

The theory behind EMDR

The theory behind EMDR is called the Adaptive Information Processing Model (AIP), which suggests that our experiences and genetic predispositions create memory networks that are stored in our minds and bodies. These memory networks form the basis of how we experience the world. The AIP model hypothesizes that our minds have the natural capacity for healing and to process what happens to us in a healthy and adaptive way similarly to how our bodies are geared for healing. For example, when we get physically injured such as if we receive a cut on our finger, we expect that the wound will naturally begin to heal after a few days. Likewise with our minds, most of our memories are processed adaptively and are functionally stored in our brain.

However, we can experience 'blocks' to our healing both physically and mentally. For example, if we get a splinter in our finger, the wound will not heal unless we remove the splinter. We can say that the splinter 'blocks' our healing. Similarly with psychological wounds such as when we experience a highly stressful event, the incident can overwhelm the brain's processing system and the stressful event may be stored inadequately. The stressful incident may not integrate into our existing memory networks and instead it can get 'stuck' in its initial state form (the original images, feelings, body sensations, and thoughts) which continue to get triggered, making it difficult to resolve.

Healing can begin when we 'unstick' this inadequately stored information and activate our brain's natural capacity to process the information in a healthy and adaptive way just as when we remove the splinter from our finger.

With EMDR, we use Bilateral Stimulation (BLS), the left, right, eye movements, to activate both hemispheres of the brain and to help the brain 'shift' or 'unstick' things. This stimulates the brain's ability to process the stressful event allowing for it to become integrated into our adaptive memory networks.

EMDR therapy helps the memory to "feel" different, with people often reporting that they feel more distanced from the traumatic event.