**Ego State Therapy and EMDR**

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Ego State Therapy (EST) and EMDR can very well be used in combination.They are an excellent match and, together, develop an even greater potential. Both approaches allow for very direct and quick stimulation of in-depth processes but also include many possibilities for activating resources and ego-strengthening.

**How is EMDR used?**

With EMDR -Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing- the patient calls into mind a stressful event in the form of an image or a film. She does this in her mind and in her emotional and physical feelings while her eyes follow the fingers of the therapist who moves her hand to the right and to the left in turn. Also other bilateral stimulations (tapping, tones) are possible. This stimulation supports the brain in activating its own self-healing powers and in processing the stressful memories. The method was founded by Francine Shapiro in the eighties.

**Theory on the effect of EMDR**

It is the so-called AIP model (Adaptive Information Processing): neural networks continuously store information that structures our future actions (Oren,E. u. Solomon,R. 2012). Under pressure or stress this information is not processed appropriately. Such situations include traumatisations but also stressful everyday events related to e.g. rejection, shame or failure. The neurophysiologic information related to such events is isolated and stored separately and may be triggered involuntarily at any time. Pain, anxiety, low self-esteem and other symptoms are consequences rather than causes of the disordered information processing.

Unprocessed stressful events disturb the inner balance and are stored in the body, in the physiology, in feelings and thoughts. The reactivated self-healing powers and the associative effect of EMDR help to retrieve and process them, so that they transform into a narrative memory related to speech. Connecting the fragmented memories takes place by disrupting the working memory. Access to lacking information is facilitated by accessing the episodic memory. In this way, emotional and cognitive restructuring are enabled, inner images and the body sensation used as a basis for salutary change, attentiveness in trusting the self-healing process promoted, self-regulation and the ability to act restored. (Solomon,R. u.Rando, T. 2012)

**Similar principles of EST**

Ego State therapists reading this will immediately notice similarities to their own work.

We too work with states represented in neuronal networks and emerged through trauma, introjection or normal differentiation. We facilitate the access to lacking cognitive, emotional or such information stored at a body level by supporting more or less strictly separated ego states (ES) in getting to know each other and connecting to each other. In doing so, the relationship aspect is given particular emphasis: it is the task of the therapist to establish good relationships with the client as a whole and all her inner states, to maintain them and to be a model for good inner and outer relationships. This results in activating the self-healing powers. It also applies to pre-verbal ES from an early stage of development or those that are non-verbal due to reasons related to the traumatic event. Furthermore, there may also be hidden ego states or somatic or sensomotoric ES that rather express themselves in physical symptoms or ways of acting.

It is not only the aim of EST to establish contact with individual ES and accompany them to problem solving or cure. Rather it is important teaching the clients to join the experiences dissociated in the states (cf. Fritzsche and Hartman 2010) in order to support the integration of the trauma material, in particular in case of trauma processing. To do this, the dimensions of thinking, feeling, acting and body sensation, until then dissociated in different ES, are pooled and (again) made accessible as an experience, for both individual and joined ego states. In this way, fragmentations are undone, frequently using the body experience as a catalyst, in particular in the work of M. Phillips (1995). Special roles play resourceful experiences, experiencing inner strength, helpful ego states and archetypical ideas from the conflict-free area of the ego (Hartmann, H. 1975).

**Combination options**

Examples from the first three phases of the SARI model

In the **first** phase (safety), most of the ego-strengthening methods of EST are suitable for combination with EMDR bilateral stimulation, e.g. in the form of the "butterfly hug" where the client crosses the arms in front of the chest and taps on her right and her left shoulder in turn. If a resourceful ES is activated, slow tapping enables the client to stay in contact with it. This is also of help when stressed or hurt ES are added in phase two.

