

Every experience we've had in our lives has become a building block in our inner world, governing our reactions to everything and every person we encounter. When we "learn" something, the experience is physically stored within networks of brain cells called "neurons." These networks actually form our unconscious mind, determining how our brain interprets the world around us and governing how we feel from moment to moment. These memories include experiences that took place years ago, and our conscious mind is often unaware that they have any impact on us at all. But since the memories are physically stored in the brain, they can pop up outside our control Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (pp. 3-4). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

when negative reactions and behaviors in the present can be tracked directly back to an earlier memory, we define those memories as "unprocessed"— meaning that they are stored in the brain in a way that still holds the emotions, physical sensations and beliefs that were experienced earlier in life. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 5). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

By activating the brain's information processing system (which will be explained in Chapter 2), the old memories can then be "digested." Meaning what is useful is learned, what's useless is discarded, and the memory is now stored in a way that is no longer damaging. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 6). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

But regardless of the number of memories involved, basically we are entering into the person's "unconscious" mind with this form of therapy, in a way that can allow insights, connections and change to occur rapidly within the reprocessing sessions. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 6). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

Also important, although a major trauma such as robbery or violence is needed to give a formal diagnosis of PTSD, a number of recent studies have demonstrated that everyday life experiences, such as relationship problems or unemployment, can produce just as many, and sometimes even more, symptoms of PTSD. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 11). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

Also, clinical situations can be complicated, because sometimes a childhood event is so disturbing that it can completely overwhelm the brain's natural ability to process it, and it's either not stored at all or becomes completely cut off so the person can't remember it. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 12). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

It's important to remember that we don't have to undergo a major trauma such as a father's death or a car accident to develop symptoms that last for years. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 14). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

we all have hardwired into our brains a mechanism— an information processing system— for healing. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 20). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

After uninterrupted information processing, the memory of the argument has generally linked up with more useful information already stored in your brain. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 21). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

Sadly, disturbing experiences, whether major traumas or other kinds of upsetting events, can overwhelm the system. When that happens, the intense emotional and physical disturbance caused by the situation prevents the information processing system from making the internal connections needed to take it to a resolution. Instead, the memory of the situation becomes stored in the brain as you experienced it. What you saw and felt, the image, the emotions, the physical sensations and the thoughts become encoded in memory in their original, unprocessed form. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 22). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

When reactions such as these refuse to go away in the present, it's often because they are also linking into unprocessed memories from the past. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 22). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

The disrupted information processing system has stored the memory in isolation— unintegrated within the more general memory networks. It can't change since it is unable to link up with anything more useful and adaptive. That's why time doesn't heal all wounds, and you may still feel anger, resentment, pain, sorrow or a number of other emotions about events that took place years ago. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (pp. 22-23). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

That's because the memory networks at the basis of EMDR treatment have far-reaching associations. Changing the memories that form the way we see ourselves also changes the way we view others. Therefore, our relationships, job performance, what we are willing to do or are able to resist, all move in a positive direction. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (pp. 28-29). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

As a result, more than a dozen studies have used brain imaging (such as MRI) to document how EMDR treatment actually changes the brain. For instance, research has established that the memory control center of the brain (the hippocampus) shrinks in people with PTSD. For some time it was believed that since this was an organic change in the brain, the condition might be permanent. Happily, as brain scans have now shown, it is possible for the hippocampus to regrow. Although there has been limited research in this area, one study recently showed that 8 to 12 sessions of EMDR memory processing for people with PTSD were associated with an average 6% increase in the volume of the hippocampus. These effects were maintained 1 year later. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 29). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

Therefore, an additional two dozen studies have explored the changes that occur with eye movements alone. They've shown that when people hold in mind disturbing memories or future fears, sets of eye movements result in less emotional distress, reduced vividness of disturbing images, shifts in thoughts and greater accuracy in memory. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 30). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

The dominant theory is that the original memory is accessed, connections changed and then stored with these new modifications in a neurobiological process called "reconsolidation." Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 31). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

Research with trauma victims has found that EMDR is able to eliminate symptoms without the homework needed in other therapies. Also, since there is no need to speak in detail about the past disturbing memories, people who are ashamed of what happened to them, or what they did, do not have to talk about it. Significant changes can occur in a short period of time. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 31). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

However, the research on EMDR shows that after the appropriate history taking and preparation, 84 to 100% of single traumas can be processed within about three 90-minute sessions. The more memories involved, the more time processing takes. But every memory does not have to be targeted since the other memories associated with the targeted one can also be positively affected. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 38). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

For all of us, unprocessed memories are generally the basis of negative responses, attitudes and behaviors. Processed memories, on the other hand, are the basis of adaptive positive responses, attitudes and behaviors. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-

26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 39). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

The brain automatically makes associations in relation to everything we do, think, feel. Our task is to recognize when we have thoughts, emotions or physical responses that are destructive, negative or harmful— and then do something about it. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 41). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

Our brains are constantly making connections that are outside our awareness. Even during processing, only some of the connections come to consciousness. For Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 43). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

As we will see in the next few chapters, there are various ways to identify the unconscious memories that run us, and ways to deal with the reactions we have that come up to bother us. First, we have to recognize that some of our reactions are not based on the present reality, but are primarily caused by memories from the past. Obviously, Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 43). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

The bottom line is that it doesn't matter who you are; our physiologically stored memories are the basis of our current perceptions of the present. Unprocessed memories not only can intensify our sensations and emotional responses, they can also prevent us from feeling. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 47). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

In this form of therapy, while there is the recognition that something in the past caused the anxiety, the treatment focuses primarily on the present symptoms. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (pp. 49-50). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

The past is present. What we need to become aware of is whether the responses are appropriate. If not, do they occur in only one area of our lives, or are those unprocessed memories casting a wider net? Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 52). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

Every association we make is based upon our memory networks— whether good or bad. The first step for any of us is to recognize what negative responses we have in the present. Then we can use some of the self-control techniques we've already learned, or others that are in future chapters, in order to deal with our responses. That means we need to monitor ourselves so we know when we are off balance.

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All these tools can help you to remember that you can be in control of your body and mind. As you explore your own unconscious processes, you'll find that understanding why things are happening can help even more. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 69). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

The thing to keep in mind is that there may be something wrong, but it doesn't have to define us. It means that there are certain unprocessed memories that are physiologically stored in our brains that contain the emotions and physical sensations that were there at the time of the event. Because these memories are unprocessed, they continue to generate negative thoughts and feelings whenever they're triggered. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 71). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

Memories that have been processed naturally, or with therapist assistance, are transformed into learning experiences so that the disturbing emotions, beliefs and physical sensations are no longer held in our memory networks. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (pp. 71-72). Rodale. Kindle Edition.

When an unprocessed memory is triggered by similarities in the current situation, since the memory contains the distressing emotions, beliefs and sensations of an earlier time, we experience the world in a distorted way. Shapiro, Francine (2013-03-26). *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* (p. 75). Rodale. Kindle Edition.