

Reflections on EMDR training

Thank you for funding my Part 1, Part 2 and Part 3 EMDR training with 'EMDR masterclass'. I would like to offer a short summary of what I've learnt from the course and how it has improved my working practice with young people. I currently work for Cornwall CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service). The majority of young people I see for assessment and intervention have sadly experienced trauma in their lives. As a consequence, they have developed a heightened sense of fear and an understandable distrust of relationships. Therapy itself can therefore be very challenging, as they explore whether they feel safe enough to feel re-frightened with you and test out whether they can rely on you as their therapist. In some young people, you can sadly see how trauma has become embodied and children are almost wired to respond from a place of threat, making it very hard to offer them reassurance and regulation.

Previous to undertaking the therapy, I felt slightly under-confident in working in this area. I was assured I could offer a safe, containing space in which to reflect and a part of me knew what was needed, but I wasn't always sure of how to guide somewhere there. Taking up this training has really offered me some specific and concrete skills to offer something that is sensitive, flexible, paced and evidence based. As a model, I also find it compliments my other previous therapeutic skills and matches my value base as a therapist.

I have found EMDR really helpful on a number of levels and my new-found skills have enhanced my abilities to engage traumatised young people and help them through processing their trauma. What I particularly liked from the onset was the mix of 'science' and seemingly 'magic' around the model. For me this fitted well with children's interests and inquisitiveness to try. Many children took comfort in how it works, for example, that the finger movements to and fro across the eyes, mimics REM sleep, which is our body's natural processing and healing process for memories. Children then felt curious as to the mysteries of how we are not really sure how rapid eye movement offers this, but that it simply just does!

I found it an approach that is also very easy to help children understand. The model itself uses lots of stories and metaphors to help children comprehend how it works. For example, the idea of a train journey, that we are looking out the window at the landscape (memories), but we are not interacting with the scenery (safety), but we are passing through to new pastures (processing). I have found young people have really got on board (excuse the pun!) with these concepts and it has helped them feel empowered about being able to manage through the tough bits.

My favourite part of the approach is that it is not 'talking heavy'. In this sense young people don't need sophisticated expressive language skills to have access to therapy. Also, for those who are unsure or avoidant of expressing their emotions or discussing their memories, this is not a necessity! The unobtrusiveness of the approach can allow people to feel more comfortable and allow them to be in control of the intimacy and sharing, not the therapist! I feel this is something that has really been welcomed and benefitted the young people I have worked with using this model so far.

What I did not realise about EMDR before I started training in it is the versatility of it and how you can employ some of its techniques to not just individual work but to dyadic work also. For example, when bringing in a caregiver to the therapy to help the young person manage better, you can teach and ask the carer to use bilateral stimulation on their child while you are taking them through the processing. This can help settle the young person (as an attachment figure as opposed to a professional is doing the 'work' and it also offers the parent skills to take away and use to regulate their child in the future.)

I very much intend to continue to use this model, alongside my other therapeutic skills. I have already made links with other trained EMDR practitioners in the county and we have set up a regular peer supervision group, so we can continue to share our resources and ensure our safe and thoughtful practice. It is my hope that I will progress my EMDR skills one day and undertake the advanced training in Child specific EMDR.

Thank you once again for allowing me this opportunity; it has been a valuable learning experience both for me, our young people and my colleagues.