

Kelly, 15 years old:

“At first I thought: this stuff is weird”

“It was definitely really hard the first time, because I wasn't sure just what to expect. You are explained certain stuff at the start, but it was still a bit vague. I just thought: this stuff is weird. Oh well, whatever. It won't help me anyway.”

“I also dreaded having to talk to someone about what I'd been through, because I'd never done that before. The first step is to learn to trust that person, and to try to feel at ease. That way, you can focus and get more from the therapy. EMDR is very different though to what they call ‘talk therapy’, as talking does help in a way, but it doesn't make the experience feel less bad. What's so good about this therapy is that you're working on your nasty memories, which really helps you to move on.”

“I didn't have to do a lot of talking during the therapy, which I liked. We processed the things I'd been through bit by bit. Until we'd dealt with the lot. It was really tough having to concentrate on a memory that I'd always tried to put as far at the back of my mind as I could. But you start to think differently, and your bad feelings change and fade away. I felt less and less scared, tense, and guilty. Now I can look back on it without it turning my whole life upside down all the time.”

Need some more questions answered?

Why not take a look at the leaflet that your parents or guardians have been given. You can also fire away any questions you have at your own therapist. They won't mind.

EMDR

Just re-record it

Whatever's bothering you probably has something to do with the nasty things that have happened to you. It could be to do with an accident, a fire, a physical assault, bullying, or some other horrible experience. Perhaps it happened just once, but it may even have been something that lasted for months or even years. Experiences like that can change the way you feel. Whatever happened may just keep playing over and over again in your head like a film, or you may not feel like doing anything, or maybe it's stopping you from sleeping properly. You may also get angry quickly or have trouble concentrating.

Just re-record it

Many young people find it weird that they suddenly react so differently. But that's all because of memories of the upsetting experience(s). And the awful feelings and nasty thoughts that go with it. Luckily, something can be done to help them out quickly. It's called EMDR.

Faster than you think

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) is a therapy for children, teenagers, and adults who have been through one or more disturbing experiences, which have caused them to suffer psychological problems. Scientists believe that in those cases memories of upsetting experiences aren't stored properly in the memory bank. When that has been improved by EMDR, the problems that have brought you here will also fade or disappear altogether.

The nice thing about EMDR is that you start to notice improvements quickly. When you've had a single bad experience, you'll probably be finished with the therapy sooner than someone who has been threatened or bullied over a longer period of time. But even then, EMDR can be very helpful.

Lisa, 17 years old:

"Just look at what I've achieved!"

"When I first started, I was having nightmares. They seemed so real it was as if I was still being abused. I was having trouble sleeping, and wasn't able to concentrate during the day, so my schoolwork was going really rubbish as well. I blamed myself for the sexual abuse. I thought it was some sort of punishment for something I'd done wrong in the past. Now I just get angry when I think back to how I felt responsible for the actions of my cousin. I know and feel now that I'm worth just as much as anyone else, which is why I also deserve respect. Those nightmares don't bother me any longer. I'm sleeping better, and things are going well in school as well, because I'm in better shape now. I thought it was a bit odd doing those eye movements. Just look at what I've achieved. I'm a lot more self-assured, and I am not worried anymore that it could happen to me again."

What choice is there?

First the therapist will ask you to tell the story of what has happened, and then to freeze-frame the story at the 'picture' that is the most disturbing to look at right now.

The two of you will work out a way for you not to feel bad anymore when you are reminded of what happened back then. The way it works is this: while you're concentrating on the picture, and on what you're thinking and feeling about it now, the therapist will ask you to do something completely different at the same time. This could be, either:

- following the fingers of the therapist with your eyes, as they move them from side to side in front of your face, *or*
- listening to sounds on the headphones, *or*
- tapping the hands of the therapist with your hands (or they can tap yours)

Once in a while, the therapist will ask you what you're noticing or what's changing. This could be images, thoughts or feelings, but also physical sensations such as tension or pain. Sometimes, stuff comes to the surface that you don't want to tell, or are scared to. Don't worry, you won't have to. The therapy will carry on until you are not affected anymore by memories of that experience.

May be edgy

Don't be surprised if you're focused more than usual on your upsetting experience(s) or stuff related to those experiences during your therapy period. This is a result of the brain's mechanism of reprocessing the information being activated. This reprocessing won't stop as soon you leave here. You may get a bit anxious

or edgy; fortunately that's usually gone about three days after a therapy session. Maybe you won't experience any of this at all.

Jay, 13 years old:

"It just happens by itself"

"When I started those eye movements, lots of things started happening straight away. Pictures, thoughts, feelings. Sometimes it was stuff that seemed to have nothing to do with it. There were loads of things that just flashed past. But the therapist coaches you really well: all you have to say, when you stop the tapping or the eye movements, is whatever you're feeling, what's changing, or whatever enters your head. At first I thought that I had to freeze the first picture or bring it back. But you don't have to control or hold onto anything. That's what's so special about this therapy. It just happens by itself. You just need to have the guts to concentrate on yourself. That's it really."

