

PRESENT-DAY TREATMENTS FOR SERIOUS TRAUMA

Traditional treatment generally follows the same principles:

In general a personal and individual approach is preferred and treatment begins with a careful evaluation (questionnaire and personal history), naturally with the consent of the person.

Trauma therapy can only take place if the individual is no longer in or experiencing a state of crisis; for example, if there is no risk of suicide, of panic attacks, delusions or hallucinations, an alcoholic crisis with an urgent need of treatment for alcoholism, or further exposure to potentially traumatic events. In other words, the crisis must first of all be managed before undertaking therapy, which is a long-term process.

All the circumstances, feelings and emotions around the event which has caused the trauma need to be explored in an atmosphere of mutual confidence. The aim of such an approach is to enable the individual to regain self-confidence and to see that he or she can control the situation without being overwhelmed.

The types of psychotherapeutic techniques available must be adapted to the nature of the trauma, the situation and the individual's personality, as well as many other factors. It may range from individual to group therapy, family or couple therapy, or rehabilitation and/or work therapy.

More recently other techniques have been developed with a certain success:

- EMDR** (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) – *see note below*
- Assisted biofeedback
- Light and colour therapies
- Techniques for a healthier life: diet, memory, relaxation
- Keeping a private diary...

Medication: A doctor may choose to add a prescription to other psychotherapeutic treatments. Psychiatric drugs have greatly improved in recent years and have fewer secondary effects. Such a treatment must however continue over several months to have a positive long-term effect.

How can you help yourself when there are no professionals around?

- Learn more about the disorder
 - Talk to friends, family and PTSD survivors for support
 - If possible, join or even create yourself a support group
 - Use stress reduction techniques, such relaxation, breathing exercises, positive imagery...
 - Develop positive lifestyle practices as much as possible in the field context (for example, light gym, healthy eating, keeping a normal work schedule (not working too late!); and minimizing negative lifestyle practices like substance abuse, social isolation and self-destructive or suicidal behaviours.
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**** EMDR** is a method of treatment for psychological trauma. EMDR stands for Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing.

Since its creation in 1989, EMDR has been used in the treatment of psychological shock caused by events such as those a humanitarian aid worker may experience in the field: bombings, massacre, rape, torture, being taken hostage, etc... as well as any situation capable of causing traumatic stress or [PTSD](#).

This treatment was discovered by Dr Francine Shapiro, researcher in psychology at the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto, California. Up to date, over 20,000 clinicians have been trained in this technique. EMDR was at first used to treat Vietnam veterans, and later in phobias, panic attacks, sexual abuse, etc...

EMDR is based on the principle that traumatising experiences are stored in the memory in such a way that they can lead to personality dysfunction. This treatment allows defusing the emotional charge. At the same time it reprograms a better interpretation of the painful past reality and in this way permits a better adjustment to present reality. One of the objectives is to reactivate the brain's reprogramming mechanisms.

Recent studies have shown that EMDR is similar to the neuro-physiological mechanisms of sleep, particularly in the REM phase.

The method consists of eight phases and numerous procedural elements. It is based on cognitive and behavioural theories, associated with a particular eye movement technique.

Given that this therapy is mostly used with emotionally shocked subjects, it is essential that it is carried out only by trained and certified clinical psychologists.

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