In the **second** phase (activation), EMDR and EST may complement each other well, e.g. by identifying hurt ES, which are then cared for in the present, using resource-strengthening EMDR techniques. For instance, the client can imagine that a hurt inner state now lives at a good place or has its place with her at home. The process of locating this good place is frequently accelerated by projecting the future using EMDR. Or an aggressive ES can be identified and then change its behaviour if a trigger situation from the present is processed with EMDR. For instance, a client does not know at first why she reacts so indignantly to her colleague. This is processed with EMDR which allows for identifying the original touchstone situation from her childhood and the corresponding childlike ES.

When approaching phase three (resolution), resourceful ES may act as inner supporters and help processing traumatic situations by being imaginatively present at the EMDR process or visited during processing breaks.

In the **third** phase, also ES embodying a new aspect may be included in the EMDR process, thus quickly and smoothly removing a blockage. When, for instance, processing a phobia with EMDR works well at first and the client feels relieved, but then the process comes to a halt, this is often due to an ES who has to be reached by talking through first, because it is ashamed, for instance. If then it becomes visible, the process continues until the stress is resolved. Vice versa, it may happen that e.g. in the course of an age regression a traumatic situation and one or more ES emerge that were not known before. Here, the use of EMDR to resolve this special situation is very helpful for all ES involved and less strenuous.

When the therapy reaches a point where certain ES want to process and integrate a traumatic memory they know, it may be very useful to support the ES work in trance by bilateral stimulation. It is also very effective to include a full EMDR protocol into the therapy to focus on a certain situation the traumatisation originated from and the corresponding ES, and resolve it. This will in turn lead to considerable relief for the affected ES.

If such an EMDR session remains incomplete, ES with soothing or strengthening properties will be contacted. This is achieved in a particularly impressing way if clients already know their resourceful and hurt ego states well from phase two. They can then e.g. use the butterfly hug at home to regulate tension states and calm themselves. This is helpful with memories associated with trauma as the act of tapping conveys control.

It is also possible that a childlike part rather experiences a negative cognition and the adult experiences a positive cognition as their respective own truth. For instance, the childlike ES feels "I am in danger" while the adult knows "I am safe". This is brought together in the EMDR process and processed at the same time, so that the two, until then dissociated, neuronal networks of these ES join and the traumatic experience dissolves. So the adult "helps" the childlike ego state to process what is stressful and at the same she herself receives help in overcoming avoidance and dissociation (e.g. in the so-called "Dialogue Protocol" of Hanna Egli-Bernd, 2001).

Elfie Cronauer and me have developed further experimental EMDR-protocols. The **RIT (Resource Integrating Therapy)** facilitates processing within EMDR by providing a resourceful memory or ego state already before starting the processing, localizing it at another place of the room than the trauma memory. It is based on developments by Jim Knipe, Carol Forgash and Catherine Fine.

The **Bottom-Up protocol** paves the way to cognition and helps to re-structure thinking by starting exclusively from body sensations at first, in particular with somatic symptoms. Here it often turns out that body sensations are based on a somatic ego state who developed in a traumatic or stressful situation. It is identified by focusing intensely on feeling the body. Due to processing with bilateral stimulation (BLS) it can then express its message in the negative cognition and later transform it into the positive cognition by which the process is then completed. A similar EMDR protocol that, however, does not explicitly refer to the inner states, was developed by U. Lanius at the same time (Lanius, 2010).

Here it becomes clear: “EMDR, Ego-State-Therapy and somatic therapy fit together like hand and glove” (Sandra Paulsen, 2009).

From the perspective of EMDR therapy, contacting the ES helps in symbolising and including resources, in strengthening the bond and the working relationship with the therapist (and their ES) and in intensifying the therapeutic process. Experiencing and understanding what happens during processing is intensified, but can also serve to facilitate the process by better control, clearer definitions and reduction of mutual phobias of the ES.

From the perspective of EST, EMDR promotes quicker and smoother processing of stressful experiences of the inner states. In addition, resources are integrated and assimilated directly and under own control. When meeting the traumatic situation, the self-healing process is experienced in an intense and gentle way. The tendency to connect to other ES is also supported. So EMDR is a method by which the therapy with ego states becomes softer but also more intense and more effective.

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