

EMDR Therapy: A New Treatment for Painful Memories

Six months ago, Sarah was involved in a motor vehicle accident in which she was seriously injured. Although she had recovered physically, each time Sarah thought about the accident she re-experienced the terror and panic that she had felt during the crash. She also had nightmares and intrusive thoughts about the accident. She felt very anxious while driving and avoided any situation that reminded her of the accident. These symptoms were causing her problems socially and at work. She avoided going out with her friends and was often absent from work.



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With EMDR treatment, Sarah is now able to think about the accident without feeling distressed. Rather than focusing on the thought, "I could have been killed", she can now focus on the thought that she survived. Her anxiety is reduced; she no longer has nightmares and intrusive thoughts, nor avoids driving. Her social life and attendance at work have returned to normal.

What is EMDR?

EMDR is an acronym for "Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing". Since 1987, EMDR has been an effective treatment for a wide variety of psychological problems. It can be safely used with children, adolescents and adults. EMDR promotes recovery from issues such as posttraumatic stress disorder and panic disorder. It is also an effective treatment for the distress caused by physical, sexual, emotional abuse or assault. Victims of crime, motor vehicle accidents, natural disasters and bullying can benefit from EMDR. Fears and phobias can be eliminated. Following EMDR treatment, memories and emotions related to neglect, abandonment, childhood memories, separa-

tion, or divorce are no longer as intense or as disturbing.

What is the goal of EMDR?

The goal of EMDR is to desensitise unpleasant thoughts, memories and negative beliefs that are blocking the individual's ability to deal with life's occurrences in a healthy, self-confident manner. Negative beliefs and emotions can be desensitised, reprocessed and replaced with realistic, positive beliefs about one's self and one's life.

What method is used?

The therapist uses a specific technique to produce "bilateral stimulation" in the brain. In normal dream sleep, the eyes rapidly flutter. This is called Rapid Eye Movement (REM).

It is believed that during dreams we are solving the problems of the day. The fact that both eyes are moving means that both sides of

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the brain are engaged. In EMDR, the therapist wants to engage both sides of the brain while the client looks at painful memories. This is accomplished when the therapist waves two fingers back and forth in front of the client's eyes while the client's eyes follow the fingers back and forth. Hand taps and auditory cues have a clinical effect that is similar to eye movement and can be used as alternatives to lateral finger movement.

During the bilateral stimulation the client concentrates on the images, emotions and physical sensations associated with distressing thoughts or memories. This process allows clients to confront large problems that have been sitting, unresolved in memory.

The client is always fully aware of what is

happening and is always in control about whether to continue or to stop. Because each individual's healing process is different, it is difficult to predict what kind of thoughts, emotions or memories will occur during EMDR. Sometimes, they can be painful. EMDR is an opportunity to face and heal these painful issues in a safe setting where one does not feel overwhelmed. The therapist guides and helps the client gain the maximum benefit from the experience.

EMDR'S place in therapy.

EMDR is only one component of general therapy. It is important that it be placed in the appropriate context in the therapeutic process. Initially, time is spent establishing a relationship of openness and trust with the therapist and a full history is also taken. After that, EMDR can be used. It is fully compatible with most other therapeutic methods. It can blend well with protocols from cognitive behavioural therapy, attachment theory and developmental psychology, family systems, solution focused, narrative, client centred and many other therapeutic modalities. In the context of a positive therapeutic relationship and used together with other forms of counselling, EMDR can be an efficient and safe way to help clients heal painful memories, eliminate negative cognitions and deal more effectively with life's occurrences ■

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Summer Survival Strategies for Parents

Spring has sprung and summer is almost upon us. Near are the days when school will be let out and our children will be home for the summer. For some, this is a time of joyful anticipation. Vacation schedules are arranged, long awaited holidays are planned, and preparations are begun. For others, the anticipation may be somewhat less than joyful. Visions of chaos, noise and perpetual untidiness come to mind. Choruses of "I'm bored, what can I do" never seem to end. Long awaited is that first Tuesday after Labor Day when the children return to school and life returns to normal.

As a parent of five children, two with special needs, I know from first hand experience that the demands of daily living can often seem overwhelming. Life seems to move too fast; keeping one's head above water is sometimes the best we can do. Under these circumstances, survival is itself a monumental accomplishment.

But there are other times, times when the dust has settled a little and the storm has

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passed, that, at least for the moment, we are able to catch our breath. It is at these times that we are able to reflect upon our circumstances and consider other possibilities; other ways to better manage life's challenges.

