala". It's a useful mechanism that equips our bodies to *Fight, Flight, Freeze* in response to a perceived threat. Anything that reminds us of the trauma can be a perceived threat.



So, a stuck, unfiled memory which feels very "now" and a switch that activates our SURVIVAL mode whenever we come across a reminder of the trauma, not matter how small or vague, makes day to day life become extremely difficult. We never know when that switch will be activated. Understandably, we can get fearful of putting ourselves

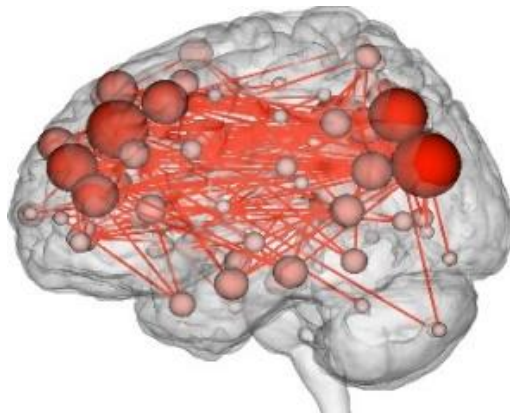
in any situations that might trigger the alarm. It can make lots of things in life feel daunting and overwhelming. **Anxiety, phobias and fears can also trigger this survival response as we get that same feeling of threat to our safety.**

EMDR

EMDR stands for Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing! Catchy!

As the brain is a massively complex thing, we 're not sure **why** or **how** it works, but we do know it does! The *World Health Organisation* and the *National Institute of Clinical Excellence* endorse it and there are many research studies proving it has a long-lasting effect.

A likely explanation is it's similar to the Rapid Eye Movement (REM) when we dream. It is thought that one of the functions of dreams is to process the events that have happened to us; we do this in REM sleep where our eyes move quickly from side to side, possibly moving the memories into the filing cabinet. EMDR uses eye movements which are like this process, moving the stuck memories to the right place, into the filing cabinet where it feels "past", **not** "now".



Luckily our brains are really good at being flexible and can shift memories from one place to another. We often do this ourselves without realising it (similar to our skin healing from a scrape), but sometimes we need a bit of help (like our skin may sometimes need a bandage or stitches to heal).

EMDR is a guided therapy which uses eye movements, but it is not like being hypnotised. You are always in control, know what is happening and can stop it at any time. The EMDR process will aim to make you feel as safe as possible during the therapy and your therapist will be there to guide you every step of the way. EMDR can bring distressing stuff up and problems you have experienced may come to the surface during EMDR and be upsetting. It is a process where as well as your Therapist guiding you it's good to look after yourself and let those you trust look after you too.

Please visit www.emdrassociation.org.uk for more information.

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