

This presentation will show how expanding the benefits of EMDR into a relational psychoanalytic approach can ignite an autonomous self-reflective process that the patient can then extend into other realms of their life. This approach of modifying the EMDR protocol and integrating it into the relational psychoanalytic work is new and unique. It relies on knowledge from neuroscience's understanding of trauma's impact on the developing brain, as well as research on attachment, and the ways in which embodied experience can enhance the integrated therapeutic work, while promoting the potential for enduring change.

Abstract

In this presentation, the author will provide an in-depth view centered on the ways psychoanalysis and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) can be effectively integrated to complement each other. The presenter will outline some key theoretical and clinical concepts that allow the integration of relational psychoanalysis with EMDR's unique contributions, specifically appreciating the neurological and embodied experience in an individual's development in relation to the psychodynamic approach to dealing with "big T" trauma and with "small t" everyday attachment-related trauma. Clinical vignettes will illustrate how EMDR and relational work, approaches that may at first seem incompatible, can be effectively integrated to help the therapist navigate the two methods.

The presenter will focus on ways in which an embodied experience informed by a modified EMDR technique may enhance the psychodynamic work when the patient's access to emotional engagement with the disturbing, and often dissociated memories is not available. The presenter will emphasize the view that it is possible for change to occur in the presence of affect that may otherwise be beyond the reach of cognitive and verbal expression.

To illustrate, the presenter will describe the development in therapy with a woman during which several specific characteristics of the work led to the presenter's decision to use a modified rendition of treatment based on EMDR technique and relational psychoanalysis to enhance the patient's embodied emotional experience. EMDR was initially introduced as an adjunct to analytic work to help bridge the patient's splitting and fragmentation. The presenter will portray the transformation of the patient's rather concrete and simplistic view of her relationship to others, adopted in an attempt to mask past trauma, first as a survivor of her own life experiences, and later as a transmitter of intergenerational trauma. Integrated therapy helped propel her toward developing a symbolic capacity and the exploration of her relational attachments, along with increasing her ability to reflect on her role in these relationships. As a result, the patient began to make amends that brought about changes that appreciated both her own subjectivity and that of others.

The presenter will elaborate on her observation of how the use of EMDR did benefit the patient, a development that encouraged the therapist to explore integrating EMDR and relational psychoanalysis with other patients as well.

Learning objectives

1. Participants will be able to identify modified EMDR.
2. Participants will become familiarized with how trauma's effect on the brain manifests in therapy.
3. Participants will gain an understanding on how EMDR and relational psychoanalysis may be integrated.