Listed below are a few thoughts and suggestions to reflect upon during those moments when there is a lull in the storm. Hopefully some will be helpful in making your summer a more enjoyable and fulfilling experience.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF. As the saying goes "you can't give what you don't got". Being a parent is a demanding job. In order to effectively and consistently look after the needs of your family, you must regularly attend to your own needs as well. It is insufficient to attempt to find time for yourself only

when opportunity arises; you must make time for yourself on a regular basis by scheduling it into your week. Sit down with your planner or calendar and schedule time for yourself within

each week throughout the summer before writing in any other commitments. Make self-care a habit. And remember, recreation is re-creation.

NURTURE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS. Relationships are like flowers; if they are left unattended for too long they wither and die. This is especially important in a marital relationship. Children's sense of security is closely tied to the stability they perceive in the relationship between their parents. The marital relationship also serves as

a model for the children as to how they ought to relate to the opposite sex. Just as with scheduling time for self-care, one must also schedule weekly couple time. When couples take time to nurture their relationship, they strengthen the family as a whole.

SPEND ONE TO ONE TIME WITH EACH CHILD. Spending one to one time with each child is an investment in your relationship with that child. During that time valuable rapport is built. Opportunities to discuss issues, which might not otherwise be mentioned, also occur. Children learn to look forward to their "date" with mommy or daddy. Other benefits often result from this one-to-one time as well. Given the opportunity to choose the activity to be done during the date (within predetermined guidelines concerning the limits of time and money), children quickly become aware of the value of time and money, especially under circumstances where it impacts them directly. Such awareness can be helpful when mom or dad want to have time to themselves, or with each other. By making time to spend with each child on a one-to-one basis, the message, "You are worthwhile and important to me", is conveyed. This message goes a long way in building children's confidence and sense of self-worth, while also reducing the apparent need children often have to seek attention in inappropriate and often frustrating ways.

HOLD WEEKLY FAMILY MEETINGS. Family meetings serve several purposes. They create a very effective forum to plan for future

activities, to delegate responsibilities, and to deal with problems and differences before they get out of hand. They provide an opportunity to develop leadership, cooperation and problem-solving skills. They save a great deal of parental time and energy by dealing with, all at once, most of the problems that occur throughout the week. They create commitment to the decisions made within the meeting by virtue of the fact that all present have had a part in the decision making process. In addition, they provide a very positive and encouraging way to deal with the

Children learn to look forward to their "date" with mommy or daddy.

relational challenges that occur in families. Family meetings are easy to implement and take relatively little time to conduct (see format and guidelines on next page).

CREATE A SUMMER SUPPORT NETWORK. Other families are in the same boat; why not pair up and go on joint outings together, or tag team by taking turns looking after each others' children so as to give each other a break. It's amazing how cooperative and well mannered our children can be for other people. Joint outings are a great way to get a little adult company while also providing the kids with a welcomed break from the usual routine. By working together, we lighten each other's load while also modeling the benefits and value of cooperation for our children.

HAVE THE COURAGE TO BE IMPERFECT. This phase, coined by Dr. Rudolf Dreikurs, puts into perspective the tragic tendency so many of us has to avoid trying new things. We miss out on so much because we fear the pain associated with failure. As parents, our willingness to try new things and risk failure models an important quality of character for our children (courage) while also conveying to them a sense of our authenticity and credibility as parents and people.

In conclusion, use the summer vacation as a time to try new things, both for yourself and with your children. In doing so you will expand them, and yourself, in the process.... and maybe have some fun doing it ■



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Guidelines for Conducting a Family Meeting

Following are some suggestions for conducting a Family Meeting. For a more complete description of the process, refer to *STEP: Systematic Training for Effective Parenting - The Parent's Handbook* by Dinkmeyer, McKay and Dinkmeyer (1997).

REGULARITY – It is important to meet regularly. Meeting once a week at the same time is best. The length of meetings will depend on the ages of the children present, but generally should be about twenty minutes to a half hour in length.

PLAN – Maintain an agenda. Keep a list of items to be discussed at the next meeting in a place that is accessible to the whole family. The refrigerator is often a good place.

COOPERATE – Children usually enjoy the opportunity of “being in charge”. Encourage everyone to take turns in each role (i.e. note taker, chair person, time keeper). Allowing children to take an active role in the family meeting encourages them to take greater ownership of the process as well as the solutions that are generated within the meeting.

MODEL RESPECT – Take turns speaking; avoid interrupting, and limit complaining. It is often good to allow children to speak first when agenda items

are introduced. Allowing children to speak first encourages them to feel more responsible, and again, helps them to take greater ownership and responsibility for the process.

SHARE RESPONSIBILITY – List chores and take turns doing them. Initially, it can be helpful to volunteer to do some of the more onerous tasks which no one else likes doing. Over time these tasks can be shared more equally. Another means of distributing chores is to use a “job jar”. To use a job jar, collaboratively list the chores that need doing and then write them on small pieces of paper, placing each paper in the jar. Each week, take turns drawing chores from the jar.

