



**BRIGHTENING  
THE  
FUTURE**



**Leicestershire Partnership  
NHS Trust**

# Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR)

Information for children, young people and their families

Will I be in a trance?

EMDR is not the same as hypnosis and you will remain fully awake and in control at all times.

What about younger children?

With some adaptations, EMDR can be successful for younger children as well as teenagers. Parents may be asked to be involved in sessions for younger children; the therapist may work with parents to develop a "story" of the traumatic experience which can be read to the child while a parent taps the child on each shoulder or knee. The child may also be asked to draw their memories or feelings.

## What is EMDR?

EMDR stands for Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing. It is an evidenced-based (this means it is supported by a large amount of scientific research) and effective form of therapy for children and adults who have been through difficult, frightening or traumatic experiences.

It can also help with other problems such as phobias, particularly when a memory of something from the past is causing difficulties in the present.

## What is trauma?

When we experience something intensely frightening, our brains do not always process what happens in the same way as a normal experience.

Usually, memories are sorted and “filed away” in our minds, but during a traumatic experience the brain is in “survival mode” and this does not happen. Instead, the memory might stay as broken parts in our minds and the emotions stay feeling very raw and current.

Our brains might try to sort and process the memories by showing them back to us at random times, which can be very upsetting.

It is common to experience some or all of the following difficulties following a traumatic event:

- Flashbacks, where you feel as though you are “back there” and it is happening again
- Nightmares and difficulty sleeping
- Feeling “cut off” or disconnected from feelings
- Feeling “on edge” and jumpy
- Feeling tearful or easily upset
- Struggling to concentrate
- Wanting to avoid things that remind you of the event
- Children may become “clingy” or act younger than their age

Often these difficulties get better with time. However, if you are still struggling several months after the event, EMDR therapy may be helpful.

## How does EMDR work?

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During EMDR, your therapist will support you to deliberately think about the traumatic memory, and at the same time will direct you through side-to-side eye movements, sounds or tapping. The side-to-side stimulation helps your brain to work in a different way, which “unlocks” the difficult memories and helps your brain to sort and process them.

EMDR does not take the memory itself away, but it helps to separate the emotion from it, so that it feels like something that happened in the past rather than something that is still happening. EMDR is not physically painful but can be upsetting at times.

## What is an EMDR session like?

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Before starting EMDR, your therapist will work with you to develop some ways of coping and feeling safe. These will be used during and in between sessions to help you manage the emotions that might come up during EMDR. You will also agree a “stop signal” to help you feel in control of the processing.

When you start the processing, your therapist will ask some questions to help you bring up the memory. You will then start the side-to-side stimulation. Every 10-15 seconds the therapist will stop you and ask what you noticed. You might notice changes in the memory, images, thoughts, feelings or body sensations. There is no right or wrong and the most important thing you can do is to just notice whatever comes up for you.

It can be upsetting at times to re-live the difficult memory, and is important to be prepared for this. We often think about it in terms of driving through a dark tunnel – if we keep our foot on the accelerator we can get through it faster, but if we stop we will still be in the darkness. Your therapist will help you to prepare for the feelings that may come up and support you to keep going through the tunnel to the other side.

## Who can access EMDR?

In CAMHS, we offer EMDR for children and young people (and in some circumstances parents) when they are struggling with a traumatic memory that is affecting their current functioning. EMDR can also be useful for experiences of chronic pain.

Similar support is available through local adult mental health services for parents who are struggling with similar difficulties - speak to your child's clinician or your GP for more information.

## More information

You can find more information about EMDR online at <https://emdrassociation.org.uk/>

This video also explains EMDR in a child-friendly animation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrH6xy3snTk&t=54s>

If you feel you need any more information or have any further questions please contact the clinician who gave you this leaflet:

Name:

Contact:

If you need help to understand this leaflet or would like it in a different language or format such as large print, Braille or audio, please ask a member of staff.