

Alternative Medicine

Writer gives EMDR treatment a try



Cindy Dern, center, illustrates Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) with a model showing hand “tappers” used in the process in Kingston. KARL RABE/POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL

By Marianne Neifeld

For Living & Being

Note: Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing is a complex method of treatment that consists of eight phases, numerous procedural elements, and a set of protocols designed to address specific client complaints. For the purpose of this article only, a small sampling of this procedure was performed.

I was curious to know what Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing was like, and was able to experience a brief session with psychotherapist Cindy Dern at her office at Woodstock Therapy Center. Dern has received training with Francine Shapiro, Ph.D., founder of Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing.

A typical Eye Movement Desensi-

tization Reprocessing session normally lasts 50–90 minutes (depending on the practitioner), and is part of a comprehensive therapeutic experience. The session I had was about a half hour, after meeting and chatting with Dern.

Despite my awareness of Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing’s safety when practiced with a trained clinician, I found myself feeling somewhat nervous. Dern noted that it’s essential to establish a comfortable and trusting client/therapist relationship, which can sometimes take many sessions.

To begin, Dern showed me two options she uses for bilateral stimulation: she gave me a device known as “small tappers” — two discs which are held in each hand connected to a control device held by the therapist,

which emits an alternating vibrating pulse in each disc. Dern manipulated the speed and intensity of the vibrations until I found a comfortable level. She assured me that there was “no right or wrong,” again comforting and reassuring me, making conversation to gain trust and ease.

Then she offered me the option of using my eye movement to follow her hand back and forth, a sensation I found uncomfortable. I decided upon the tappers, which Dern said most people prefer.

Sitting across from me, she monitored my comfort level several times throughout the session.

She made sure to check that her sitting distance was OK with me — and she started the tappers vibrating left, then right, in my hand.

The tappers had a relaxing effect.

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Dern turned off the tappers while we talked, and asked me to think of a “light, recent upset.”

After discussing some options, I chose to talk about my concern for my elderly parents, and spoke about emotions such as guilt and concern, while Dern took notes. She asked me to name the “good parts.” I told her of my love for them, that I felt blessed to have them in my life, and happiness at their longevity.

I was asked to put a number on my level of unease. I felt an 8 on a scale of 0 to 10. It decreased steadily throughout the session, as Dern continually monitored it.

She showed me some relaxation techniques, used in Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing to establish a “safe place”: deep breaths, and the awareness of my feet firmly on the floor as I sat comfortably.

(Dern said it is important to consistently monitor the client’s range of discomfort. “If the client is starting to get overwhelmed,” she said, “we go back to the safe place we created.” This monitoring as well as her observations are important assessments throughout the session.)

She asked me about my “level of vulnerability” after the breathing, which I felt was a “three.” It’s important to start at a lower level to begin the session, she told me.

“Normally,” Dern said, “we would jump into what’s difficult.”

Because of our restricted time during this experience, Dern began by restating the good emotions I had told her, and allowed me to articulate the guilt, which she also repeated to me.

She guided me to relaxation, and then began with the imagery of the good things I told her about my parents, repeating words I told her, and asked me to “feel that for a moment — how that feels in your body.”

Next, she spoke about the negative feelings I had told her — and asked me to see what that feels like.

At this point, she asked if it was OK for her to put the tappers on. I agreed, and she began the “round” for about 15-20 seconds, asking me to notice how I felt. There was no talking during this time, just the quiet to reflect, and feel the pulsations of the discs in my hands.

She then turned off the tappers, and told me to “take a nice breath,” and gently asked me to report back to



Cindy Dern uses a control that makes the “tappers” vibrate as she demonstrates Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) in Kingston. KARL

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her what just happened.

I felt reinforced and validated, having heard Dern gently repeat the feelings I had previously articulated to her, and then holding the tappers — which provided a calmness, a comforting relaxation.

Somehow, working through these understandings while holding the tappers allowed for a sense of comfort, an ability to see this situation regarding my parents as it is, almost from a far-away, safe place. The situation didn’t feel as overwhelming as it previously had.

Hearing her say that my siblings and I are all overwhelmed at times and that my siblings lived closer, I realized that I could do only what I could do. And yet I was relaxed, and not emotional.

We did another round with the tappers for about 20 seconds. I closed my eyes (optional) while feeling the alternating pulses in each hand.

She guided me through breathing again, and checked into how I was feeling.

I was feeling even more relaxed and OK with the situation. Dern accentuated the positive feelings I was

expressing, and we finished up the session with one more 20-second round.

“Notice where you feel the ‘OK-ness’ in your body,” she said.

Another breath in, and out ... and reassessment. Dern maintained a very supportive demeanor.

With this last round, I felt calm, relaxed and yet reassured, and the previous feelings I had, the worry and concern, were diminished greatly. I saw my situation in a different way than I had when I first started the Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing. It was still there, but it wasn’t as upsetting.

Dern told me that she advises her patients to hold on to this feeling — take a walk around the block, or drive slowly instead of taking off to my next place — which I did.

Even with this somewhat abbreviated session, I was impressed with this new feeling and understanding, and with Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing.

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