

- Northeast Wisconsin
- March 2014

Written by Phyllis Kasper, PhD

Connecting your head and heart with CBT and EMDR



Have you ever had what seemed to be the perfect plan to achieve a great change in your life, only to have it all slip away? Most of us have had that experience more than once. You find a great book on clearing clutter, making more money, conquering fear or losing weight, and it makes sense. You embark on the journey, but somehow you just can't do what you know you are supposed to do to achieve a result. It feels like a failure and is very discouraging.

Perhaps you've even had cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which taught you many skills like assertiveness, positive thinking and relaxation. The idea of this therapy is that if you change your thoughts and behaviors, you will accomplish more and feel better. This kind of therapy is very valuable, but often falls short of its promise. It will certainly leave you better off than when you started, but on a plateau that may not have improved your emotions and achieved all of the desired change. That's where eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) comes in to release the negative and deeply held emotions and beliefs that hold us back: emotions such as fear, and beliefs such as, "I don't deserve to be happy."

When I started using EMDR back in 1996, most of my clients were referred to me by a psychiatrist who was the medical director of an inpatient psychiatric unit. Her patients were stabilized with medication and cognitive behavioral therapy. They were no longer actively self-destructive or profoundly depressed and they were able to work. But something was missing.

Staying on that plateau took conscious effort and continuing guidance to stay on track using all the skills they had learned. There were still some deeply imprinted emotions and beliefs that created resistance to change. These seem to exist in parts of the brain that can't be reached by logic or willpower. One of my clients described her CBT this way:

It's like going to college to learn stuff, having the "aha," then slipping back. You have a lot of knowledge, but it doesn't stick and you can't follow through. CBT gives you skills and an outline of the steps to follow. But willpower doesn't get you through the blocks or out of analyzing and trying to figure out what to do. You try so hard, but your walls come up.

EMDR can bring down those walls of deeper emotions and beliefs. When this happens, it becomes much easier, even automatic, to apply the skills learned with CBT. The desired changes in emotions and behavior seem to flow naturally. EMDR involves doing teamwork with a skilled therapist. The eye movements made while tuned in on events involving abuse, humiliation, betrayal or abandonment seem to trigger the brain to reprocess and update the information. Instead of being locked into the survival gear of the brain, the information is released to the parts of the brain that allow us to evaluate and put things in perspective. There is often a sense of feeling much lighter and freer.

Yes, you do have to revisit parts of your life that you would rather forget. But EMDR isn't about dwelling in these events while trying to psychoanalyze you or assign blame for your problems. It is more about using the healing powers of the mind to flush out negative emotions and beliefs and replace them with positive ones that will help you achieve a better life.

With CBT, you use your conscious mind to develop skills and strategies to change behavior in the hope that this will change how you feel about yourself and your place in the world. EMDR lifts out unconscious, automatic, dysfunctional learned beliefs and emotions, setting the heart free to use the skills without effort. CBT can work very well at clearing clutter if you have never learned the skills and set appropriate goals. But if the outer clutter reflects inner chaos, EMDR can bring order to the inner chaos. Then willpower and faith in yourself are in harmony.

Dr. Phyllis Kasper has expertise in anxiety disorders, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, peak achievement, biofeedback, hypnosis, EMDR, cultural diversity and pain management. She can help you use personal empowerment to unleash your best you! Call her at 920-693-2250. Visit <http://evolveability.com> for a free download of a hypnosis sample. She is available at Healthy Connections, 510 E. Wisconsin Ave. in Appleton, 920-257-4601.