

## What is Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy (EMDR)?

*By Sylvia Denise Greenbaum, LPC, LCDC*

*For additional information and services, please contact me at [Deniselpc.com](http://Deniselpc.com)*

EMDR is a therapeutic model that is structured and incorporates other therapeutic approaches to help clients suffering from anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), complex post-traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD), and other mental health conditions.

Unlike talk therapy, clients process information by stimulating two sides of their body (bilaterally) alternatively through eye movements or tapping. When information is processed bilaterally, it helps reduce the emotional reactivity when triggers arise in the future. For example, road rage. We all know (on a cognitive level) that it is unsafe and pointless to engage in arguments with others on the freeway. We can study the affects and consequences associated with anger, such as physical symptoms, risk of harm to self and others, etc.

If we took a test on “the hazardous effects of anger” and passed with an A, we would have cognitive knowledge of how dangerous it is to engage in arguments when we are angry. Even with all of this knowledge, there is a good chance we would still go into reactive mode when we are triggered. Therefore, we would probably have an anger reaction if someone cuts us off on the freeway.

When clients process information using EMDR, they make cognitive connections and use bilateral stimulation to help reduce emotional reactivity when future triggers arise. It even helps to reduce physical symptoms, such as muscle tension, increased heart rate, etc. It’s a proactive approach. After processing anger pertaining to road rage, a client may react quite differently after being cut off on the freeway. For example, the client may experience a reduction in physical symptoms. The client might still feel anger and have negative thoughts; however, the client may not have the urge to chase or engage in an argument with the other driver.

The level of symptom reduction depends on many factors, such as: 1) the intensity of the problem before EMDR therapy, 2) the number of years the client has struggled with the problem, and 3) whether or not other related problems or obstacles are connected to the presenting problem.

When using EMDR, clients identify their triggers, such as anger, anxiety, etc.; and various approaches are used to uncover negative thoughts and feelings associated with their triggers. Clients are able to make specific connections to past experiences that are triggering their problems. Then clients become aware of past patterns, and are more in control of their current problems, struggles, and reactions. EMDR helps clients change lifelong critical beliefs about themselves and their lives. As a result, clients explore, identify, and implement objective and healthy options for themselves in their current circumstances and for their future.