HAVE FUN – Plan family recreational activities and provide choices within reasonable limits. Consider using a “fun jar” in which recreational activities, written on small pieces of paper, can be drawn from. During meetings, remember to focus on the positive, encourage effort and notice improvement. Discuss the positive contributions each member of the family is making and thank them for their help. Teach family members to encourage each other as well.

Family meetings are a great way of encouraging positive interactions among family members. Regularly held meetings provide a forum to respectfully discuss problems, find solutions, and live cooperatively together. Following is a brief, sequential outline of the Family Meeting process.

CHECK IN – what good things have happened this week?

READ PREVIOUS MINUTES.

REVIEW OLD BUSINESS – discuss what went well, what didn't go well.

DISCUSS NEW BUSINESS – list what needs to be discussed, prioritize, and then discuss in order of priority.

PROBLEM SOLVE – brainstorm possible solutions allowing the person who owns the problem to select the solution of his or her choice to be tried over the next week.

PLAN FAMILY FUN – discuss what will be done for fun after next week's family meeting.

REVIEW SOLUTIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES – discuss who has agreed to do what ■

Farewell Farrell

Our well-loved and highly respected colleague and co-worker, Farrell Hannah,



has joined the ranks of venerable retirees after 42 years as a Registered Psychologist. We are honoured to have been in association, for the past 13 years, with such a skilled, knowledgeable and compassionate therapist. We will miss his outrageous sense of humour and the laughter and joy he brought to our office. Happy Retirement, Farrell and Audrey!

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Book Review:

He's Just Not That Into You

A new book entitled, *He's Just Not That Into You*, should be a big help to some of my female clients who are having trouble with their relationships. Much of the advice in this short book makes a lot of sense.

One chapter is entitled "He's Just Not That Into You If He's Not Asking You Out". The authors make the point that if a guy is interested in a woman, he will make sure they are seeing each other. He will not allow his work or play schedule to get in the way. Some women work overtime making excuses for guys when they do not initiate contact.

Another chapter talks about guys not calling or dating. The authors point out, however, that in this day and age it is very easy to make phone calls. Most people have access to cell phones and can find a few moments to touch base with someone special. If he claims to be "too busy" to call, his priorities lie elsewhere and this does not bode well for a budding relationship.

Then there is the chapter entitled "He's Just Not That Into You If He Only Calls When He is Drunk". "Being drunk or high are altered states that can actually take you away from real feelings. Be aware that if Boozy the Clown has to slip on the red nose every time it gets intimate, it could be symptomatic of a bigger problem".

One of the best chapters deals with marriage and an unwillingness to move in that direction if there is a committed relationship. The point is made that every guy who claims to not be interested in marriage or has "issues" with marriage, will eventually be married. If he is making excuses now, then it will be someone else he marries; it may be time to cut losses and move on.

In spite of these good points, however, I have a few concerns.

The authors are trendy and hip and seem to assume that their readers have a similar mindset. I found some of the language to be "off-colour" and juvenile and the morals to be loose in some areas.

One chapter is sheer nonsense. It is entitled, "He's Just Not That Into You If He's Not Having Sex With You". The theory is

that if a guy is not wanting sex in a dating relationship he is not interested in a long term committed relationship.

This chapter is absurd for two reasons. First, it discounts the reality that there are men (and women) who, although interested in sex, abstain due to religious reasons or health concerns. These people are very interested in commitment but are not interested in violating their beliefs or risking ill health or both.

The other reason this chapter is ridiculous is that it completely ignores the reality of most uncommitted relationships.

Many males are only too interested in having sex, and commitment is the farthest

thing from their minds.

To their credit, the authors advise that it is not good if a fellow is in a relationship and sleeping with someone else. They suggest dumping the two timer. The authors disapprove of sex outside an uncommitted relationship but unfortunately condone it within such a relationship.

The other unfortunate aspect of this book is that it claims that a fellow who avoids sexual intimacy is a "freak" who should not be taken seriously. As mentioned already, there are still those who believe that sex should be restricted to a marriage relationship.

The authors, Behrendt and Tuccillo, have worked as consultants and writers for the now defunct TV program, "Sex in the City", which may explain where they are coming from.

In spite of their bias, the authors have some excellent advice for women dating men not interested in commitment. Some of the chapter titles are: He's Just Not That Into You... If He's Not Asking You Out; If He's Not Calling You; If He's Not Dating You; If He Only Wants To See You When He's Drunk; If He Doesn't Want To Marry You; If He's Married (and other Insane Variations of Being Unavailable); and If He's a Selfish Jerk, a Bully, or a Really Big Freak".

One of our clients told us that this book "changed her life". That is strong praise ■



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